

Christians Must Perform the Truth - Part 4

by Stephen Olford

Growing through giving is a key to unlocking God's blessing in our lives and in the lives of others, and it is a mark of Christian maturity and spiritual growth.

Duration: 1:00:04

Scripture: Exodus 23:19, Leviticus 27:30, Proverbs 3:9-10, Malachi 3:6, Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Topics: "Truth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the topic of giving and tithing. One person shares a testimony of how they continued to tithe even after their income decreased, and God faithfully provided for their needs. The speaker emphasizes the importance of determining our regular commitments and sticking to them, including giving to the local church and missions. The sermon also highlights the significance of giving from a heart of love, as an expression of worship to God.

Transcript

Thank you, Gilbert. Good afternoon, everyone. I don't know whether it's this beautiful venue here, but it's the first time I've felt warm since I got here.

And it's great. I think I'm going to ask for the young people's meetings to be transferred across here in the morning. Gilbert, with typical modesty, said he knew me in another connection.

He actually knew me because he was the principal of the London Bible College when I was training there. And I learned a great deal through my time there, some of them through the curriculum and some of them through a lot of extracurricular activities, which we won't go into now. But, you know, Gilbert's a very generous man.

And he should be giving this seminar today because when Clive Calver was there, he ended up not only with a degree, but Gilbert gave him his daughter and he married her. Now, that's generosity for you. But when I went there just a couple of years later, one of my best friends, he went and married Gilbert's secretary.

So he gave his secretary away as well. Well, not having any daughters or secretaries left, I had to look elsewhere to find a wife. But that's the sort of generous man that he is.

We're thinking this afternoon about growing through giving. And I'd like you to turn in your Bibles to a couple of passages of Scripture. One in the Old Testament, the book of Malachi, Chapter 3. Last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, Chapter 3. And across in the New, 2 Corinthians.

And if we open it up at Chapter 9, we'll be referring to that a little bit later. A couple of Scriptures, really, that I want to use to earth what we're discussing this afternoon. So important that we discover that talking about giving is not something that we approach merely from a pragmatic point of view.

In other words, the church needs a new roof or we desperately need to extend the Sunday school hall. But giving is a principle which runs right through Scripture. And I'm not just picking out a couple of proof texts.

I really would ask you in your own Bible study and in your house groups or your services at church to begin to note the number of times in both Old and New Testament, generosity, hospitality, having a free, a giving spirit. These things are mentioned and commended by the Lord. So we're not just looking at it purely from the point of view that the church needs money to survive.

But we're seeing it as a mark of Christian maturity. I've often said that if you want to find out how a church is spiritually, we often say, well, look at the prayer meeting. I believe a much better way of assessing how a church is doing is to actually look at their accounts.

Because a church may be packed to the doors on a Sunday. But if you look at their accounts and discover that most of their money is being used for themselves, you know that that church hasn't grown very much in world vision or commitment to the wider work of the kingdom of God. I believe you can tell how far a church has gone with God by how much they give away of what's entrusted to them.

That may sound a little bit controversial, but I hope as we go through this afternoon, you will understand it. Malachi chapter 3, I want to read to you something which the prophet Malachi brought to the people of Israel. And he does it in a familiar way that we find in scripture of dialoging.

And he imagines a dialogue between the people and their God. And we read, first of all, in verse six, I, the Lord, do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

Ever since the time of your forefathers, you've turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty. But, you ask, how are we to return? Will a man rob God, yet you rob me? But you ask, how do we rob you? In tithes and offerings.

You are under a curse, the whole nation of you, because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

I will prevent pests from devouring your crops and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit, says the Lord Almighty. Then all nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land, says the Lord Almighty. The context of the message that Malachi preached was this.

The people of Israel were back in their land, having come out of the captivity in Babylon, and they'd been back for around about 100 years. The temple had been rebuilt, but the promised blessing that had come through the prophets just had not happened. And the people were asking the question, what's the point of serving God? I mean, why don't we turn to the gods and the idols of the nations around us? And it would

be true to say that a lot of apathy had set in.

There was lethargic approach to worship, and they were saying, is it worth serving God? And coupled with that spiritual problem, there was an economic problem, that the country was affected by economic hardship. Inflation was raging, and there were great problems for the people in just everyday living. And in Malachi's message, you get back in the first chapter, where he presents the challenge that God makes, where's my honor? A son honors his father, a servant honors his master, but, says God, where's the honor that you're meant to give to me? And that's a bit of a hard message to a people who are feeling that God's a long, long way away.

But Malachi, throughout his book, is seeking to bring this challenge to the people to say, listen, God is promising that if you honor him, he'll honor you. And that's where, at the end part of the message, in the third chapter, he reaches this climax where the Lord is saying to his people, return to me. Get me back in the center of the stage.

Put me at the center of your personal lives. Reintroduce me to the center of your worship. Don't let it be an empty, lifeless thing.

Allow me to be at the center of your affairs as a nation. And then the people, Malachi imagines, asking the question, well, what's the issue? What's the problem? How can we return to you? And then God puts his finger on the heart of it. Will a man rob God, yet you rob me? But don't you find it interesting that Malachi is saying to the people, look at your tithes, look at your offerings.

Look at the way you bring your gifts to the Lord. You're not bringing the full amount that he truly deserves. And the spiritual principle that I find in those last few verses that we read together, in verse 10, we find that God is presenting a challenge to the people.

He's saying, will you test me? He's inviting them to put him to the test. He says, even though economically times are tough, begin to honor me in practical ways. Begin to give in the way that you know you really need to.

And in doing that, notice that I'm going to open the very floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing, that spiritual power and vitality that you know is missing, I'm going to pour it out in such a way that you're actually going to cry out, Lord, stop. I don't know about you, but I'd love to be in that situation in our country, wouldn't you? When we're actually praying, Lord, please will you stop? We can't cope with any more Christians, new Christians coming into our church. We just haven't got enough folk to cope with them.

And God says, that's the invitation that I make. If you begin to honor me by your giving, then spiritually I will bless you. And then we get in verses 11 and 12, and materially you will also be blessed.

And the spiritual principle that's true here is if we get our giving right, not only are we spiritually blessed, but God materially blesses us. Some of you have learned that lesson, haven't you? Have you noticed at times when you've given, when you've really thought to yourself, I can't afford to do this. As I look at my monthly accounts, it's impossible.

If I give in the way that I believe God's telling me to give, I won't have enough to get by. And yet God miraculously is able to make less go farther. That's God's ability.

And I believe that often when I'm talking to young people on a subject like this, that they look wistfully and they think, oh, if only I could be a great missionary pioneer. Or see a church planted in such and such a place. You know, they look at people and say, what a wonderful thing to be great men and women of faith.

But God says to you and I, you can actually be a great man or woman of faith every month of your life. Every week of the year. When you prove me in this way, that when you honour me, I will honour you.

Now let's move over to 2 Corinthians, because some of us may be tempted to say, well, that's just Old Testament. That's in, as one little boy delightfully put it, that's in the Old Testament before God became a Christian. Well, of course, we know we only have one Bible.

And why I'm turning to 2 Corinthians is to illustrate to you that the principle of giving is not just something that comes from the Old Testament prophets, and indeed in the law, in the Pentateuch as it was given to Moses, because giving was very much a part of the worship, the tabernacle worship, and later the temple worship. That you didn't come empty handed before God. That you brought your tithes, one-tenth of the produce of the field.

That you brought your offerings. But in 2 Corinthians, we've moved to a very different situation. The church has begun.

And Paul is writing to a bunch of Christians in Greece, Corinth, in the south of Greece. And he's writing to them about an offering that he's arranging, because the church in Judea, that's Jerusalem and that sort of surrounding neighbourhood, were undergoing great suffering. There was a famine at that time.

And Paul was arranging, in conjunction with others, a love offering. And he was collecting from other Christian communities, a love offering that they could take to the Christians in Jerusalem, and surrounding areas, in order to help them. The famine was so severe, and many of these Christians were poor, they were slaves, some of them were, because they were Christians, were facing extra pressure and persecution, and Paul was wanting the gospel to be demonstrated.

It's one thing to say, we love you, and it's another thing to demonstrate it. Many of us as Christians know John 3, verse 16 off by heart. But I wonder how many of us know one John 3, verse 16 off by heart, where we're told that we should lay down our lives for our brothers.

Now you and I may not ever get into the situation where we literally are called to lay down our life, because of a brother or sister in Christ. But the principle that Paul is spelling out here is that we are to lay down our self-interests, looking after me and mine, in order to serve the people of God. Why? As a demonstration of the reality of the gospel, that Christ has made us one.

And back in the first letter that he wrote to the Corinthians, in chapter 16, he urges regular, systematic giving. He says on the first day of the week, the time when Christians met together to worship, he talked about bringing their offerings together, not doing it under some false sense of pressure, but laying on one side the amount that God has shown should be laid on one side. So Paul isn't making an emotional appeal off the top of his head.

This is something that is being planned, and it's something that people are being asked to give to systematically. And when we get to 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, a lot of water is passed under the bridge, and indeed probably a couple of other letters to the Corinthian church that we no longer have. But Paul is saying to them, right, now is the time when I'm coming, and I want that offering to be ready.

And 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are two of the most valuable chapters we have in our New Testament on Christian giving, how to grow through giving. And I want to encourage you, if you have any responsibility in your church, looking after the house group program, or the Bible study program, or anything like that, I'd love to urge you to get to grips with 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Go through it systematically. Teach it.

Share it together as a church. Because I believe that there are certain things here that could really, in the words of Malachi, bring about a situation of blessing where God opens the floodgates of heaven. Because it's terribly practical.

It's talking about giving God the right place that he deserves. And I believe it's important to understand that Paul, when he writes to the Corinthians, is writing to people, asking them to give to Christians who are separated from them by distance. They lived about 800 miles away.

Now, in modern day terms, that's nothing. That's about an hour and a half on a plane. But in their terms, it would mean that they would perhaps never have the chance to get to Jerusalem, and the folk in Judea and around there would never get the chance to come to Corinth.

They were separated by distance. And they were separated by race. Predominantly, the Judean church was made up of Christians from a Jewish background.

And in Corinth, they came from a Gentile background. And also, they were separated because they'd never met. They didn't know each other.

Perhaps they knew names of leaders in one another's church. There had been visits from some of the apostles who told them about key people. But they didn't actually know the church intimately.

And that doesn't seem to be a problem to Paul. You see, for us, we perhaps think, well, yes, giving to my church, I can understand that. But as we're going to see this afternoon, giving goes beyond that.

God wants you and I to be involved in that lovely fellowship of the church of God where we are able to minister to the needs of those who we may never see this side of heaven. And yet we're part of the same body and able to minister in the love of Christ to them. I want to just look at a couple of verses in 2 Corinthians 9 where Paul says this, Just remember this.

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he's decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion.

For God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. I love that little verse there in verse 7. God loves a cheerful giver.

The Greek word there is the word hilarious from which we get the word hilarious. You ever giggled in church when the offering comes around? You've got a scriptural warrant to. You see, the Bible says God loves cheerful giving.

And Paul's urging them not to give reluctantly, not under a sense of compulsion. And let's be honest, I have to be honest, that sometimes when it comes to the issue of giving, that's how I see it. It's a sort of, oh well, I suppose I ought to.

Or under a sense of compulsion, a wrong sense of compulsion. And Paul is saying, no, that isn't the spirit of giving. God loves cheerful givers.

And that word actually that we would use in English as hilarious means to be liberal, to be generous, to have a ready and willing mind, to have a sense of joy that means you're ready to do anything. Now I believe that God has something to say to us as the people of God in these days in Britain on this issue. It's a sad indictment, but when you move to other parts of the world and when you talk to pastors and mission leaders, you will discover that the church in Britain, although we've had a great reputation for evangelicalism for many generations, sadly, one of the issues that we are noted for is our lack of generosity when it comes to giving.

Now I believe the tide is turning there. And in my work in the Salt Mine Trust, we have the privilege of going to many different parts of this country. And I've noticed an interesting principle, and it's this, that giving churches grow and growing churches give.

That giving churches are growing in spiritual depth as well as in numbers. And at the same time, too, a mark of a growing church is that it's giving. It's looking beyond its own four walls.

It's looking for its people to learn how to be generous. You see, giving is a basic building block in the nursery section of Christian experience. And until we learn to handle it properly, we're not going to get on very far.

I wonder if some of you this afternoon have come along to this seminar because you're the church treasurer. Well, first of all, can you receive my sympathy and condolences because you have a tough job. I reckon the real unsung heroes in our church is the church treasurers.

But I wonder if you as a church treasurer or someone as a missionary treasurer, you have that responsibility. Can I just ask you something? Do you as a church set an example to your people about giving? I've got four small boys at home. I know I don't look old enough, but I'm married very young, so that's how we managed it.

But I have four small boys and I have learned more than anything else, more than words, the best way to teach is by doing. And so often in our churches, in our PCC, in our diaconate or in our elders meeting, in our missionary committee, we say, oh dear, if only our people would give more generously. If only we could get them to respond to this issue or to that issue.

But I want to ask you, are you as a church setting the sort of parenting type of example? In other words, do you give away money that's entrusted to you? Or do you simply see it as something that comes and you've just got to use it for yourselves? Gilbert mentioned that I wrote a book entitled Pennies for Heaven a number of years ago. Modestly forbid to me saying anything about it other than the fact that I agree with every word in it. It's the only book I say that about.

But you know, I didn't write that as a director of a mission. I couldn't have written it actually as a director of a mission because it would have perhaps been misconstrued. But I wrote that as part of the pastoral team in a local church where we were trying to move forward in a number of areas, and one of them was the area of giving.

And one of the key things that happened in our church was when we, after a lot of heart searching, decided that we were going to start giving away, and we set a percentage figure that we were going to

give away from all of the income that we as a church received, irrespective of whether we could meet our bills or whatever. That was one of the turning points in the giving level of our people because they saw that we as a church weren't simply concerned with having lots of money in the bank, but we were practicing what we preached. We were implementing the principle of giving.

And that's what Paul is talking about there. God loves cheerful givers. Let me move on to ask some basic questions, can I, about growing through giving.

Here's the first question. Why should we give? Why? It's always important to get the motive right, isn't it? Look at chapter 9 and verse 15, just over the page in my Bible. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift, his inexpressible gift.

Paul is saying here at the end of this section in chapters 8 and 9 about giving. He's putting giving into its true context. Here he is talking to these people about being generous, being sacrificial in their giving.

And then he reaches the end of it and he says, oh by the way, let's not forget how much we owe God for his indescribable gift to us in Jesus. Often when it comes to an offering in a church, we use those words. You remember the Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that through his poverty we might become rich.

That's the context of giving. You see there's a difference between fear and love. Fear makes you do things because you have to.

Love makes you do things because you want to. And as far as giving is concerned, it isn't meant to be seen as a legalistic principle, we have to do it, but God is saying you have free will. You have money that I've entrusted to you.

It may be a student grant, it may be a widow's pension, it may be something which is much more sizable than the average income in Britain. The amount is irrespective, it doesn't really matter. God's entrusted to us gifts.

He's given you a home. He's given you clothes, he's given you food. And out of all of that, God looks to us to generously express our love and our thanks for him.

Love does things that are utterly reckless. Have you noticed that? You've seen that advert on the television about the guy going up the escalator at the tube station and this lady floats by on the other side and he smells something nice and he jumps over three flights of escalators and runs down four flights of stairs just to give this lady a bunch of flowers because she's wearing a perfume that he happens to like. That advert always reminds me that love, although in that case it's probably just attraction, makes us do crazy things.

And God is saying to you and to me that giving comes from a heart of love. I've been so glad in recent years that there's been much teaching on worship and a recovery of worship in a lot of our churches. Now, the mode of that is unimportant.

We don't want to get into that today. It doesn't matter whether you're sitting in straight rows or in a circle. I hope all of us are adult enough to realize that heaven is going to be a very multicolored place when it comes to worship.

But part of worship is our giving. And that is why I love to use the term offering. Not a collection, as Gilbert rightly said, but an offering.

And that in the context of a worship time, we bring our offering to God. You see, words come easy, don't they? Words are easy to just flow from our lips as we sing or even as we pray. But giving adds substance to what we're saying and to what we're praying.

Why should I give? Because of God's great love and generosity. Let's move on to a second question. How much should I give? And that, as our American friend says, is where the rubber hits the runway.

And I guarantee that if in your church you started to really have an airing on this one, you'd have a very lively discussion and debate on your hands. To tithe or not to tithe? That's the question for many Christians. Well, I'm going to be infuriating this afternoon because I'm not going to answer that question.

I believe the answer to it actually comes on your knees before God. But let me just say a couple of things that may help you. I do believe that tithing is a guideline.

I don't believe that it should be seen as some legalistic principle so that we say, well, by giving a tenth, and that's what tithe means, by giving a tenth, I've done my duty. God is interested in the nine tenths that remain as well as the tenth that we give. And sometimes if we're not careful, we can sort of give it and think, well, that's it, I've done my bit.

The second thing that I think we need to be aware of is that tithing for the Old Testament Israelite was really a minimum. A more accurate assessment of what he gave was about 23.5% of his income. Not just a tenth.

When you add in the other offerings that came on top of that, and as you read through the Old Testament, you'll discover that in more detail. And I believe the answer to that question comes when we come to the Lord, and whether we're talking as a couple, as a single person, or whether we're talking as a church about how much we should give, it comes when we seek the Lord and say, Lord, what do you want us to do in this situation? Gilbert Kirby was principal of the London Bible College, and I had the privilege of training there for three years. And we have great reason to give thanks to God for Sir John Lang.

Through his generosity, the college at Northwood actually came into being, and it's the form that we see it now. And I remember reading John Lang's biography, that as a man who faced a real crisis in his business, he met with God and had a real spiritual experience of God. And part of the covenant that he made with the Lord during a time that he spent with God away in a hotel up in the north of England one weekend, part of the agreement that he made was that if God would bless him in his work, he was wanting to put God at the very center of his business interests, and he hadn't done that previously, then he actually would covenant to give back to God.

And John Lang got out an envelope and he wrote on the back of that envelope a sliding scale of giving. It's the only way that I can describe it briefly, where he said that if God was going to prosper and bless him in his business, then he would give a certain amount. And he actually worked it out that if God in a particular year blessed him with this much, he would save a certain amount and give away to the Lord's work a certain amount.

Now just in case you think that this was a businessman making a slick deal with the Almighty and making sure that he was going to keep very comfortable, it wasn't that at all, because his giving was going up

proportionately all of the time. I find it fascinating that when John Lang died and his will was published, he left just a few hundred pounds, because the man who had handled millions in his life had given so much of it away. You see, he had learned that giving wasn't a rut that we got into, one-tenth and that's it, but he was saying to God, Lord, if you are pleased to honour me as I seek to honour you in my business dealings and in my Christian life, I want to honour you and give back to you.

He kept that envelope with him. And I understand that just a short time before he died, he showed it to a friend, a battered old envelope now over the years, that he kept in his wallet as a reminder of his covenant with God. I remember speaking at a meeting in Wales a few years ago.

At the end of the meeting, a young fellow came to see me who was in the RAF. He'd only been converted, I think, about four or five weeks. And he said, look, I wonder if I could take some time and ask you some questions.

And we sat down, had a cup of coffee, and he had a list of questions. Obviously, he was growing as a Christian, and there were a number of things that he wasn't clear about. But I remember one of his questions.

He said, listen, I know now I'm a Christian. I need to use my money for God. I used my money for myself before.

And he said, I've been praying. And he said, I just feel God is saying to me, give me 10% of what you've got. I said, now, does that sound right? Now, he hadn't picked it up from scripture, and another Christian hadn't said it to him.

He'd been asking God as he was praying in his quiet time what he should do. And as we shared together about the lovely way that we can grow through giving, I realized as I drove away from that meeting, that young fellow had traveled further in three or four weeks than some Christians do in 40 years. Because he was starting off with the right spirit.

He was saying, Lord, you direct my giving. What should I do in this situation? And the last thing to remember in answer to this question, how much should I give, is this. Remember, it all belongs to him.

I remember speaking at a convention like Finally Week at Skegness, a couple of years ago. And during the course of a particular seminar that I was taking, it was on marriage. And I talked about the fact that God wants us to give our homes back to him.

And I mentioned that my wife and I had really found that such a help to be able to give our home back to God, and the furniture and things that he'd entrusted to us, to be able to say, Lord, this is yours. And a couple of hours later, a couple came to see me, and they said, we've just had a fantastic prayer time. They said, we've been back to our chalet, and they said a few other couples from our church.

And they said, we've just given everything away. And my heart nearly stopped, because I thought, what on earth have they done? How on earth are they going to live? But what they were saying was this. They'd gone back to their chalet.

They said, we've never done this before. And we just knelt down together. We had a tremendous time of prayer, giving back our homes and our jobs and our cars and our possessions to God.

And what we've said is this. God, it all belongs to you. Now show us how to use what you've entrusted to us.

That's such an important point at which we all need to come. Third question, to whom should I give? Okay, we understand that giving is part of our response to the grace of God. The answer to the question how much really comes out of our relationship with God as we seek him and ask him, but to where should our giving go? Just go back to chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians in verse 5. Five areas really are illuminated for us to whom should I give.

And the first one we see in verse 5 of chapter 8. Here Paul's doing a very clever pastoral trick. He's actually telling the Corinthians what the Christians in the north of Greece did. He says, they did not do as we expected in Macedonia, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

He says to the Christians in Corinth, he says, you know your brothers and sisters in the north of Greece? They gave, they gave a generous offering, but the important thing is this. They gave themselves first to the Lord, then to us. So when we say to whom should I give? The first answer we find is to the Lord.

You know it's so easy for us to think if we're supporting a particular mission or we give to someone who's in special need that we are doing something for them. We received a letter in our office just a couple of weeks ago from someone and it wasn't sort of written in the normal religious cliché mold. They just said, look this is just a small part of God's bank account that he's asked me to pass on to you.

We smiled when we read that because we knew what the person was saying. They were saying this really belongs to the Lord. It's not me, I just happen to be the post boy.

It belongs to him. To whom do we give? We give to the Lord. Please be careful, won't you, about talking about my church.

It isn't your church, it's his church. Be very careful in talking about my giving to the church. I remember a pastor confiding in me just a few months ago where he said, you know, we're really facing a tough time at the moment and one or two prominent families in the church who keep the place going have stood up and said, we're going to pull the plug on the cash.

He said, what should I do? I said, I'd let them go. Do without them. Because if their view of the church of God is like that, it's not a golf club.

It's not a subscription that you just keep to keep the place going. You'd do well without them. I'm giving it to the Lord.

Secondly, obviously I'm giving it to the local church. I wrote the book Pennies for Heaven as a pastor of a local church and I learned so much during my time within the local pastorate about responsible membership. I want to ask you, do you have a commitment to your local fellowship where God has put you? You may not agree with everything that is said and done in that church.

Of course not. A church is a family. It's a growing place.

But are you committed in your giving to your local fellowship? That's where it begins. R.T. Kendall wrote a very helpful little booklet on tithing and he makes a very strong case there for what Malachi says about

bringing the whole tithe into the storehouse as meaning the tithe comes into the church. Your giving goes above that to any extra church activity.

There's a powerful case perhaps to be made for that. But our local church fellowship is where our giving begins. And I want to ask you, do you pray for your church treasurer? Do you pray for your missionary committee? Do you pray for those who have perhaps a committee who look after finance and fabric? Do you pray for them? So often we look at people like that and we don't think that they've got a very spiritual role.

They just keep the thing ticking over. But I believe more than anything else we need men and women of faith in those positions. I remember we had a church treasurer who was a great guy.

He moved on from us tragically after just a couple of years, but a fantastic fellow. And a number of times we used to come to church meetings and somebody would stand up and say, excuse me, as we were making a proposal, can we afford this? And quick as a flash he used to get up and say, wrong question. The proper question is, is God in this? The answer to whether we can afford it or not comes second.

If God is in it, then he will meet the need. That's the real issue we need to be addressing ourselves to. I tell you, I wish I could have had him cloned and parceled off around the country.

We need men and women of vision and faith like that. Too often we have, we appoint people as treasurers of churches or treasurers of missionary societies who are accountants and bank managers. Some of my best friends are accountants and bank managers, so please don't lynch me afterwards.

But you see, just because someone has expertise in finance doesn't actually make them a man or woman filled with faith and filled with the Holy Spirit. And when we come to the New Testament, we come to the book of Acts, we find that's what they look for in deacons, in stewards, in administrators of finance and food. We found that they look for men and women of faith, men filled with faith and filled with the Holy Spirit.

In my time in Southend, I was privileged to be chairman of a Christian hospice that came together. And through the churches there, we were able to open a hospice in the town, which is still exercising a very valuable ministry in the community. Now I tell you, that was one of the most nightmarish experiences to be involved in.

We didn't have any money, and yet God gave us the money to open it. He gave us the facilities. Everything we needed came in, in a space of less than a year, and the thing was opened.

But on our committee, we had a couple of guys, one who was a bank manager and one who was an accountant. And regularly they used to say in our committee meetings, in our trustees meetings, listen, we have to suspend a lot of our normal thinking about finance and raising money when it comes to this. Because God seems to take us to the very edge.

And in business terms, we'd say this is crazy. But in spiritual terms, we see that God is leading us to take a step of faith. And how we moved on and saw with never more than about three weeks running costs in hand, how God could meet the needs.

Now does that mean that we ignore financial management? Does that mean that we turn aside from people who've got expertise and understanding? No, of course not. We need men and women like that.

We desperately need them within our churches.

But we need them to be men and women who not only have, if you like, the expertise from the secular field, but have vision and faith and hearts after God. And at times when they can say to us, friends, this is absolutely crazy, but God's in it, let's go for it. That's what we need.

Thirdly, we need to be giving to missions abroad and at home. I learnt a principle in the local church, and that is when Christians pay for something, they usually pray for it as well. Have you found that? I found one of the best ways to engender mission prayer and prayer for people in other parts of the world was to make sure that we were giving and giving to them.

Now sometimes we think that missions begin on the other side of the English Channel, and they don't. Missions begin here. You know, I hope you know, that our schools are a mission field today.

Last night in the Young People's Meeting, David Morgan from the MWE staff came in and in a very telling way talked to the young people there about how MWE evangelists throughout the year are going into schools and sharing with children who know little or nothing about Jesus Christ, the love of God. And three of the MWE evangelists are coming back here in the new year to Skegness to do a solid week in the local schools to share with youngsters the good news of Jesus. How good it is to have an organisation with vision that they don't just want to come here for a Christian convention, but they actually want to make inroads into the community.

But listen, you can't do schools work and expect the local education authority to pay for you. And in some parts of the country, the local churches just haven't got the wherewithal to support it. And there are people involved in mission at home who need support.

And to be able as a church or as a young people's group or as a house group to get behind someone who's going into schools or working in the inner cities or who's got a burden for Asian immigrants who are untouched by the normal life of the local church in their neighbourhood. Or by some of the folk who have turned their backs on lucrative careers to get involved in serving God in the community in one way or another. We need to be behind those sort of people.

And overseas mission, of course overseas mission, which is often the Cinderella when it comes to giving in the local church. Some of us think, and you perhaps need to understand this, I hope not in a critical way, but some of us think when we look at our giving, oh we gave a few hundred pounds to such and such a missionary society working in India or Thailand, and we think, well isn't that good? But I would ask you to go back over your church accounts and say, over the years how much has our giving increased? Inflation goes up, in the normal wage realm we expect our wages, our salaries to go up, but how much has our giving gone up to world mission? And in parts of our world today there are missionaries who are actually living on less now than they were when they first went out. But that isn't the fault of their society, it's the fault of people like you and people like me who aren't getting behind them.

Now I know it's a difficult one, and I know there are some missionary societies that should have packed up a long time ago, and they just want to keep the thing going for the sake of it. But you know if we exercise prayerful discernment, we know when God is at work, we can tell and sense when a missionary comes, a deputation speaker comes to a church, whether God is at work within the work that they're doing as a team of people, but that needs support. And I believe that sometimes when we look at our missionary prayer meeting, or we look at our young people and we say, oh what a terrible lack of vision there is, you

know we had a missionary weekend and none of the young people turned up, or just the same faithful few were there.

I wonder if part of the reason for that is because within the body of the church they don't see a radical commitment to world mission giving. I'm thrilled when I read about churches who have a commitment to support their missionaries and it's absolutely to the hilt. I can think of a church in the south of England who took a commitment some years ago that anyone who went out from their fellowship to serve God anywhere in the world would be fully supported by that church.

And they've got a whole host of missionaries. And talking to their pastor some months ago I said, how on earth have you managed to keep that mission budget up? He said, simply because we've put it to the people. If we are going to send these people out, then we have the responsibility to support them and not leave it to someone else.

Fourth area, the needs of the poor. You know I don't believe we talk often enough or long enough about the needs of the poor in our own society or in our world today. Thank God for Tear Fund who've raised the profile of world relief, World Vision International and others too who are working on that scene.

I've never forgotten my first visit to India about four years ago. On the Sunday we had our harvest festival service. And in our church we used to make it look like Sainsbury's.

I don't know what you do in your church. But we used to get people bringing things forward, you know, melons and leeks and cans of baked beans. And we used to sort of stock them all up at the front and then they were distributed around the community over the next week.

Within a few hours of standing at the front of our church and seeing the platform groaning with this produce, I was standing in the streets of Bombay in the middle of a monsoon looking at kids begging from taxis for money to live. Now we live in one world. Although we talk about the first, the second, the third and the fourth world now, we're actually one world.

And I believe that we need to have a concern in our hearts for the needs of the poor. And then fifthly, those in need around us. I believe every church has got people with needs, people who have practical financial needs.

Some of us may say, well, I haven't got an awful lot to give. But I believe that as a church, if we're growing, then we'll have a concern to give in other ways too. Hospitality, care, love.

How many elderly folk within a church need practical jobs doing that they can no longer do? That's the sort of church that it's good to be part of. But how do we develop that sort of church? Well, it comes through teaching people to have open ears and open eyes, open hearts and open hands. That's what Paul's really getting at in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. He hasn't got one of these terrible thermometer things.

I think the thing should be burned. You know, it's the outside of churches. I had one in our area, and it had a big notice on the top, help preserve this ancient church.

And I used to feel like scribbling across the bottom, why bother? If you go into the world to say, please help preserve this ancient church, I wouldn't bother. But he didn't come with a thermometer saying, now let's see how high we can get it. He's saying, listen, Corinthians, learn about being people with open ears and open eyes and open hearts and open hands.

It's a spirit of generosity that we need. Let's move on to the last question. How should we give? What's the spirit of our giving? Well, first of all, we need to pray before we give.

Obviously, that's understandable, isn't it? And that applies to me as an individual. It applies to us as a married couple, as a family. It applies to us as a church.

Pray before we give. You know, the number of times that perhaps you've been in this situation, we either as a church or in the mission I now work with, a particular need has arisen, and suddenly a letter has arrived. And it's from someone, and they don't know it.

You haven't sort of made any hints or anything like that. And they've said, look, we really felt a burden on our hearts for you today, and we're enclosing such and such an amount of money because we believe that that's needed. And there have been times when the need has come up, and God's just met it.

It gives you a tremendous lift. Because you know that God is speaking through his people. But are we responsive to hear him? If our giving becomes merely habitual and ritualistic, we've missed it.

Pray before you give. Secondly, develop a system of giving. And there are some people who think that any sort of system is thoroughly unspiritual.

And there's a mood today around that says anything that approaches systematizing, reading the Bible, or having a set order of worship in church, well we should throw it out because it's not Holy Spirit led. Nonsense. We read that the Lord created the heavens and the earth in an orderly and a systematic fashion.

I believe you can have a system that is devoid of the Spirit, and I think you can also have total chaos that is devoid of the Spirit too. And I think that to develop a system of giving is one of the best things that we can do. So that we say personally now, what are my giving responsibilities? What do we as a couple feel it's right for us to do? Remember a young couple in our church as we were teaching a series on giving, and by the way every church should teach a series on giving once a year.

This young couple wrote to me and they said, we can't do it. We've looked at our commitments, we've got a mortgage, two little children, we just can't do it. But they said, you've been talking this week about faith, we're going to step out in faith.

Some months later I called in to see them and I said, come on, tell me how's it going? They said it was amazing. We don't know how God's doing it, but we've got less every month, but it's making it. And we've grown through the excitement of seeing God do it.

And they sat down and systematically worked out how and where they were going to give. Third thing. Determine your regular commitments.

Where do my priorities lie? Now obviously we talked about the local church, we talked about the need of missions at home and abroad, but it could well be that God lays on your heart at a certain period of time a commitment. Determine that commitment and stick to it. I know that church treasurers who are here today would plead with me to say something that churches and missionary societies benefit from, and that is to use a deed of covenant.

You don't realise what a difference that makes. Not only does it help a church or a mission with budgeting, knowing what their income is going to be, but it also means that they can claim back from the government the tax that you paid on your gift. Now you may think that's terribly unspiritual, but it isn't.

I think the idea of Mrs Thatcher supporting evangelism is a tremendous idea. I'm thoroughly in favour of it. Here's a fourth thing.

Do it cheerfully. A glad heart is so important. Do it cheerfully because God loves cheerful givers.

Here's another thing. Pray as you give. Sometimes in our work we'll get a letter that comes into the office and somebody will say, look, we're sending a gift to support your work, but as we were praying today, God told us to share this with you.

It's a word, a text from scripture, a word of encouragement that we need. Pray as you give. And here's the last thing.

Review your giving regularly. It's easy to get into a rut about giving. It's easy just to sort of go through the motions, but review your giving regularly.

Look for where you give and to whom you give. When I was writing Pennies for Heaven, I wrote to David Watson. And I asked David about the experience that he had in York when he was at St. Michael the Belfry.

And he wrote back and said, you know, God did teach us a lot about giving. He helped us to grow as givers as a church, but he made a very telling point. He said this.

He said, we noticed, though, that most people couldn't learn to give until they had been filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, let's not get into arguments about words or terms. But he said, I've learned that until the Holy Spirit brings about a release within a person's life, then they will just imbibe the spirit of the age, which is grab, grab, grab.

And if we want people who have got the spirit of Jesus, which is give, give, give, it needs to be a spiritual experience. They need to know what it is to be released from hanging on to things. I'd love to recommend to you David Watson's book on discipleship.

We were plugging this this morning with the young people in the Bible study there. And that's a fantastic book, a digest of much of his teaching and preaching on the subject of discipleship. And he's got a whole section in there on giving and speaks about how we as Christians need to know an experience of God releasing us from our grasp on material things.

And as Christian fellowships, that we might have a far wider vision of the need in God's world today. Growing through giving. In Pennies for Heaven, I quote about a young couple, a fictitious young couple.

But I want to mention them to you because I think they illustrate for us something of the way that we can grow through giving. I said, let's take as an example a young married couple who've only got an income together of 500 pounds a month. And as they sit down and begin to pray and work out their giving commitments, they decide that they want to give to the Lord over and above what some would see as a tithe.

They want to give 75 pounds a month. And so they decide that the church, their local church, is going to receive from their giving. And then they decide that they want to be involved in supporting a needed child through the work of tear fund in a third world country.

And then they decide that they want to apportion another part of their giving to a young couple who are working amongst Muslims in the Middle East. And then a small amount to a young Christian who's working as a schools worker in the north of England. And in the course of that chapter that I was writing there, I said, you know, that's just an ordinary couple.

And people might look at them and say, well, they're nothing very special about them, nothing very significant. But, you know, in God's terms, they're kingdom builders. Why? Because out of their giving that they've covenanted before God every month to give, they are involved in ministering through their local fellowship, supporting the work of God there within their town.

They're able to support a needed child in a third world country who they'll never see, encourage a couple who are painstakingly seeking to bring the love of Christ to Muslims in the Middle East, and getting behind a young schools worker who that morning gets out of his car and walks into an assembly hall confronted with 800 pairs of eyes who know nothing about the love of Jesus Christ. You see, for that young couple who might say, well, we're nothing special in God's kingdom, they're involved in kingdom building. They are putting their money where their mouth is.

They're involved in service for God. I heard a song written by a man called Ian Traynor some years ago. It's a song that I want to just quote to you.

I don't want to sing it to you because you'll all get up and leave. But I want to quote it to you. Show me a kingdom where righteous men meet.

Show me a highway that's straight for their feet, and I'll show you a place where God's all in all. The spirit is reigning, for they've answered his call. Show me a brother in whom self has no part.

Show me a sister who's pure in her heart, and I'll show you a person to whom God's all in all. The spirit is reigning, for they've answered his call. Show me a family where sons are at peace.

Show me a home in which love will increase, and I'll show you a dwelling where God's all in all. The spirit is reigning, for they've answered his call. Here's the last verse.

Show me a church who've learned how to give, and I'll show you a people who know how to live. I'll show you a bride to whom God's all in all. The spirit is reigning, for they've answered his call.

See, growing through giving is a very important, fundamental part of growing as a Christian. Paul actually speaks in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 about the grace of giving. The reason he says that is because it's a gift of the spirit, and it's a fruit of the spirit.

And we need to know the work of the spirit to make that possible. We've got some time for questions, and I'm going to hand back to Gilbert, who, in his capable chairmanship, will be able to answer all the difficult ones and leave me the easy ones. Being the modest man that he is, Ian didn't say too much about this little book, Pennies for Heaven, but it's still available, and it sells at 175.

It's a Kingsway book, and I recommend it very, very much. Now, we had some very down-to-earth teaching based on Scripture. Time is actually up, officially, but we could take just for a few minutes one or two quickies.

Anything that Ian has said, or anyone else would like to... Yes? Fifty-five. Oh, you're doing the giving, then. That's good, that's fine.

That's very good. That's good. That's the bargain of the week.

Anything else? Anybody else? Yeah, I entirely agree. I wish we could even get, overall, our people to tithe. I think that it's the basic.

It's the, as Dennis points out, there's more to it than that. We mustn't be like the Irishman who said, I hear people ought to give a tenth. I'll do better than that.

I'll give a twentieth. And I think that's the mentality of some people. Like the man who said, as he went out, I've got nothing but praise for your church.

And the deacon said, yes, I noticed that when the paint went round. But still, we mustn't be facetious, because it's a very important and very serious subject, and thank you, Dennis. But it does seem from the Old Testament, and after all, we, in a sense, have a greater measure of revelation of God.

Tithing was just the most basic, first fundamental starting off point. Now, is there another question, quickly? Anyone else? Yeah. I hope you heard that.

And in clapping, you're not clapping this lady, you're praising the Lord for His grace in showing her this, and honouring His word. That's tremendous. Thank you very much for sharing that.

Many, many people. I have found, actually, in church life, that some of the people who have the greatest excuse for not giving, humanly speaking, because they're on low incomes, are the most generous. And sadly, at the other end of the scale, you get some big disappointments.

But we're not here to judge one another. But thank you for that testimony. I'm reluctant to prolong a meeting after its scheduled time.

We've only gone over five minutes, or not quite that. So we could take one more question, if you have one. You couldn't hear... I'll just summarise it, I couldn't repeat it completely.

This lady said that her husband has died within the past year, and obviously her income went down sharply. She had, since she became a Christian, been tithing, and she was tempted to give up tithing on the lesser amount that she now had. But she didn't.

And she maintained her tithe of the income she now has, and God has honoured that, and met her every need. That's a summary, isn't it, of what you were saying. Anyone else? Yes? Now, this lady, you may not have all heard, but she is saying what a wonderful provision this covenanting is.

And it's only four years now that you commit yourself, and if you've passed on, or anything like that, it automatically comes to an end. So, here is a legitimate way provided by the government, whereby we can not get the money back ourselves, but money that we've given in income tax can go to a church, or a missionary society, and so on. And I know the church that we belong to, it literally brings in thousands of

pounds in the course of a year, because people are taught to covenant.

It's very interesting in our church, we've only recently joined this church, because, well, we haven't moved recently, but we've joined this church, and when they passed the offertory bag round, very few people put anything in it. And I was mystified about this. I said, you know, it's a bit odd.

And I inquired from the treasurer, he said, well, we've trained people to make banker's orders and covenants and so on, and they've actually given, and, you know, they don't give necessarily again, if they feel especially blessed, perhaps they do, but they've already, before the Lord, assessed their income, made a banker's order that every month the bank will pay into the church X number of pounds, and that's the way they do it. I must say, in a sense, I felt it a bit strange, but I can see the logic of it. We mustn't be sentimental.

I mean, if you give, whether you give by banker's orders or covenant, the thing is the giving, and the spirit in which you give, as Ian says. We're not to judge one another. Other people say, well, I like to put it into something.

Well, that's fine. Some might keep their pound notes under the pillow. Well, that's all right.

Others go to a bank. Well, I think we ought to close. A big word of thanks to Ian, who's been very heavily worked this week, but God has given him a very special anointing.

Pray for him. Pray for all the workers from this day onward, because we're halfway through, and as somebody already said, I think, or I've heard it said, anyway, somewhere today, that we begin to, you know, tire a bit from Wednesday onwards. So please pray that we may finish on the top note, and that God may be glorified right to the very end.

Let's say the words of the grace together. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/19/SID19987.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/stephen-olford/christians-must-perform-the-truth-part-4/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net