

Senior Pastor

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Discipleship & Stewardship



Some topics are more popular in churches than others. I would say that church finances, along with our use of personal finances, are near the bottom of the popularity list. At Friedens, I've heard multiple people say they find it refreshing that we don't talk much about money. On one hand I am happy to hear this; I'm glad that our church's finances have historically been quite strong and we usually don't have a driving need to call for increased giving. Yet I have to wonder if we're doing a disservice to God and His people by not talking about money. My reason for saying this is because our use of personal finances is closely linked with our level of commitment to God. To say this another way, stewardship and discipleship go hand-in-hand.

Jesus certainly had no problem talking about money. Roughly 1/3 of His parables were about money, and He talked more about money than heaven and hell combined, and twice as much than He talked about prayer. Jesus often connected stewardship and discipleship. For instance, Jesus was clear that where a person's treasure is, there their heart will be also (Matthew 6:21). We cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24), because they will pull us in opposite directions. With this in mind, I would like to briefly summarize the biblical basis for financial stewardship. As you're reading this, I invite you to do so from the perspective of discipleship, i.e., how it helps us grow as a follower of Christ.

Steward: A person who is entrusted with the responsibility of watching over something that belongs to someone else.

Our attitude toward money

As Christians, we believe that everything we have has been entrusted to us by God, for everything ultimately belongs to Him (Psalm 24:1). We should focus on being content with what we have, for the love of money and possessions leads to false hope and many problems (1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19; Hebrews 13:5). A Christian's life should be based on being generous toward God and others, not seeking

an abundance of possessions (Luke 12:13-21). While there is nothing inherently wrong with accepting a raise or a higher-paying job, our motives are crucial.

Our use of money

In line with the attitude described above, the Bible outlines multiple good uses of money, including providing for our family (1 Timothy 5:8), investing in friendships (Luke 16:9), and sharing with those in need (2 Corinthians 8:14).

God is also clear that we should give a portion of our finances back to Him. How much should we give? It is common for Christians to say we should "tithe," which is giving 10% of our income to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30; Malachi 3:8-10). In the New Testament, however, the tithe is no longer the standard for giving. Instead, the focus is on giving with a generous and cheerful heart (2 Corinthians 8-9), with no prescribed percentage except that it should be in proportion with one's income (1 Corinthians 16:2). A tithe can still be a helpful reference point by which to evaluate one's financial giving to the Lord's work. However, we should also recognize that the standard for giving has actually increased, because the standard is now based on the generosity of Christ's sacrifice (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Let's come back to the issue of why we give a portion of our income back to God, for this will clearly show the link between stewardship and discipleship. Regularly giving strengthens our faith by reminding us that everything comes from God (1 Chronicles 29:14). In addition, giving encourages an "eternal perspective" by reshaping our priorities on money (Matthew 6:19-24). Giving also supports people in need, supports God's mission through the church, and honors God (Proverbs 3:9-10; 19:17; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Hebrews 13:16). Finally, "generosity confirms that our hope is in God and not in ourselves or our money" (John Piper in *Desiring God*).

Choosing
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In summary, the Bible has a lot to say about our use of money. Financial stewardship really is deeply connected to discipleship. A willingness to surrender our finances to God is a sign of our faith in Him, and being content in Him shows that He is a far greater treasure than anything we can ever have on earth.