



Giving

Session 5 – 18th February 2018

Bible Readings

2 Chronicles 31:5-12, Matthew 23:23-28

Sermon Notes

If we were to ask ourselves what is our biggest priority in life – many of us would say, “God – I’m all out for God,” but would our bank statement confirm what our mouth says?

Our God is a generous God and he wants us to be generous like him. The Holy Habit he gave us for this is “tithing” - the practice of giving 10% of our income back to God.

What does the bible have to say about tithing? Well quite a lot, and we understand, for example, in 2 Chronicles 31:5-12 and Malachi 3:10 that it’s all about bringing back to God what is already his.

We discover that a tradition of tithing produces generous hearts. God’s plan for the universe is not based on our leftovers. God’s people instead are called to practice giving our “first fruits.” Proverbs 3: 9-10. “Honour God with the first fruits of your crops. Then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine.” The idea here is that when I get paid, the very first portion is set aside to give to God.

In Jesus' time when the farmers planted a crop of new fruit trees, as the first tree began to offer fruit, they would tie a reed around it, declaring "I'm going to offer everything from this tree to God".

And of course, in Jesus, we see the ultimate expression of God's generosity. "For God so loved the world he gave his only son." Jesus is God's first born. His gift to us. His first fruits.

God is saying to us 90% of your income with my blessing is worth more to you than 100% of your income without my blessing. But don't mistake this for a prosperity gospel. It's not! We don't give to get.

Generosity is just the way the kingdom works. When you take a concrete step into generosity, you are swimming with the tide of God, of the Holy Spirit, of the divine. When Jesus rose from the dead, it created this community of irrational joy, and irrepressible generosity.

Tithing will test our faith, and tithing will build our faith, and the reality is, that the best way to be able to afford to tithe, is to begin to tithe. If you wait to tithe - and there will always be a good reason to wait - you probably never will tithe.

God says: **"test me in this"**. Elsewhere in the bible we are told not to test God, but in this case God appears to be saying, "I am so keen that you become generous that you can test me in this - give it a go!

So why not try it for a while - and if you don't feel the joy of tithing into God's amazing adventure for Ely - and the blessing of being part of God's generous vision for you - then go back to normal!

Go away and think about it, pray about it. If you start tithing, I am certain that 90 days from now, many of you will be saying: "Thank you, I didn't know what it was to really trust God with my money. I didn't

know the joy that would come from putting God first in this concrete area of my life.”

One of the joys of giving is that we are joining all our brothers and sisters in the church community, in investing in what God is doing through the church. There is a corporate joy in that.

Key Quotes

“It is no accident that the word “miserable” comes from the word “miser”. To be a miser is to live in misery. You are robbing yourself of joy!” John Ortberg.

‘Everything in Heaven and Earth is yours’, declares David to God.

Discussion Questions

Do you feel God is a generous God? Why? If we are made in his image should we reflect that generosity? In what ways?

What do I understand by the term ‘first fruits?’ Did God give his first fruits for us in Jesus? In what way? What are my ‘first fruits’? Am I prepared to give them to God?

‘A tradition of tithing produces generous hearts.’ Does this ring true? In what ways does giving change us?

Why do you think it is that surveys have shown that ‘people with more money give less as a percentage of their income than poor people.’?

If we give our ‘first fruits’ to God, Malachi says ‘then our barns will be overflowing!’ Should we take this literally? Or is God speaking about something else – about our spirit, our soul? How does this compare with a prosperity gospel?

If we put our living expenses first and only give what remains to God, what does this reveal about our view of money, ourselves, of God?

‘Everything in Heaven and Earth is yours’, declares David to God. How do we feel about this statement? How does it inform our view of giving?

Do you feel well informed about the way our church, St Mary’s and Christchurch, spends the money the congregations bring? Do you feel it is your responsibility to fund the work or is it someone else’s job? If so whose?

Ignatian Prayer

Lord, teach me to be generous, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to look for any reward, save that of knowing that I do your holy will. Amen.

Living the Life

Live your life extra-generously during Lent. Look for ways to be generous in every dimension of your life. See how it makes you feel.

Personal Reflection

Money tells us so much about ourselves. What does your spending pattern tell you about the state of your heart?

Blog, Vlog and Social Media

Please visit the Holy Habits pages on the St Mary’s website.

www.stmarysely.org and join the conversation on our [Facebook Group “Ely Team Holy Habits”](https://www.facebook.com/groups/267574210421687) www.facebook.com/groups/267574210421687