

In 1899, more than 500 titles were compiled in a bibliography on *"Tithing and Systematic Proportionate Giving."* Today, if we searched the world's bookstores, libraries and the world wide web, we would find that teaching on giving is the "silent subject" of the Christian community.

Christians sit on untold quantities of wealth never before imagined. Even the average Christian teenager in America has more disposable cash income (\$1500) than 50 percent of the world's population.

Yet, while our wealth has increased, most Christian leaders of the last few generations have ignored teaching the biblical imperatives of giving. This departure is seriously impacting our ability to further the gospel to a hurting, confused and broken world. A materialistic undertow is threatening the spiritual vitality and financial stability of Christians and Christian ministries everywhere.

Over the years, I've been privileged to speak on giving across America and on five continents. During this time, I've heard many personal accounts of faithful giving to the Lord and the blessings that have come as a result. In a desire to sound the trumpet for biblical stewardship, I would like to share some of those stories while articulating six principles of Christian giving that must be reissued in our generation.

Give to God first

After one giving sermon, an older man told me how 50 years earlier, he and his wife made a commitment give God the first portion of their income. As a young married couple, they studied their budget to see how they could cut expenses but found there was no way to do this and still meet the needs of their growing family.

Praying over their decision, they began giving to God first anyway even knowing that by the end of

the third week of every month they would be out of money.



But God provided faithfully, month after month and year after year. He creatively cared for their family through odd jobs, leading others to share clothing or home grown vegetables, a

bonus or overtime pay from work, close-out priced items in stores and the list went on.

By making giving to the Lord's work their first financial priority, they learned more about the love, care and reality of God as their Heavenly Father than through any other spiritual discipline.

You may recall the story in 1 Kings 17 about the widow and her son who were about to eat their last meal and die due to severe famine in the land. She gave to God's servant Elijah first before caring for her own needs, and God worked miraculously so that *"her jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry."*

When we give to God first, regardless of our needs, we see how big God can be in our lives. If we withhold from the Lord, we miss the many blessings and provisions the Lord is longing to shower on us.

Give to God systematically

When leading a Sunday school lesson on giving, I encouraged 8-year-old Alex to set up three jars: one marked "God's money," the second "savings," and the third "spending money." Whenever Alex was given money, he could put the first portion in "God's jar" and the second and third portions in the "savings" and "spending" jars.

A few months later when my wife and I were preparing for a 5-week ministry trip to India, Alex came to me and pushed three crumpled dollar bills into my hand. He said, "Do you remember the time

you taught us about the three jars? Well, I went home and did that! Now your going to India to do God's work, and God wants me to give you some of His money."

Alex acknowledged that everything he had came from God's hand, and he implemented a practical way to regularly lay aside for God what he received. He then gave from those stored resources as the Lord directed him.

Some people have opened an additional bank account to separate their giving from their household expenses. Others track their finances with bookkeeping accounts and regularly make certain they are "caught up" with their giving. Some Christians in India set aside the first of their rice and eggs for their pastor's family.



Christians who don't have a regular way of laying aside the first of what they receive for the Lord often feel pressed and confused when it comes to giving. Many people making comfortable incomes experience no joy in giving because they haven't determined how they will give.

Give to God cheerfully

II Corinthians 9:8 tells us, "God loves a cheerful giver." When Nancy was abandoned by her husband and left to support their three children on the \$25 a week he sent for groceries, she was excited that she could finally give to the Lord's work as her husband never allowed it before.

Out of her grocery money, she gave to God, though the small amount she had could never cover her family's living expenses. But God provided Nancy with an assistant position to a photographer of cookbooks. When the photo sessions were over, the photographer gave Nancy all the food. Her

cupboards were full with the provisions God provided for her family.

R.G. LeTourneau, a Christian businessman, once said, "I shovel out and God shovels in – but God's shovel is always bigger." We should never "give to get," but we can trust that as we give, our God will meet our needs, sometimes in very special ways. Instances arise when it makes no financial sense to give to the Lord. Yet, God wants us to give at times with the realization that we are totally dependent on Him to meet our basic needs and desires.

Give to God eternally

Visiting with an elderly couple who had financially supported a Christian camp for more than 40 years, the wife expressed feelings of failure over not being used by God during her lifetime. She hadn't led anyone to the Lord, and as a result, feared her life was a waste.

She never realized that her family's giving had been used by God to reach thousands of people. The Bible teaches that those who stay with the supplies and send the supplies will share equally with those who are on the front lines of ministry.



I Timothy 6:18,19 says, "Command those who are rich...to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age." From an investor's perspective, giving to the Lord's work is the safest and wisest investment we can ever make. Our giving will pay heavenly dividends throughout all eternity.

And God promises we will share in the reward. "For God is not unfair. He will not forget the love you showed for Him by the help you gave and are still giving your fellow Christians," (Hebrews 6:10).

Give to God expectantly

Our reasons for not giving to the Lord may center around our circumstances, our debts and financial obligations or our lack of income, but under the surface, we don't give because we don't trust God enough as our provider.

In Malachi 3, God says, *"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."* God promises to prove Himself to us as we choose to trust Him in our giving.

In this day and age, we also wrestle with materialism. A sure way to slay the dragons of greed and covetousness is to make giving to God a first priority.

Old and New Testament scriptures both teach that when we withhold our giving from God, we are opening ourselves up to Satan's attack. The first chapter of Haggai says, *"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while [God's Temple] remains a ruin? Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: Give careful thought to your ways...you earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it. You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?...because of my House which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore...I called for a drought...on the labor of your hands."*

God desires to bless and care for us. But as we choose NOT to acknowledge Him in our giving, the money we try to hold onto slips through our fingers and is never enough, regardless of our income.

Give to God proportionately

Several years ago, my wife and I grew frustrated in our Christian giving. We were setting aside the first 10 percent of our income for the Lord's work, but we felt pressed when trying to decide how much to give to Christian causes in addition to our local church. Then, I read in I Corinthians 16:2, *"On the first day of each week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper."*

The next Sunday, we started "counting our blessings" from the past week together. We discovered that in addition to my salary check God had blessed us through friends taking us out to dinner, a birthday gift of cash, payment from a speaking engagement, and a used 5-speed bike given to me by a co-worker. We assigned a dollar value to each item and found that the "blessing items" totaled \$150. Then, we set aside 10 percent of my salary for our church and 10 percent of the week's blessings to support our missionary friends.

Each week, we began writing down how the Lord provided for us and were surprised by all the little (and sometimes big) things occurring that normally we would never have noticed. And each week, we gave 10 percent of my salary to our local church and 10 percent of the "blessings" to Christian causes.

When working on our taxes, we found we made only \$15,000 – not a lot by most American standards – but we had given \$1500 to our church and another \$2500 to Christian causes. I could hardly believe we gave \$4000 to the Lord's work on a salary of \$15,000!

Deuteronomy 16:10,16,17 says, *"...giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the Lord your God has given you...no man should appear before the Lord empty-handed."*

Each one of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you."

Some people teach that we should "give to get." Others teach that we should "sacrifice and go without so we can give more to the Lord's work." The best way to give to the Lord, however, is to see clearly week by week what He's given us and then set aside the first portion to give back to His eternal purpose as He directs.

In Conclusion

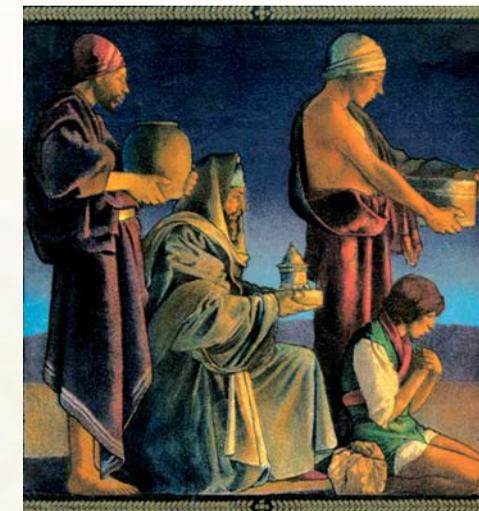
If you've ever owned a vest, you know how important it is to get the first button fastened correctly. When the first button is in the wrong place, every other will be out of order – and you'll look foolish. The same is true with your finances. If you don't fasten your giving button first, all your other money buttons (saving, spending, investing) will be out of order, and you'll be confused and look foolish before God.

If you haven't already done so, make a spiritual decision today to set aside 10 percent or more of your income, blessings, and assets to God's work. Set up a practical way to honor your commitment (a separate bookkeeping or checking account, or a special container). Then, begin giving faithfully, generously and cheerfully to the Lord's work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Brian Kluth is a national and international speaker and author on Biblical generosity. He is also a senior pastor and the founder of **MAXIMUM Generosity**, a public ministry dedicated to advancing Biblical generosity through inspirational preaching, leadership training seminars, writing, resources and the media. Brian's materials have been distributed to more than 350,000 Christian leaders in more than 100 countries. For additional generosity materials visit: www.MAXIMUMgenerosity.org

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Understanding the Grace of Giving



*Just as you excel in everything...
see that you also excel in this
grace of giving.*

2 Cor 8:7

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