Sermon: Giving/Tithing
Sunday February 14, 2021

We're living in a disruptive time. Our rhythms are off, mental health issues are up and we just don't know what the future holds.

How do we live in these disruptive times with a fresh focus on God's presence?

That's what our sermon series has been about. Today, we're wrapping up our series *Realign Your Life*. We've been looking at ancient Christian practices that connect us with the flow of God's grace.

We've looked at Prayer, Fasting, Scripture, Service and Hospitality. **How many of you have been blessed by these messages? If you've been encouraged by this series, click the "Yes!" button in the chat.**

At the end of this service, you're going to have an opportunity to make a Lent Commitment. But right now, we're going to conclude this series with a message on Giving. How many people are terrified?

Now I know what you're thinking.

Pastor, this is church. Preach about faith or love. But don't talk about money.

What does money have to do with God? Prayer, scripture and all those other practices – I get. But why preach about giving?

It's like that old Sesame Street song, remember? *One of these things is not like the others, one of these things just doesn't belong…*

So why are we talking about giving in a series about biblical practices?

Let me answer that with a question?

How much money is enough? How much money is enough for you to be happy, to not worry, to be more generous?

In the 1920s and 30s, John Rockefeller was the richest person in the world. He founded the Standard Oil Company and owned 90% of all the oil and gas industries. His net worth was over 1% of the entire U.S. economy!

One day, he was asked, how much money is enough? Do you know what his response was?

Just a little more.

How many of you feel like you'll have enough when you have just a little more?

It turns out that ***enough* isn't about an amount. Enough is about your attitude**. You could drive fancy cars and own a private island but still not have enough.

Author Steven Covey called this attitude the Scarcity Mindset. It's when you believe that there's only so much to go around so you keep what you have. That's why people don't give. Because if they give, they won't have enough for themselves.

Many of us live with this Scarcity Mindset. We believe we don't have enough. We believe we need more. That's how the Scarcity Mindset works. But it also affects how you live.

- It makes you anxious and afraid.
- It leaves you unhappy and unfulfilled.
- It keeps you from taking risks and doing big things for God.

So why are we preaching on giving?

Because God doesn't call you to live a life of scarcity. He calls you to be a generous giver. As Beth Nolson said last week, "With God, there is always enough. There's enough time, enough food and enough space for everyone."

I would also add, there's enough resource to share. God isn't a God of scarcity; he's a God of abundance! With God, there is always enough.

A great example is the story of Elijah and the widow, found in 2 Kings 17. Israel had rejected God and turned to idols. As punishment, God withheld rain for three and a half years. This meant a severe famine and drought.

During this time, the prophet Elijah was on the run from King Ahab. How would he survive when there was no water or food? God's plan? Go to a small town called Zarephath. There, you'll find a widow and she'll give you food.

Verse 10 says: So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" (v. 10)

Remember, these people are in a drought. It hasn't rained. To ask not only a stranger for water but one of the poorest people in that society was no small request. But she does it.

This says a lot about her heart doesn't it? But then Elijah asks her for one more thing. Bring me some bread. Then the widow says,

As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only ***a handful of flour*** in a jar and ***a little olive oil*** in a jug. [Notice the language of scarcity.] I am gathering ***a few sticks*** to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die." (v. 12)

Talk about some depressing dinner companions.

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. **14** For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: '***The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry…***'" (vv. 13-14)

Now, what would you do if that were that widow. Your family's starving. You barely have enough for a meal. A man of God says, Don't worry, you'll be okay. God will take care of you. Just go on and make dinner for us.

But here's the catch. Whose dinner are you supposed to make first? Elijah's. So what does she do?

She went away and did as Elijah had told her. (v. 15)

As she pours out her last flour, she kneads it into a cake. But instead of keeping it for herself, she gives it to Elijah. This means she has nothing. She's given it away.

But then a funny thing happens. She goes back to her kitchen expecting to see an empty flour jar. But instead, her jar is full!

Her story which begins with scarcity ends with abundance. Why? Because she trusted God with what she had. And with God there is always enough. **Type that into the chat. "With God there is always enough."**

That's why the Bible says, it's better to give than to receive. Because when you give, you don't have less, you have more. Why? Because God multiplies it. Your jar will not be used up and your jug will not run dry. You'll always have enough. That's why the life God's calls you to isn't to be kept for yourself; it's to be given away for others.

Paul talks about this shift from Scarcity to Abundance. He says,

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. **7** Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. **8** ***And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work***. (2 Corinthians 9:7-8)

So how do you break the Scarcity mindset and experience God's abundance?

The practice that helps you with that is the tithe.

What is the tithe?

The tithe actually comes from the Hebrew word meaning *one-tenth*. When God blesses us, we bring him one tenth of that as our tithe and we give it towards God's work through the local church.

Now people often confuse tithing with giving. They give let's say, five dollars to the church and call that their tithe. But unless their annual salary is $50, that's not a tithe, that's giving – which is of course still good, but it's not tithing.

Tithing is bringing 10 percent of your income to God through the local church. This has been the biblical benchmark for Christians to move towards and even go beyond.

People often ask, *Is tithing based on your gross income or your net income?* I once heard a pastor respond: That depends. Do you want a gross blessing or a net blessing? I'm not interested in getting into these kinds of debates.

Personally, I tithe on my gross income. But whether you tithe on your gross income or your net income, God knows your heart and honours your desire to be faithful.

Another question people ask is, *Where in the New Testament does it say that Christians are supposed to tithe?*

Tithing is taught in the Old Testament. Some people argue that because this was based on the Old Covenant, we're not required to tithe anymore because we're under the New Covenant.

But is that true? Because tithing actually pre-dates the Old Testament. Abraham tithed his victory spoils to the priest Melchizedeck. Jesus also affirms the tithe in the New Testament and says that he didn't come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

Not only that, but the New Covenant is greater than the Old Covenant. We have greater promises, we have a greater relationship. God made a greater sacrifice – he gave his One and Only Son Jesus. So if everything is greater under the New Covenant, shouldn't our giving be greater as well?

Tithing is the biblical benchmark for Christians in their giving. It breaks the Scarcity Mindset so that you can experience God's abundance.

How does it do that?

First, tithing teaches you to put God first.

When God blesses us financially, what do we do? We usually spend it on ourselves first. We buy groceries, we pay our bills. And then *if* there's any leftover, *maybe* we'll give a little to the church.

But the Bible says,

The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives. (Deuteronomy 14:23, TLB)

That means that when God blesses you financially, instead of spending first on yourself and then giving God your leftovers, you bring your tithe first to God and then with the remaining 90 percent, you save some of it and you spend the rest wisely.

When I first became a Christian, I didn't understand why I needed to tithe. After all, I was a good Christian, I was active in the church and there were things I wanted to save up for. Why does God want my money?

The answer is, he doesn't. He doesn't want your money. He wants your heart. And he knows that money, more than anything else has a way of stealing your heart.

That's why Jesus taught more about money than almost any other topic. He says:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also… No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matthew 6:21, 24)

Tithing isn't about your money. It's about your heart. It's a tangible way of putting God first. It's a way of saying:

- Everything I have comes from you God.
- I'm so thankful for your blessings.
- I trust you to provide for my every need.

Tithing helps you put God first.

Second, tithing builds your faith.

In the book of Malachi, God says:

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. ***Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it***. (Malachi 3:10)

In other parts of the Bible, God clearly says not to put the Lord your God to the test. So why does God make this exception?

It's like God is saying, Give me your tithes and see if I don't take care of you, see if I don't provide for all your needs. Test me, try me and see if I don't bless your socks off. Because I honour those who honour me.

Let me tell you my story.

Before I was a pastor, I was a Chartered Accountant. My world *was* budgets, cash flows and financial statements.

When God called me to be a pastor, I actually did a cost-benefit analysis. That's how big of a nerd your pastor is. And it didn't add up.

I didn't know how I would pay for my tuition. I had just quit my job and had no income. The only thing I knew was that with God, there is always enough. And man, was that so true.

One day I came home and found a letter. It was from my best friend in Calgary. He wrote to tell me how encouraged he was that I was following God's call. And he told me that God had prompted him to sell his guitar… his favourite guitar so that he could give me the money to help pay for my tuition.

With God there is always enough.

Another time I was talking to Pastor Andrew and he told me about a scholarship. I had missed the deadline but I wrote them a letter and asked if I could still be eligible. They wrote back and told me they would pay for a portion of my tuition.

With God there is always enough.

Around this time, my annual CA membership fees became due. I owed them over $1,000. I had never paid this before because my firm had always covered it. But now that I wasn't working, I had to pay this expense out of pocket.

I didn't have the money so I called up the CA institute and asked if they could waive the fee. Not only that but over several conversations, I asked if they could create a special waiver for people like me in ministry. And you know what the crazy part is? They agreed! I've never had to pay in the past 18 years while still maintaining my standing as a Chartered Accountant.

With God there is always enough.

That's just a tiny bit of my story of how God's provision is so abundant. I didn't even mention how God led me to meet my future wife Joanne during this time. Because that's *her* story of how God's provision is so abundant. Happy Valentine's Day, Jo!

Now what I'm not saying, is that when you tithe, God will return to you dollar-for-dollar everything you give. This isn't a prosperity gospel. God doesn't work like that. But when you give, God blesses you abundantly. With God there is always enough.

What's your story of God's care and provision? What's your story of God's abundance? If you don't have a story yet, consider tithing so that you can experience God's provision first-hand.

Tithing builds your faith.

Second, tithing provides for the work of God's church.

Malachi says,

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. (Malachi 3:10)

In the Old Testament, the storehouse was next to the temple. It's where people brought their tithes to support God's work.

Tithing provides for the work of God's church. And if you're part of our church community, your tithe supports the mission God has given us as a local church.

We haven't had in-person worship services for almost a year now, but we've continued to move forward in our mission. I like how Ed Stetzer puts it: ***The moment we are in doesn't pause the mission we are on.***

Do you believe we're on a mission? Are you a part of this mission?

During this pandemic, we've been *more* active in our community. We've supported long term care homes, local organizations, we've helped people escape human trafficking. There have been so many stories of people deeply impacted by our ministries.

In fact, we've been able to hire Bethany as our part time Outreach Director. She's working hard to build partnerships and strategic initiatives so that we can continue to bless our community. We're moving forward in our mission… because of your generous giving.

As you know, our worship services have moved online. Our teams did an incredible early on job putting these services together. But later, we hired a Production Director and Video Producer. They've done an incredible job producing amazing video content and taking our digital experience to the next level!

Through our online services, we've had a global impact. People from Japan, Uganda, Barbados and other places all over the world are hearing the good news of Jesus. We're moving forward in our mission… because of your generous giving.

But are all these people watching our services but not engaged in the church? In the past four months, we've connected 76 people and launched 9 new small groups. Most of these people have never even stepped inside our building!

But they're now in community. They're developing friendships, growing in their faith and engaged in the mission here. We're moving forward in our mission… because of your generous giving.

If you're encouraged by what God is doing here, would you click the "Praise God!" button in the chat!

The moment we are in doesn't pause the mission we are on.

Tithing teaches you to put God first.

Tithing builds your faith.

And tithing provides for the work of God's church.

Tithing is just what Christians do. It breaks our Scarcity Mindset and helps us experience God's abundance. Because with God, there is always enough.

For some of you, maybe giving 10 percent feels like too big of a step to take. Maybe you could start with 2 percent or 5 percent. And over time, increase the amount.

If you're already tithing, way to go! Thank you for your generosity. As you pray about this, could God be calling you to go beyond the 10 percent?

The best way to give here at Cornerstone is to go to our **Give page [cornerstonechurch.ca/give].** Here you'll find all our giving options as well as opportunities to direct your funds.

In addition to our General Fund, you can also give to our Covid Fund, our Benevolence Fund or our Global Impact Funds.

If you're considering being a regular giver, why not take advantage of our Pre-Authorized Debit option. This way you can set-up a recurring donation so you don't have to worry about forgetting.

Cornerstone has always been a generous church! We've been on God's mission as a local church now for over twenty years now and we hope to do this for many more years to come!

This week our Practical Guide Sheet is on how to cultivate Generosity and Contentment. **[Show cornerstonechurch.ca/realignyourlife]** Here you'll find experiments you can do on your own or with your family as well as budgeting tools to help you get a handle on your finances. You'll also find this prayer that I've adapted from Christian author Mark Scandrette – that we're going to pray now responsively to close this message.

I'll pray the part that says, "ONE" and you'll join me in praying the part that says "ALL." Are you ready? Let' do it!

ONE: We know that we are cared for by an abundant Provider.
ALL: Let us choose to be grateful and trusting.
ONE: We know that we have enough and that what we need will always be provided.
ALL: Let us choose to be content and generous.
ONE: We know that our choices matter for ourselves, for others and for future generations.
ALL: Help us to live consciously and creatively, celebrating the signs of your New Creation that is present and coming.
ONE: Creator, who made us to seek the greater good of your kingdom,
ALL: Guide us to spend our time, talents and resources on what matters most.
ONE: Teach us to be free,
ALL: to live without worry, fear or greed in the freedom of your abundance.
ONE: Give us our daily bread, as we share ours with the hungry.
ALL: We give you thanks for the precious gift of life! Amen

Pastor Steve will be explaining the Lent Challenge in just a bit. But right now, we're going to sing a couple songs as we prepare our hearts to come before the King of Kings with our praise and worship.