Practice #9: Giving My Resources

Key Idea: I give my resources to fulfill God’s purposes.

Key Scripture: “Since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” —2 Corinthians 8:7

Introduction

For children, there is a big difference between “have to” and “get to.” “You have to go to the doctor for a shot.” “You have to wait here and be quiet until I’m done.” “You get to go out for ice cream.” “You get to pick out a toy at the store because you were so patient.” Early on, we learn to draw a line to divide activities we perceive to be fun or boring, good or bad, positive or negative.

As adults, we still experience plenty of “have to’s” and “get to’s” in life. But some of these area can move from one extreme to the other, depending on the person and their circumstances. Giving certainly fits such a description—particularly giving to the church. One person finds great joy in giving regularly to support the gospel ministry, while another views it as a heavy burden. But what makes the difference in the two perspectives? What draws the line between joy and drudgery or delineates the boundary between generosity and greed?

Key Question: How do I best use my resources to serve God and others?

Historians tell us when soldiers in the Middle Ages came to faith in Christ and were baptized, the event often came with a unique twist. The warrior would keep his right arm up out of the water. The symbolic point intended was that the arm used for wielding his sword and killing would not be committed and surrendered to the Lord, as was the rest of his body. This decision was certainly an odd attempt to show that the left hand didn’t know what the right hand was doing.

Today it seems many Christians hold their right arms out of the water as well—but with their wallet or purse in hand, as if to say, “Lord, you can have everything…except my money!” In his first letter to Timothy, Paul warns: (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

Of the thirty-eight parables of Jesus in the Bible, sixteen of them deal with how to handle possessions; all told 288 verses in the Gospels-one out of every ten-refer to money. Over two thousand Bible verses talk about our personal resources, compared with approximately five hundred on prayer and fewer than five hundred on faith. We can’t conclude from these statistics that Jesus’ heart was focused on money, but rather that he knew ours would be. His teaching continually directs us toward using all we have—including our money and our possessions—to love him and love others.

Key Idea: I give my resources to fulfill God’s purposes. God’s great grace should move us to feel, not as though we are required to give, but as though we are privileged to give. The apostle Paul writes: (2 Corinthians 9:7).
As devoted followers of Christ, our daily prayer becomes, *Lord, how do you want me to use the resources you have entrusted to me?* This includes our wallets and purses—the cash, checkbooks, credit cards, saving accounts, and all other resources.

This practice is directly tied to the belief of stewardship: I believe everything I am and everything I own belong to God. Therein lies our dividing line. Do we perceive our money, our resources, to be God’s or ours?

When Jesus redeems our souls, he can also redeem our financial management, debt, savings, investing, and giving. Our checkbooks, credit cards, savings accounts, stocks, bonds, and 401(k)s should all come under his authority and leadership.

After many years of living, preaching, and working with people, I can safely say that what keeps many Christians from giving isn’t really their lack of desire, but rather an abundance of personal debt. All too often, debt comes not so much from medical bills from unforeseen illnesses or unavoidable tragedies as intentional choices to accumulate stuff, which then places an almost unbearable burden for many years and prevents true freedom and blessing in giving to God and his kingdom.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches *(Matthew 6:24).* Sadly, while many Christians today would say they love God and desire to serve him, their devotion must go to “serving” the payments demanded each month. Jesus’ words are as accurate today as the day he first said them.

As we have stated with other key ideas, we give our resources with an eternal reason at the forefront—to fulfill God’s purposes. Money will never save anyone’s soul, but funds are needed to support ministries that reach people all over the world with the gospel of Christ. *If we believe the only thing that will matter in heaven will be what we have done for Christ here on earth, then the vast majority of the money to go through our hands will not count for much—except what has been given to build Christ’s kingdom.*

**Key Application: What difference does this make in the way I live?**

- We intentionally give a percentage of our financial resources to fuel the purposes of God and his kingdom.
- We intentionally make available the material resources God has entrusted to us (home, car, clothes, tools, food) to fulfill God’s purposes in the lives of others.

Here is a valuable exercise. Take out your checkbook register and last month’s credit card bill. Walk through the past thirty days and categorize your expenses. While potentially painful, I can promise it will benefit you in the days ahead. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What patterns or tendencies do I see?
2. What priorities are evident in my spending?
3. Where am I pleased with regard to my money management?
4. Where am I disappointed with my findings?
5. What changes should I consider making?
As you lay your finances before the Lord, ask, “Am I using the resources you’ve given me to accomplish your purposes?” If the answer is yes, thank God for his wisdom and provision for you, and continue to grow in giving. If the answer is no, then self-condemnation and regret are not the proper responses. The very good news is that God, who is faithful and just, will forgive you, and he is ready to help you direct your energy to the transformation of how you use your money.

So where do we start?

We go back to the heart. There’s a decision to make. Whom will we serve? Ponder again these words of Jesus: (Matthew 6:24).

One man stated it well in his financial testimony: “I used to think I couldn’t afford to give to God, but once I started, God blessed me so much I could no longer afford not to!”

If you don’t already know this key principle, now is the perfect time to receive this truth: God has his own economy. He doesn’t have to rely on the current condition of any nation to bless his people, and he isn’t limited by anyone’s actions. He can produce what he needs to provide, exactly when he desires to bring it forth. The people who have read the Scriptures on giving and decided to take God at his word also testify to the miracles he has shown when they put their trust in him and placed all their resources into the center of his economy. Remember, we are in the world, but not of it! Whether it takes us a few months or a few years of faithful obedience to get our financial house in order, God has the unique ability to multiply what his people offer him and bless what he is given access to.