

Devotional



Day Two

HOW MUCH SHOULD I GIVE?

“And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability” - II Corinthians 8:1-3

“How much should I give?” That is the right questions, isn’t it?

I encourage you, rather to ask, “How much does God want me to give?” There may seem to be very little difference between these two viewpoints, but the divergence is immense. “How much should I give?” is a self-centered question. It focuses on bank accounts, bills, obligations and regulations. “How much does God want me to give?” places the focus on Him. He is the center.

The immediate concern is not on the financial bottom line, but rather on faith, needs, opportunities, joy, gratitude and the Holy Spirit. The Macedonians, even though they could have qualified for a hand-out, begged for “the privilege of sharing with others.” God’s mercy and grace, not rules and obligations, were at the center of their stewardship.

Dr. Hugh McKean, a missionary who served in Chiang Mai, Thailand, told of an impoverished church in an isolated area of Thailand. The 400 members, each painfully poor, were diligent to give at least ten percent, usually more, of their meager income to God’s kingdom work. Though their weekly wages averaged less than 20 cents, they had done more for Christ than any other church in Thailand. They paid their own preacher, supported two missionary families in an isolated community, and were intensely interested in all forms of Christian work, especially work for unfortunates of all kinds. Their love for Christ overflowed with joy to make Him known. This “church of the overflowing hearts,” was a church of lepers. Every person had leprosy. Do you suppose their disease helped them to escape the grip of materialism and to center their lives and their stewardship on God?

One pastor in my denomination has the habit of “attempting something so great for God that it is doomed to failure if He is not in it.” We need this perspective in our stewardship, as well. An outlook that limits itself to “what-I-can-do” creates spiritual nearsightedness.

What keeps us from giving substantially from our wealth, let alone from our poverty, as the Macedonians did? We have a materialistic mindset rather than a Macedonian mindset. We often fear that we will not have enough money or provision...that we will run out. Should we not learn from this text that you cannot out-give God? The fact is that we have less because we have given less. We may receive little, Paul says,

because we have given little. (II Corinthians 9:6)

There is no fixed formula on how much we ought to give. The tithe may be a very good place to begin, but it cannot be an inflexible standard by which we measure our giving. Christians in an affluent environment may quickly come to view the tithe as a minimum. If this text in II Corinthians teaches us anything, it is that we must get beyond the confines of the tithe. God teaches us this in other places as well. When the prostitute anointed Jesus' feet with costly oil and the Pharisees protested, He commended her faith and declared her sins forgiven. (Luke 7:36-50)

How much does God want you to give? Let me suggest that He wants you to give more than you think. This is because giving has so much more to do with our faith in God and so much less to do with simply existing. God wants you to give more than you think, because He wants to stretch your faith far more than you can imagine.

I encountered such faith in an elderly couple I met several years ago in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I was asked to visit some very important donors to the seminary where I was working. Knowing something of their generosity, I expected to find a large palatial house with a manicured lawn and luxury cars in the garage. I was so astonished by the small white frame house that I rechecked the address to make sure it was correct. However, the loving welcome I received erased my doubts.

As they shared something of their spiritual pilgrimage, the wife told how she had become a believer many years earlier and had started to regularly increase her giving. At first her husband thought she had lost her mind, but soon he began to covet her joy. Her giving brought the husband she loved to faith, and a spirit of generosity had become part of the foundation of their marriage. Throughout a lifetime of giving, God has stretched and enriched their faith over and over. Money that could easily have been spent on luxuries was invested and reinvested in kingdom work.

I left that modest frame home smiling - smiling and praying quietly that God would work that same spirit of selfless joy into my life and my home.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, please help me to look to You and not simply to my bank account as I consider how much my faith promise ought to be. Free my mind from math-centered stewardship. Let Your Spirit speak to my spirit. Please use my giving as a way to stretch my faith. May my giving overflow from the joy of my salvation. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

In what way can your faith promise commitment stretch your faith?
How does your stewardship perspective change when you move the focus from "How much should I give" to "How much does God want me to give?"
After prayer and reflection, write down a preliminary faith promise.

"Men who expect a good return at harvest are not wont to pinch and spare at sowing their seed" - Matthew Henry