Believe
Chapter 19: Giving My Resources

**Key Verse:**
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

We humans are selfish by nature. Generosity is not something that comes naturally but is the result of God's grace in our lives. This is why Paul refers to the Corinthian offering as this act of grace (v. 6).

*Charis* is used both here and in the next verse of a spiritual endowment or gift of the Spirit. The Corinthians took great pride in their spiritual endowments. And well they should, since they do not lack a single one of them (1 Corinthians 1:7). Not only this but they excel in them—or at least in faith, . . . speech, . . . knowledge, . . . earnestness and love (2 Corinthians 8:7). Paul consequently pushes them to excel in giving as well (see that you also excel in this grace). Giving is identified as a gift of the Spirit in Romans 12:8, where Paul exhorts the Roman believers that if one's gift is contributing to the needs of others, then that person should give generously (compare 2 Corinthians 8:2).

All things considered, the list of endowments here is a modest one. The first three are gifts of the Spirit. Faith is grouped with gifts of healing and miraculous powers in 1 Corinthians 12:9-10. So Paul is probably thinking not of intellectual assent to a set of propositions but of a belief that God can and will act in a particular situation. This kind of faith, Paul says, is able to "move mountains" (1 Corinthians 13:2). Speech and knowledge are too areas of gifting that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:5). Speech may be a catchall term for such oral gifts as prophecy, teaching and tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10, 28). Similarly, knowledge may refer to the gifts of discernment, word of wisdom, word of knowledge and interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:8, 10).

Also among the things that the Corinthians excel at are earnestness and love. The Greek word *spoudh* denotes the earnest engagement or zealous pursuit of something. Paul has already made reference to the Corinthians' earnestness in trying to clear themselves of any and all blame regarding his public humiliation during his last visit (2 Corinthians 7:11-12). Love must accompany the exercise of the other
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four, otherwise nothing of lasting importance can come of them (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).¹

Questions:

♥ Read 2 Corinthians 8:7-8. How do love and giving go together?

♥ Compare Romans 12:8 and 2 Corinthians 8:2. How should we give?

The key idea for this week is “I give my resources to fulfill God’s purposes.” One way to give my resources is to tithe. Let’s take a look at what the United Methodist Church says about tithing.

What does the United Methodist Church say about tithing?²

The Church says that tithing is "the minimum goal of giving....", but does not specify net or gross. Some people tithe out of their gross income. Many tithe from their adjusted gross income and many tithe out of the after tax income. The important thing is to begin to tithe. God can always work on the details later.

In addition, each annual (regional) conference, as part of its responsibilities in the area of stewardship, is to "educate the local church that tithing is the minimum goal of giving in The United Methodist Church."

The Church also expects pastors to "teach and model generous Christian giving with a focus on tithing as God's standard of giving."

Since the tithe was figured in so many different ways in the Hebrew Bible, Rev. Clif Christopher and Rev. Herb Mather took the stance in their book Holy Smoke! Whatever Happened to Tithing? that the tithe is a benchmark. Just as people and institutions need all sorts of benchmarks to measure growth, the tithe can be one (of

many) benchmarks of spiritual growth. If a person accepts that possibility, then they recommend starting with a tithe on the net and then moving beyond to setting a benchmark of tithing on the gross.

**Questions:**

♥ In what ways can the tithe be considered a benchmark of spiritual growth?

♥ What are your feelings on whether tithing is done on net pay or gross pay?

**Tithing: Law of God or Gift of God? (Part I)**

Recently, tithing has become a topic of great discussion within the church community and even outside the immediate church community. Some congregations set the expectation of giving at the traditional tithing mark (ten percent of an individual's income); while other congregations rarely, if ever, deal with this predominantly Old Testament concept. In reality, giving in United Methodist congregations, as well as other mainline Protestant congregations, is far less than ten percent of people's income. According to studies by Empty Tomb, Inc., average giving by church members is less than 2.5 percent of members' annual income. A November 23, 2007, Wall Street Journal article titled "The Backlash Against Tithing" notes congregants' reluctance to tithe.

As Christians, we are called to give to God "what is right, not what is left," as the popular quote from a church marquee states. God calls us to offer our "first fruits," not the "leftovers." First fruits giving requires the theological premise that our possessions and assets ultimately belong to God. All that we have in life is a gift from God! Faith-filled, first fruits giving is our opportunity to return to God a small portion of God's abundant blessing in our lives. Moreover, these blessings are not limited to financial assets or possessions. Most of us can examine our own lives and find numerous blessings, perhaps even some astounding miracles.

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Tithing becomes a benchmark for the modern-day Christian. Since few regular worship attenders have achieved the giving mark of tithing, how might pastors and church leaders encourage congregants to strive to tithe? If pastors and church leaders promote proportionate giving, worshipers will be called to examine their current giving levels and will be challenged to move closer to the tithe.

Why is tithing a benchmark rather than a goal? In his sermon, The Use of Money," John Wesley preached about "earning all you can, saving all you can, and giving all you can." For Wesley, the tithe was not the ultimate goal of the Christian; it was the standard, the normative mark, the common denominator. Jesus' teaching and example urge us to examine our choices with all our possessions and assets, not just ten percent of them. Frankly, Jesus asked his disciples for one hundred percent commitment. In Holy Smoke: Whatever Happened to Tithing, authors J. Clif Christopher and Herb Mather write: "God provided the tithe as a benchmark, to help us put God first in our lives . . . to help us put all else in proper perspective."

Questions:

♥ Why are Christians in today’s society reluctant to tithe?

♥ Based on the article above, what was John Wesley’s belief about the tithe?

Tithing: Law of God or Gift of God? (Part II)4

In postmodern culture, financial giving is usually not the first monetary decision people make; rather, it is one of the last decisions. We might rationalize these priorities by considering our primary financial decisions to be those of basic needs, similar to Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs. We make choices about housing, food, relationships, transportation, employment, and recreation -- to name a few -- before we make choices about monetary gifts. Our lifestyle and all of its financial requirements take precedence over our obligation to share financial resources. However, Maslow began with primitive needs. For many of us, these primitive needs

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for things such as food and shelter have been replaced with a super-sized, extravagant version. Thus, we minimize any substantial possibility to give. Further, when we do share, we often do so with a sense of obligation, guilt, or shame.

The decision of defining how much is enough for our lifestyle is a difficult one. Few of us living in developed countries live with anything primitive, yet millions of people each day live without even the most basic resources. As Christians, we are called constantly to balance between our desired wants and our perceived needs.

In contrast to the postmodern model of giving, God offers us a different perspective on giving. It is not one of last resort and compounded with guilt, but one filled with abundance, freedom, and joy. It is the ancient model of tithing. Tithing can help us take a step toward achieving a God-honoring balance with our financial resources. One of the best tithing stories is that of Jacob (Genesis 28:10-22.)

The ways in which we choose to earn, give, save, and spend money are really spiritual decisions. When our first decision is one of giving, we place a greater level of trust in God. We begin by saying, "Thank you God! All that we have received is a blessing from you.” We acknowledge that we worship God and not money! Giving frees us from the bondage that money can have over our lives. Tithing encourages us to focus on God as the source of our strength, rather than our own achievements or financial assets. Tithing leads to spiritual growth.

Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, taught that one who earned and saved money, but failed to give money was not living as a Christian. Tithing introduces spiritual discipline to our financial choices. The bipolar contrast between the pull and push of the hyperconsumer culture versus the biblical principle of tithing is so clear. Tithing dissuades us from absorption into the competitive posture of hyperconsumer-driven communities. Tithing challenges the common assumptions of economics and debt. It offers possibilities of economic justice, moderate consumption, and self-control.

Finally, tithing provides the financial assets for congregations to launch and expand a wide continuum of ministries. Together, we are able to accomplish far more than most of us can achieve individually. We might consider giving money through the church, rather than to the church. When people give to the church, they are giving to sustain the institution. However, when people give through the church, they are empowering ministry. The spiritual discipline of tithing is one of giving through the church. Tithing congregations are beacons of spiritual vitality and health. They are
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communities grounded in spiritual relationships, beginning with a relationship to God as the primary source of strength, hope, and life.

Questions:

♥ What are some reasons that “financial giving is usually not the first monetary decision people make”?

♥ How does tithing “challenge the common assumptions of economics and debt”?

♥ How would you describe the differences between “giving to the church” or “giving through the church”? 
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It was recently announced that Kayla Mueller, an aid worker captured in northern Syria in 2013, had been killed in a building hit during a Jordanian airstrike on Raqqa, the militants' de facto capital in Syria. But did you know that Kayla was a United Methodist who was walking the path she believed that God had set before her. Kayla was an example of offering herself (and her resources) to God.

Slain hostage was following call to offer aid

A UMNS Feature
By Kathy L. Gilbert

Kayla Mueller died 6,000 miles from her Arizona home, taken hostage and then killed as she followed her call to offer humanitarian aid in Syria.

Friends and family say the 26-year-old was walking the path she believed God set for her.

A close friend and campus minister at the college Mueller attended said the young woman was not the “high-energy, do-gooder saint” she has been portrayed as in some media reports.

“She was so laid back, so very humble. She saw the suffering before her and tried to respond,” said the Rev. Kathleen Day, who was Mueller’s campus minister at Northern Arizona University.

Mueller was an active member of the United Christian Ministry, an ecumenical campus ministry that includes The United Methodist Church, at Northern Arizona University. A candlelight vigil was planned at the ministry center on Feb. 14.

The Mueller family confirmed their daughter’s death Feb. 10. Kayla was captured in August 2013 by the Islamic State group, but the family had kept it a secret because ISIS threaten to kill their daughter if it was made public she was a hostage.

Keeping Kayla’s message alive

Day is part of a close knit community who knew of Mueller’s kidnapping in 2013 and has been in close touch with the family throughout the ordeal.

5 http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/40-days-of-lent-find-your-own-spiritual-path
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“The family is focusing on hope and on keeping Kayla’s message alive,” Day said in an interview with United Methodist News Service. “Their faith is strong. They are remarkable people, which is no surprise given their remarkable daughter.”

After her death, the Mueller family made public a letter Kayla wrote to them while she was in captivity.

“By God and by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in freefall. I have been shown in darkness light and have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful. I have come to see that there is good in every situation, sometimes we just have to look for it,” she wrote.

Day described the way Kayla lived her life as “Christ-like.”

“She poured out her life and she really didn’t worry about whether she had enough. She worried about those who did not have enough. Her call was to use her gifts, her knowledge and privilege to fill someone else’s cup ... and she called us to do the same.”

Day said when she first heard the rumors that Mueller had been kidnapped she immediately called Mueller’s parents to offer prayers and support.

“Her parents have not felt the absence of God, they have felt the presence of God through all this.”

Marsha Mueller, Kayla’s mother, told Day she used to sing, “He Who Began a Work in You,” to her daughter when she was a child.

Kayla regularly wrote a blog. In 2011, she wrote: “I find God in suffering. I’ve known for some time what my life’s work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering.”

The Muellers have started a foundation, Kayla’s Hands (http://kaylashands.org/), to continue her work.

United Methodist bishop offers prayers

Among those offering support is United Methodist Bishop Robert Hoshibata, episcopal leader of the Desert Southwest Conference.

“Horror struck close to home,” he said when he heard of her death.

“Loving God, we turn to you in prayer in this time of sadness and shock,” Hoshibata, wrote on a Facebook post. “We recoil at the cruelty that has resulted in
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the tragic loss of the life of Kayla Mueller. We pray for Kayla’s family and all who cherish her.”

The bishop said he first learned of Kayla’s captivity from Day.

“Since then my fervent prayers have been for Kayla and her family and for those who were then diligently working for her safe return,” he said.

Day said Kayla had always participated in projects to help others since grade school and throughout high school. She was involved in high-profile efforts like helping Darfur and she was also a volunteer in a women’s prison.

“She took steps and they weren’t giant steps, she just kept walking.”

The Islamic State group first claimed Mueller died in a Jordanian airstrike launched as retaliation for the militant’s killing of one of its pilots. Jordan denied the claim and U.S. officials have said they do not know how or when she died but are certain it was not in the airstrike.

President Barack Obama has vowed to bring those responsible to justice.

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Questions:

♥ God does not call everyone to do what Kayla did, but God does call us to love those we encounter. How can you better reflect God’s love towards others in terms of giving of your resources?

♥ What are some practical things we can learn about giving of our resources from Kayla’s life?
Giving

The true meaning of giving – charity – is solidarity. We are in solidarity with the poor when we recognize how we are all interrelated. What we have is related to what the poor do not have. We must give of who we are and all we have, not of what we have left over. We are in solidarity with the poor when we risk our material and social privileges so that poverty, living on one dollar a day, can be eradicated. Solidarity – giving – is living simply: opposing consumerism, not turning wants into needs, living with less comfort so that the poor can simply live.

Questions:

♥ Read Matthew 6:1-4. How does Jesus instruct us to give to others?

♥ If you look at Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 6, specifically, looking at giving to the needy (Matthew 6:4), praying (Matthew 6:8), and fasting (Matthew 6:18), what are some of the comment elements?

♥ Question to ponder: With your next good deed, ask yourself “Would I still do this if no one would ever know?”