

The Joys of Christian Giving

by Peter Aceti

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's ownership and our role as stewards in the joy of Christian giving.

Duration: 1:04:02

Scripture: Luke 6:38, Acts 20:32, 2 Corinthians 9:7

Topics: "Giving"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses four parables from Matthew 25 that emphasize the importance of being faithful and responsible in our service to the Lord. The first principle highlighted is the need to plan ahead and think about the future. The speaker also emphasizes the significance of giving to our homes and families, as it reflects our priorities and heart's desires. Additionally, the sermon explores eight areas of Christian giving, including the motive, measure, and method of giving. The overall message encourages believers to develop a plan for giving and to have a mature understanding of receiving and giving in the context of our relationship with God.

Transcript

The questions that I've handed out to you, I thought would help us just to get our minds sort of in gear about the whole concept of giving and sort of the priorities that we have as Christians in giving to the Lord and looking after the responsibility that the Lord has given us in managing what He has given us. Whether it's money, possessions, our abilities, our time, everything that we have so that we can be properly equipped to reflect the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. To give as He gave, unselfishly and totally.

A high and holy calling it is to be able to give in the name of the Lord Jesus and to give like the Lord Jesus. The subject has been a difficult one to prepare. You can't talk about giving without speaking to yourself.

So, the disclaimer for this seminar is in Philippians 4.17 I desire that fruit would be added to your account and to mine too. That's the goal of all Christian giving is that we increase in our heavenly bank account to the glory of God. So, when we look at these questions, and I just want to look at the last question.

The others are food for thought. What is the main reason for your giving to the Lord or the work of the Lord? Do we do it out of a sense of guilt? Do we do it out of a sense of appreciation for what He has done for us? Do we do it because we're told to do it by others or do we do it because the Lord has asked us to do it? Do we do it because it's part of the accepted thing to do, to put something in the offering every

Lord's Day? Or do we do it because we truly understand what the Scriptures teach about giving and how it is not only a picture of our appreciation, but it's also a sacrifice while pleasing and acceptable to God and it's also a responsibility that we have as priests to God and it is the ultimate act of worship. Laying ourselves on the altar and all that we have for the service and the glory of our Master.

And I think that's really the essence of Christian giving. It's to glorify God by what we have been given by Him. On the handout that you have, you might be able to see it up here, if you don't want to keep looking down at your paper, but the first section that we look at is the principle that God is the owner of everything.

God is the absolute owner. And three basic questions I would like to ask you today. Why should we give? What do we give? And how can we give? Or the motive for giving, the measure of giving, and the method that we have in giving.

If you've been like me, you have received something in this last little holiday season. You may have got a gift or multiple gifts. And you know what it feels like to get a gift.

Now if you're like the little boy that is on America's Funniest Home Videos, and he opened up a package and it has just a piece of clothing in it, and he threw it down and just scuffed. And he said, I didn't want to get this from Christmas. Well, he didn't really have a very mature concept of what receiving is all about, or giving for that matter.

And sometimes we're like that with the Lord. We don't like what we've been given in life. And our problem is that sometimes we do want more than what we've been given.

A little story is told of a rich man that learned that he was going to die in a few days. And he thought, he figured out a way to take it with him. And so he spoke to his doctor and the preacher and his lawyer.

And he said, I'm going to ask you to take these envelopes. And he gave each one of them an envelope. He put \$10,000 in each of the envelopes.

And he said, when you walk by my casket, I want you to put it inside my casket. And so the preacher had every intention of depositing the whole amount. And he realized that the organ needed repair.

And so he took \$2,000 out, and he said, I'm sure that he wouldn't mind. And he deposited the balance in the coffin. And the doctor realized that his clinic needed some funds, and he knew that the work that he did was of the Lord.

And so he felt very comfortable in taking \$5,000 out and putting it towards the work of the clinic that he was called to do, and then put the deposits in the coffin. So the lawyer came along, and he said, well, that makes me feel a lot better. He said, I have a clear conscience about it now.

He said, because I took all three of the envelopes and put them in my pocket, and I wrote him a check for the full \$30,000 and put it in the coffin. Now, that's the way some people get. It's in name only.

But there's no reality to it. There's no reality to it. And that story is humorous, but true.

So the way we sometimes get is in a very stingy and unappreciative way. And if we can figure out a way to get around it, sometimes we do. Sometimes we do.

Let's look at the Scripture. Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20.

The final words of the apostle as he was leaving the Ephesian elders. We turn to these verses often because they encourage us at the love of Paul to his fellow elders in Ephesus. Acts chapter 20, and begin reading at verse 32.

He says, And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities and to them that were with me.

I have shown you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Do you know what they did? They cried.

They cried. They hated to see him go because they knew that Paul had spoken true words to them and he had given true ministry to them over a number of years. But the words of the Lord Jesus are the words I would emphasize to our hearts today.

It is more blessed to give than to receive. The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of that, isn't he? Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich. Now, today I don't want to make this a sermon.

I would like you to ask questions. And if I say anything that promotes a question, don't hesitate to ask. I would like to encourage participation.

And if you feel that you would like to share something, please do that. This is a seminar. We're not in a meeting.

Both speak as far as protocol is concerned. But I don't want you to hesitate. If you have a question, please let me know.

The example of the Lord Jesus is the ultimate example in giving. And we have to recognize that it is because God has given his son that we in turn can give back to God. And so the first principle we have in giving, as the top of your hand goes, principle number one, is God's ownership.

God owns everything, including me, God's ownership. So we learn that giving is a direct result of receiving from the Lord. That's the first principle.

We don't have anything in our possession that wasn't given to us, directly or indirectly, through the provision of God. Now, the best example of that is what we have received spiritually. We have been redeemed, not with corruptible things, like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

God has given us his son. His son has given us his life. And we were redeemed with his life, with his bloodshed.

And so the perfect example of giving is seen in the person of the Lord Jesus and how God has given him to us as our provision for our salvation. He has given us spiritual blessings, and he has given us physical blessings. And we read in Psalm 24, verse 1, for example, that the earth is the Lord's.

So everything we see around us belongs to him. Everything. Corrie Ten Boom said in one of her books that one of the things that you learn in life as a Christian is not to hang on to things too tightly.

You kind of let them go through your hands and not try to keep them for too long. And it would seem that's a good principle to follow if we believe that God is the owner of everything and he has given us richly all things to enjoy. So the first principle, God owns everything.

He gave us the earth as a stewardship. And we have a brother who ministers on the subject of stewardship often. He calls the stewardship of Adam the Adamic stewardship.

Man was given a garden to look after and the earth to look after. Dominion over the elements, over the sea, if you will, over the earth. That was our responsibility, to manage what God has given us.

Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above. And so once we understand that principle that we don't own anything, but God owns it, that he has given it to us, both spiritual and physical, as a blessing and to be a blessing to others. 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 10.

This is one of the most misquoted verses in the New Testament. And I think you can relate to why it's misquoted. Oftentimes people will say, money is the root of all evil.

And they forgot to read that little word, love. For the love of money is the root of all evil. While some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Loving money is wrong. It is the root of all evil. We'll look at that in a little while, in a little more detail.

But having money is not evil. Loving money is evil. It is evil.

Using money is not wrong, but misusing money is wrong. So the love of money is wrong. And later, Paul says in the same chapter, Timothy, Timothy, you man of God, he says three things.

He says, flee these things, follow after righteousness, and fight the good fight of faith. The fight, fright, and flight syndrome of the nervous system of the human body is here in spiritual sense, that Timothy was told that he needs to flee these things of covetousness. Covetousness, that's what Paul's talking about.

Flee these things, covetousness. Follow after righteousness, and God's even faith, love, patience, and meekness. And fight the good fight of faith.

You see, the covetousness of money, the love of money, will prevent anyone from becoming a man or woman for God. Everyone will be stopped dead in their tracks if they love money more than they love God. Remember what Peter was asked by the Lord Jesus? He said, Peter, do you love me? Peter smiled.

Yeah, I love you. But the question was this, do you love me more than these? Now whether he was talking about the fish, or talking about the disciples, Peter's heart was shaking. We love the Lord, but do we love him more than these? Do we love him more than these? And if we love him more than what these things represent, then we won't have a hard time understanding that he owns all of this, and he owns the keys.

Here's our keys. He owns the keys, and he owns the deeds, and he owns it all. Do we love him more than we love these? When you look in the mirror, do we love him more than we love ourselves? Those are hard questions.

And a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ ultimately has to come to the point where they say, yes, I love him more than I love these things, and I love him more than what I see in the mirror. And so when we talk about the joy of Christian giving, we're talking about true discipleship. This is what it boils down to, true

discipleship.

So we recognize that God is the owner, and Paul tells Timothy in verse 17 a charge. He says, "...charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate or to share, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come that they may lay hold on eternal life." Being rich in this world, I wonder if anyone in this room believes that they are rich today, materially rich. Well, if you have a roof over your head, and you've been eating three meals a day, you are rich, materially, physically.

Because there are a lot of people in this world who don't have a roof over their head, and who don't have three meals a day. I think that from the world's perspective, we are rich. Whether we have large or small numbers in the bank account is really secondary.

The bigger the number, the more the responsibility. That's the bottom line. But truly, we are rich in this world, in comparison to many people who are just living an existence out, who have no other priority except to find food and water for another day, if they can find it.

And so we are the ones that Paul is talking about here. We're not looking at the people with the Cadillacs, and the six houses, and the condominiums, and all the other things that go with it. That's what he's talking about.

And of course, in that day, there were some real class differences between rich and poor. There were slaves and free men, and there were class differences. But I think in our day, we can apply it to ourselves, because it's so easy to get ahead in this world materially, and yet there are so many people who do struggle with it.

And there is a tremendous difference, even in our culture, between those who are very rich and those who are very poor. But in comparison to others, we are, generally speaking, very rich. The ownership of God is so important to understand.

Now, there are misconceptions in the world about what it is to be a truly great person. And one of those misconceptions revolves around how big your bank account is. So the great people of the world are the ones that are on the Fortune 500 list, where their names are listed as being multi-billionaires and multi-millionaires, and so the world looks at greatness in direct proportion to how much money you have in your account.

Now, if we look at an Old Testament character like Solomon, he was loaded, but he didn't ask for it. He was given it by the Lord. Solomon was given riches, but that wasn't the desire of Solomon's heart.

When God asked him, what do you want, Solomon? You give me the wish list, and I'll fill it in for you. Solomon asked for wisdom. He asked for the things that would honour God.

And God said, I'll give you those things, and I will also give you what you didn't ask for. So Solomon was blessed with material blessings, and we see that from God's perspective, things like self-sacrifice and self-denial are far more important than looking at your desire to get ahead materially. And so God blessed Solomon.

Solomon's confidence initially as a young man wasn't in his riches, but as we know by his life, he ended up being taken away into idolatry because of all the marriages that he had become involved in, and it led him down a path of ruin and misery. But God's viewpoint of greatness is self-sacrifice and self-denial, and not self-satisfaction, but pleasing him. Solomon is an example of how God gave him the things that he didn't ask for.

The story is told of King Charlemagne. Those of you who know a little bit of history know he was a great king, and he died, and like a lot of these great kings die, and they put him in his vault, and in his vault he sat on his throne. And all his treasures were with him, as many as the people could conscientiously store in these tombs.

And some years later, they found his body, which was nothing but a skeleton, and they found him sitting in his chair, and the scriptures were open on his lap, if you will, and his finger was pointing to this verse in the Bible, Mark chapter 8, verse 36. For what shall it profit a man that he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? What a contradiction, what irony! A man among his riches, absolutely impoverished, without any true riches as far as the kingdom of God is concerned. People realize this.

People would love to take the earth to the graveyard. They would love to, and put everything in it, and take a U-Haul along, and bring it all with them. And people desperately want that.

Reading in the Words of Peace, from April of 95, this man said, My whole life is gone. All of his possessions, \$2 million worth of gems, were in four little crates, and somebody stole them. And that was his life.

My whole life is gone. But what did Paul say? Paul said, But our life is hidden in Christ. That's real life.

It's in Christ. This man's life was in Christ. And that said, people would like to take the jackpot home, wouldn't they? Here's another good one.

I enjoyed this one, July of 95. Jackpot. Now there are a lot of people that you know, and probably some Christians that you know, who like to buy lottery tickets.

They don't like to tell you that. But what are they hoping to get? The big one. Right? They want to get the big one.

And what's the first thing that they do after they win their prize? They don't tell anybody. They hide it. Because they know they're going to get bombarded with requests for money from family and friends, from financial groups that are giving them some excellent investment opportunities, and on and on.

People are afraid of winning a lot of money, but that's what they want. They want to get the jackpot. Money is the root of all evil.

I think there's a lot of truth in that. But the love of money is what the scripture tells us to avoid. So the first thing that we need to understand, the first principle is God's ownership.

The second principle is our stewardship. Number two, God has given us the responsibility to be faithful managers of what he has given us. That is our stewardship.

And being a steward is simply being a manager. And so the question is, what do we give? Our measure of giving. What do we give? Now, I was reading, I don't subscribe to this magazine.

This is disclaimer number two. But in the work that I'm in, I have a lot of people that like to influence me to think that they're trying to help me. And this is the way they think they're trying to help me, okay? They want me to make money.

And so I was given a magazine, money, where to make it in 1996. And I got thinking about that. Thinking, yeah, that's an interesting thought.

Where am I going to make money in 1996? And as I got thinking of it, I thought, you know, well, really, if this was a new issue of Publix or Council Magazine or the Missions Magazine, it would say, money, how to manage money for the glory of God in 1996. Isn't that a better way to look at it? How to make money in 1996. That's what the world wants you to do.

They want you to put your full lot in with them so that you can join them in making a lot of money. And if you go through the magazine, it'll tell you, Mr. So-and-so, excellent investment broker, earned 40% return on the following investment. And that's where it's at.

And they are, I mean, motivated to get you online. Not an online Bible to get you online with their investment strategy. They want you to make money.

Because if you make money, they make money. And if they make money, that makes them happy. That makes them happy.

So, making money is the world's greatest motivation. And they're not ashamed to flaunt it. And people will pick these things up, \$3.95 a copy, and every month they run a new issue to get you so that you can see your investment opportunity.

1 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 2 talks about the fact that we are stewards of what God has given us. We are stewards. 1 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 2. Moreover, Paul says, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

It is required. A requirement of being a steward for the Lord Jesus is faithfulness. A faithful manager for God.

Now, if we look at the things that we have been given by God, our substance and ourselves, as not our own, but to be vessels that are used for the glory of God, it will help us in making decisions as to how we can better use the resources that God has given us so that God can be glorified by it. So, we need to be wise managers. We hear a terminology in the world, an investment builder account.

I like that terminology, an investment builder account. And we can use that terminology because that's what we've been given by the Lord, an investment builder account. We can build up our investment in heaven by good managing here on earth.

By good managing here on earth. Now, I am not a full-time worker, and I have not been called to do that at this time in my life. I'm not a missionary.

I've been called to be an optometrist by God. And thus far, that is what I've been doing. I'm 40 years old, and I've been doing this for 17 years.

So, any statements that I will make from now on do not come from the perspective of someone who is pleading with you to give more of your time and your substance and yourself to the Lord, other than for the

purpose, as I said originally, of adding proof to your account and mine. When the bottom line comes in, we want to hear these words, Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into what? The joy.

The joy of the Lord. The joy of giving starts by managing well what God has given us. The bottom line comes down the road.

And so, the Lord Jesus talks a lot about earthly possessions. For where your treasure is, I'll say that's where your heart is. Isn't that something? Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is.

And how you handle the deposit that God has entrusted to you, to earn interest on it for the kingdom of heaven, to the glory of God, is going to come to account someday. This is not slipping through the door and saying, I hope you didn't notice. He's taking notes.

He's taking notes. And he's got little margins on it to make comments as well. This is what's so serious about the whole concept of money and possessions and stewardship, is that inherent in being a steward is the day of reckoning that comes, the day of accountability.

And so you see the Lord Jesus speaking parables of stewardship. We don't have time to go into them in detail. I think they are mentioned for you at the bottom of that first sheet.

And the four parables that I've mentioned talk about being faithful in our responsibilities, Matthew 25. Being truthful in our responsibilities, Luke 12. Being farsighted in our responsibilities, but more so responsible and farsighted in our service to the Lord.

And then the fourth one, being faithful in our service to the Lord. Being faithful in our service to the Lord. So these principles that we're talking about is based on some of the teachings that the Lord Jesus has given us.

For instance, in these parables, the number one principle is plan ahead. Plan ahead. Think of the future.

Be farsighted. Don't think about how you're going to handle things just for today. But remember that what you do today will have an impact on what happens tomorrow and on the day of accountability.

The judgment seat of Christ. Where we will have all the secrets revealed. 1 Corinthians chapter 4 talks about the secrets being revealed.

The motives and giving are going to be declared. It's hard to look forward to it sometimes when you look at the whole picture. But it's a day of accountability.

The Lord wants to know and make known why we did what we did. There won't be anything that is hidden that will not be made secret some day. And so we need to be aware of that principle.

Plan ahead. There's a day of accountability coming. Also, another principle is this.

In Luke 16 where he says this. Being faithful in little things. That's what a steward is.

A steward is being faithful in little things. Abe Lincoln at the age of 24 had a little discrepancy one day and ended up \$17 over. Didn't know what to do with it.

So he put it away in a piece of cloth and wrapped it up. One day whoever was figuring out the book realized that Mr. Lincoln made a boo-boo at the post office. And so some years later they went back and

said, Honest Abe, they didn't call him that at the time, they thought he was a crook.

They said, you're \$17 out of your bookkeeping. Abe goes over to the little chest. Opens up the chest, unravels the cloth, and he says, here's the \$17.

I didn't know what to do with it. So I kept it until you wanted it. Faithful in little things.

Mr. Lincoln went on to do some big things. That's the kind of men and women they call you. People who are faithful in little things.

So the judgment seat of Christ helps us to recognize that we have the possibility that we'll be accounted for. One of the things that we are struggling with in life, of course, is managing our finances. And managing finances sometimes is a real juggling act.

And on the chart you can see that if you look at the first three, and I'm looking at the center section, in relation to employment and what you do with your income, shelter, transportation, and food take up 59% of an average person's income. Shelter, transportation, and food. And then it divides it up into these other columns.

Retirement plan, your utility costs, mortgage, entertainment, medical care, savings, insurance, excluded, required home 1%, and Mr. Lincoln, your 7%. Do you notice something missing on there? Kidding. Kidding.

Now, there's something that will affect all of these figures. And it's that right there. Debt.

Debt. These figures will all be affected because if you put the word down here, interest payment, it's going to throw everything off on that formula. Being indebted is a problem.

So when you go to buy a home, one of the questions was, is getting a mortgage putting you into debt? Or mortgages? Because they've got a great deal near the airport. Let's say some people buy houses. They go out and get their house, and they thought they got such a great deal.

But the truth of the matter is sometimes when people buy houses, they're getting it way over their head. Way over their head. And I know people who have went out and spent well over \$100,000 on a house, making \$1,500 to \$1,700 a month payments, realizing that they just can't keep it up.

And then losing all of their initial investment. And it really affects people. But making wise decisions will help you when it comes to distributing your income so that there will be something left over to give.

But is that the way we look at giving? Is it what's left over? No. We know that, don't we? We start it the other way around, don't we? We start off first with the Lord's portion, the principle of first fruit, and then we have to fit our needs and expenses into that formula. The world doesn't look at it that way.

They say, here's where your expenses are. There's no money left to give to anybody else. But we start off with the Lord's portion first.

Every day, every payday, every day we buy something. So remember that the Lord has to get this portion first. And so when we get into a situation where we're trying to help, it creates problems.

Now let me give you a quick example of how to save a lot of money. You go out, as Newlyweds, for example, and you buy a house. You say, well, we're going to start off with a \$90,000 house.

And that's a little bit above average for most houses, I think. I'd say that's above average. But they want to get into it.

They've got dual incomes, and they're all set to go. And over a period of 25 years, at \$790 a month expenses, it will take them all of 25 years to pay that off. But if they went out and bought a house for about half of that amount, they could pay it off at the same rate in seven years instead of 25 years.

And then they could sell their first little home at \$45,000, getting all the cash in hand, going out and buying their second home at \$90,000. And in seven more years, that house will be paid off. So they will have paid their house in 14 years instead of 25 years.

But they had to do something really important to start with. They had to swallow their pride and find something that they could afford to live on. And that's something we don't like to do, is take the big pill and swallow it.

We like to go and live like everybody else. And that thinking comes into the assembly. We want to be like everybody else instead of being the people of God that He wants us to be.

And so what we practice in our private life, sometimes we carry on in our corporate testimony, in our gatherings. People can waste a lot of money. Now, there's no greater waste of money, in my opinion, than if you keep smoking.

If you know a person that's smoking, they probably do, they can save thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars that could be put into the Lord's work if they just quit one stupid habit. One bad habit could support a missionary or a full-time worker or to be given to the poor or to go into the Lord's work, such as in printing or magazines or whatever you may be led to do by one foolish habit that you may have. And it's amazing how it all adds up.

Principle number three. Principle number three. The joy of giving, a job well done.

We talk about God's ownership and our stewardship. But the joy of giving, the third principle is this. To end up, here are those words, a job well done.

God's Spirit leads us to willingly give back to God cheerfully to give Him the glory. So the joy of giving is to do so for the glory of God. And that's the bottom line.

That's what it's all about. Here are those words. Well done.

Now give Him faithful service. Enter into the joy. Enter into that joy.

The world's techniques for giving and getting are quite different. A story is told of one particular church where they had a lot of delinquent members. And so the gentleman in charge of reconnecting the lost members to the body sent out one of the members of the body who didn't have first class education nor was he very tactful.

And so he decided that what he would do is he would send a letter to all the members in that particular group who hadn't been coming out regularly to their church services. And so the elder in charge got a

letter. And the letter read something like this.

You know, we thank you very much for notifying us of our delinquency in coming to church. And we just want to inform you that I received your letter and I want to remind you that there is only one T in dirty and no C in skunk. And here's a check for \$1,000.

Now that's the way some people do it. They make you feel guilty. They call you a dirty skunk.

You should be doing this. And it's never that obvious, is it? It's always a lot more subtle. But the world will make you feel guilty if you don't get to God.

And you know that by the mail that you get. And you know that by the ads that you put on television. And by the ads you read in magazines.

I want to look at eight areas of Christian giving. You see them outlined in your handout, page two at the bottom. And there are eight areas that I want to look at very, very briefly.

And the first thing that you need to do, if you have been struggling with Christian giving, and this little cartoon illustrates it, develop a plan. Now these people had a plan for getting into the bank. And it wasn't too well developed.

They got into the wrong building. And I think sometimes when we give, we give with the wrong motive. And we give for the wrong work that is to be done.

In other words, our giving isn't effective because we don't do it with the right reason for giving. And we don't put it in a place where the Lord would really need us to do that. And the reason is that we haven't committed ourselves completely to the Lord as individuals.

We haven't first given ourselves. Now that's the teaching of Romans chapter 12, as you know. When God gets a man with a car as one of his children, he's got a car in his service.

When he gets a woman with a sewing machine in her house, he gets a sewing machine in his service. And when he gets a sister who can cook, he gets a kitchen in his service. And when he gets a man who's got a big bank account, he's got more money in his service.

And that's the way it works. God's plan is that when he saves people, he gets the whole package. He doesn't want just a part of you.

When you become a Christian, you and yours belong to him. And so the Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9, which are the two great passages about Christian giving in the New Testament, among some other excerpts in Corinthians and in Philippians, we have the example of the Macedonian Christians who gave themselves to the Lord first, sacrificially giving themselves to the Lord. And so the principle of first fruits, again, is so important in remembering that first we give ourselves to the Lord, and when the Lord's got us, he's got everything that we own, all of us.

Giving is truly an act of worship, and there could be no greater gift than to give yourself to the Lord. You have the examples of many young Christian men who went off in the mission field as young men. Mr. Anthony Grove, some of you have heard of Mr. Grove.

He was a dentist who left his dental profession, went to minister as a missionary in India, and he said this, and if you want to have a really bad night's sleep, read his book on Christian devotedness. It will keep you conscious. He gave everything to the Lord to serve him, and he challenges us in our thinking as far as riches go.

He says, Are not all things given us richly to enjoy? Yes, but it would be degrading to the members of the kingdom of Christ to make their rich enjoyment consist of consuming on their own lusts like the members of the kingdom of Satan. Those things which they are committed to apply to the exaltation of their Lord and Redeemer. Be assured, my friends, the sooner we can see our wealth appropriated to God's service and glory, the better, for then it is gone for the Lord and the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Those combined cannot bring it back. We give it to the Lord. The enemy can't get it.

They can't use it. It's his, and so it's like a one-time act of dedication, putting your body on the altar. Don't forget to take this with you, and the keys to the car, and the keys to the house, and all the certificates, and the bonds, and whatever else goes with it.

It's a package. It's a package. The Lord wants us to give ourselves.

Mr. William Gordon was called to go to the mission field. He had the family fortune behind him, and he wanted to give it up. And in his Bible, at each stage of his decision-making, he would make a little note, and at the first stage, he said, no reserves, when he turned his back on the family fortune.

And then he went and left home, and he put down in his Bible, no retreats. And finally, as he was diagnosed with cerebral meningitis, they read in his Bible later on, no regrets. He died a young man, but he was on the altar.

He was ready to go, to give himself as an offering. But he had no reward. He said he'd given up the reserves first.

And we need to do that. I know a brother who went into the Lord's works, and he said, Peter, he said, in 19 such and such, the Lord called me to full-time service. He said, and I knew it would be right if I gave it all to him at the beginning.

And so I was prepared to do that. Give him every dollar, because I couldn't rightly be a servant of the Lord, depending on my bank account. And he said, that's exactly what he did.

And the minute the last penny was gone, that's the first time I received fellowship from another believer through the hand of the Lord, when all the reserves were gone. We have brothers and sisters who are in the Lord's works full-time. And they don't live like kings.

But we read in the scripture, if you look at the Corinthian believers, Paul said, you're living like kings? What about us, he said? We're the apostles. We get spit on. We get rocks thrown at us.

We get treated like scum and like dirt. And you people are living like kings. And he wasn't telling them that to lay the big guilt chip on them.

He wanted them to know the responsibility that they had, and how the Lord had called them to that work. And he could say later on, he says, I preach the gospel, and I live by the gospel, because I make the gospel of no charge to people that need it. That's why people who are called to the Lord's work, who've

given themselves and put themselves on the altar, why they've done it is because it's the gospel.

And the gospel doesn't cost people anything, because they've cost God everything. God paid for it. His son paid for it with his own blood and blood.

The gospel cannot be with charge. It doesn't work that way. So the purpose of our Christian giving is affected by the fact that it is without charge that the Lord has given us freely all things.

The gospel is given freely without charge. And so those who live by the gospel, who've laid their lives down on the altar, do it without charge. But we know that they have needs.

We know that they have bills that come in. And so who has the responsibility to help those who are in the Lord's work, who are on the mission field? We do. We do.

You've heard the story told of a missionary who came home on furlough. She sat at the back of the church, and one of the church members said to her, you know, that dress you're wearing isn't really very nice. And she said, well, it's the one you sent me.

Right? Isn't that the sad truth? I know a brother who's gone to be with the Lord now, and his wife bought a new coat from her mother, and it was used, and it cost her \$10. And what were the Christians saying? Oh, she went out and got a new coat. They must be doing good finds.

And this is super disparaging. She said, my wife was so hurt by those words that it wounded her for years, the uncaring, unkind comments of Christians. We have people among us, they are ministering to us today, and they have given up whatever secular employment they have or could have had because it's more needful for us, because the Lord has called them to live worse.

We have a responsibility to give to the Lord, and the responsibilities sometimes are so obvious before us, and we live like kings as we shouldn't be living, but there are others who are going without. And I think the first problem that we have is that we haven't done this first step. We haven't given ourselves completely to the Lord, because if we did, the Lord would certainly be talking to us about the needs of our brothers and sisters.

That's certainly the first step. Our home is family, number two, in giving to them. It sounds like a strange thing to give to your home and family, but this is in the area of where your heart's affections are.

If you had people come into your house, brothers and sisters, and they looked at what was in your house, it would tell them what was important to you. It would tell them what you've spent your money on. I've had a brother share a good example.

He walked into the brother's library, there were no books, but there was a great video game on the computer. What does your house tell people about what's important to you? How have you spent your money? Do they come in and see one toy after another and all kinds of elegant things that really don't have a place in your home? Or do we live meager lives? And I say that with tongue-in-cheek, because I probably don't live as meagerly as I could. And maybe you don't either.

There are ways that we can probably change our living habits. And furthermore, our homes should be places that are just like hospitals for the saints. The hospitality of the home.

Giving isn't just of your financial resources in the sense of giving directly with your money, but in terms of using what the Lord has given you. Your homes are wonderful hospitals for people to be brought into. That's what hospitality is all about.

Bring the saints in. Bring a sister home who's discouraged, and give her a meal or give her a treat by taking her out of the house instead of having her prepare dinner. Or take her home after the meeting and encourage her.

Hospitality to the saints. Lodge a visiting preacher. Lodge a traveling Christian.

One night, we got a call from one of the elders in the assembly, and he said, we've got some visitors coming through. And when we had finished visiting with them, they stayed a couple of nights, we never heard from them again. And we were sure that we were visited by angels.

We were sure. It was such a blessing. If you've never exercised the gift of hospitality, open up your home.

It is the most wonderful privilege and blessing that you have as Christians. I know a sister who housed us one time when we were traveling, and we were brought in as total strangers, and she told me the story. She said, we were going to sell our house, but we decided not to because we knew the Lord wanted us to use our big home to entertain the saints and to house visitors like yourself.

And so they didn't sell their home and move into a smaller home, which could have been more convenient for them because they believed the Lord was using them in that ministry of hospitality. Use your own. Hospital work among the saints.

We need it. We need it. Thirdly, in the area of, we'll go to the assembly.

And in the assembly, 1 Corinthians chapter 16 talks to us about the need of giving. The collection, as it's called, for the saints. The collection for the saints.

This was primarily a collection in coordination with Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9. Paul was getting a gift from all the churches in Macedonia, Corinth included, to bring to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. So the first mention of a collection in the scriptures is for the poor. That's the context of it.

For the poor. For the poor saints. Paul wanted to show the solidarity of the Christian movement as it had extended into the pagan world and how their expression of love in this practical gift was going to be brought back to the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to show that the gospel truly had broken down the middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile.

What better way to express the unity that we have in Christ by saying, I love you and I want to help you. That's what it's all about. And that's what the collection was for.

And so the assembly should be looking at the needs of the poor. When we talk about assembly giving, most of us think we're talking about Sunday morning offerings and we know that the building has to stay open, we know that somebody has to pay for the eating and the phone bill and the insurance and other expenses that are incurred. But that's not giving.

That's not giving. Those are like saying, I'm giving to the work of my health being open because I paid my hydro bill last month. You've got to pay the bills.

That's not Christian giving. It is giving to the Lord, but it's not giving above and beyond what we need to give in order to keep even our buildings open. That's just the basics.

We have to look one step beyond that. So giving to the assembly isn't just with the view of paying for the basic bills that a building has incurred for day-to-day use. But it's to be divided up, I think, using the principle of Acts 1-8.

You notice the Lord Jesus said, Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. And so giving should be localized, first of all, Jerusalem, Judea, and then in your immediate area, Samaria, and then in the uttermost parts of the earth. And I think that principle in Acts 1-8 is a valid way to look at our Christian giving.

We should be most interested in the needs that we have locally, and we should be interested as well in the foreign field. So the assembly is a tremendous place to be able to give. You'll notice the question there, tithing versus giving.

How many of you feel that tithing is still 100% applicable today? Well, most of us like to think that that's a little steep. Isn't that true? Mr. Groves in his book says, you know, if a person was to give 100 pounds or 1,000 pounds, using Mr. Gooding's terminology, that they would feel they had really done service to the Lord. I know of a man who, as a businessman, was blessed with so much that his policy was to give 90% to the Lord and only keep 10% for himself.

For whom much is given, much is required. And so we need to be careful. We need to be storing up in heaven and not storing in, you know, the Bank of the United States or the Bank of Canada.

The assembly giving is certainly important, and we need to, as assemblies, as part of our worship, bring offerings to the Lord, bring offerings to the Lord to present to Him for the needs that they work. And certainly those responsibilities are handled by those who are deacons in the assembly and the elders in the assembly, and it is appropriate for those who have been given positions of responsibility in local churches to carefully and carefully consider the management of those funds. And it is no small thing.

So in our assembly, for example, we have a regular meeting. The men get together and we pray about where the Lord would meet us in Guinea. Also in our assembly, each Lord's Day is designated as to where the funds will go so that you can pray about where the funds should go.

So on the first Sunday of the month, the funds that's in there are for generals and the second Sunday of the month, the funds are used to fellowship with those who are full-time working in our assembly. The third Sunday of the month, the money that is brought into the offerings is given out in missions. And the fourth Sunday of the month, we even have fellowship with those who may come in as visiting preachers or those who we know have needs who are preachers, where we would be able to send a gift to them.

And we even have fifth Sunday offerings, which are special offerings, which we pray that the Lord will give us wisdom in where to use those specific funds in specific areas. So we've identified those areas in our assembly. Sometimes in assemblies, the offerings are just taken in generally, and then the deacons and the elders will decide how those funds should be dispersed and how they should be handled.

But whatever way it is done, it is to be done carefully and carefully. In assemblies, too, we get into this whole area of, do we go out and buy beautiful \$650,000 buildings with a beautiful mortgage attached to them, or do we live within our means? And I think that common sense would prevail in telling us that it

would not be prudent stewardship to go out and take a large mortgage on a building. I can give you an example of an assembly which brought the matter before the assembly as far as the need of a building.

And as they prayed about it, the assembly laid in store, as the Lord had promised them, the principle of 1 Corinthians 16. And when it came time, the money was there. People had laid in store and decided that they were going to give to the work of the Lord so that when it came time, the building would pay for it.

Now, if you're going to buy a huge building, it's not going to work unless you've got 1,000 people in your fellowship. But if you're like most fellowships that are between 40 and 140, it's not going to happen. You're not going to be able to build a 500-seat auditorium.

Even a 200-seat auditorium might be a little big. So we need to be careful about the whole idea of going into debt. Scripture makes it clear we're not going into debt.

One of the things that hindered the work of the Lord in the book of Nehemiah, if you go to chapter 5, was usury. Brethren loaning money to other brothers and sisters. Loaning them money of interest.

If you have a brother or sister that needs money and you can give it to them, give it to them. Don't loan it to them. Give it to them.

If you've got money to loan, then you probably have money to give. This idea of Christians loaning money to Christians is absolutely nonsense in my opinion. Totally without any biblical basis.

If a brother or sister is in need, they are in need. And the principle of 2 Corinthians 8 is that the Macedonians needed to give to the Jerusalem Christians and one day the Macedonians might need to receive from the Jerusalem Christians. You sow in one field and you reap in another.

And if you sow spiritual things, you're going to reap spiritual things. But if you sow carnal things, you're going to reap carnal things. So we need to be careful.

The Lord's servants at home, number 4. I am most distressed when I get letters in the mail like this. Please continue to remember us in your prayers. Remaining financial support, 20.5% monthly at \$7,100 for outside passage, spiritual and mental preparation for the cross ministry, etc.

4. Over the past several years, my faithful prayer partners and financial supporters have gone to me with the Lord. Others have had to reduce or stop supporting. Will you consider supporting me now? Okay.

You've got letters like this in the mail? You ever got letters like that? However, the financial support needs required before we can return are critically high. Our concern is for our current deficit of \$500 in monthly Christ support. And then they even give you prayer cards with lines and circles and dots with little swivels in them to add your financial dollar amount to them.

And our special Christmas project is this, and our picture has a little magnet on the back You can put that on the fridge so that it will keep looking at you until you send us money. That's the way the world does things. That is not Christian giving to respond to that.

People who write you and solicit for funds are using the world's techniques. The servant of the Lord depends on the Lord for his provision. And I cannot stress enough, I am fully persuaded from the Scriptures that it is wrong for people to solicit for funds from the Lord's Word.

If the Lord isn't providing funds for you, I have some shocking news. It means you're not to go. That's the way it works.

And it means not now. It doesn't mean not ever. It means not now.

We can look at 1 Corinthians chapter 9, but our time is running out. But the Lord's servants are supported by the Lord. And the Lord's people are responsible.

Paul rebuked the Corinthians soundly in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. And he said, when an ox treads grain, you need to feed the ox. Don't we deserve that from you? Don't we deserve to see that our brothers and sisters who are serving the Lord full time are given what they need? One brother wrote a little book, and it was quite interesting. He said that people who are supported by the Lord full time shouldn't be living above the average Christian or below the average Christian.

And this may seem a little radical. But we don't expect our brothers and sisters who are in full time service to live below the poverty line, do we? Yet how many of them do? It's a rebuke to us. We need to change our ways, we really do.

We need to be like KBI and say, consider your ways in this particular area. These few thoughts that I've shared with you, I've brought on the third page some suggested addresses that you can write to as far as being able to find help. Find help in your giving.

There are organizations, so-called organizations, who will take the funds that you believe the Lord has led you to give and will give 100% of those funds to the people that you have been led to give. Groups like Missionary Service Committee and Christian Missions in Many Lands produce material like the Missionary Prayer Handbook. They also have books that describe for you the states and the provinces and the workers that work in those provinces, and also help Canadian Women's Missionary Service Committee and the Missions Magazine that has other help.

They will help you in your giving. If you really do want to increase your giving to the Lord, and you're not sure where to do it, and I find this is quite common, people say, well, I don't know who to send it to. I really, I'm not sure.

Or like one of the initial questions, has the Lord ever spoken to you about someone who may be a missionary or full-time worker? Has he brought their name or their face to your remembrance? He's talking to you about them. There's something that you need to pray about to ask the Lord to show you that you can be used to help them. And so the Prayer Handbook, the Missions Magazine, we see even in the magazines like Uplook, for instance, or other materials that we have, where we hear of conferences like this conference where a lot of the speakers are full-time workers.

These are our men and women who are in the work of the Lord. And one thing you won't hear from them is, the Mass is over in the fall. Come and help us.

You won't hear that. But they need our help. But they are so convinced of New Testament principles when it comes to giving, you will not hear that from them.

Because they believe that we know what the book teaches. And if we're not in the book, how are we going to know what the Lord expects of us? The book of Nehemiah closes in chapter 13. I'd like you to look at that as we close this seminar.

Nehemiah chapter 13. We do have a responsibility to those who are called to the work of the Lord in foreign fields. We have a responsibility to those who are poor.

And the Lord Jesus taught us, the poor you always have with you. But in Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah had gone back to the palace and had returned back to Jerusalem to sort of have a look at what's happened since the walls went up and things got going again in the land. And this is what he found.

He said, verse 11 of 13, Then contended I with the rulers, he said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together and sat them in their place. And then brought all jute of the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil onto the storehouse. And I made treasurers over the storehouses.

Shalamiah, the priest and Zadok, the scribe and of the Levites, Hedayah. And next to them was Hanan, the son of Zachar, the son of Mataniah. For notice, they were counted faithful and their office was to distribute unto their brethren.

This is how Nehemiah's biography closes. That the work of the Lord was going to go on by people who were going to be faithful distributing to their brethren. And I would encourage you and exhort you today consider the joy of giving, the joy of hearing the master say, Well done, well done.

Be good and faithful to him. Enter into the joy of your Lord. We didn't get a lot of questions and answers.

My grandfather was told a book that was published in Italian. He never knew how to spell. But we're going to have to end and we'll just ask the Lord to bless our time.

Our Father, we would thank you this day for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who became poor for our sake. We thank you that he gave up all that we might have, everything. We know our Father that we do reign as kings now for we are seated in the very heavenly places with our Savior.

We pray that you'll expand our capacity for loving and that in turn will help us to give as we should in appreciation for what you have given to us. Bless our brothers and sisters in this room.

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