

Spiritual Discipline Series: Stewardship
Malachi 3:6-12; Luke 21:1-4 NRSV
WRCoB 10.18.20

Today is Stewardship Sunday.

If you have followed the sermon series
On the spiritual disciplines

You will have noticed that stewardship
Is not one of the disciplines.

I wonder why?

To me, the way we manage money is a discipline.

And as people of faith acknowledging that
Everything we are and have comes from God

Then management of our money
Becomes a spiritual discipline.

And that's what we want to talk about today.

Today, I want to challenge us by exploring the biblical basis
On giving to the church.

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We begin by looking at our Old Testament Scripture.

Malachi was one of the last of the OT prophets.

He lived during the postexilic period around 450 B.C.

The Jews returned to Jerusalem
After their exile in Babylon.

Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt the Temple
And the walls of Jerusalem
And life was good and the people were secure.

But as many do when life becomes comfortable
The people became complacent.

They neglected their responsibilities to God
And turned to a life of self-indulgence.

In the verses Sandy read this morning
Malachi reminded the people
That God's faithfulness never changed

Even though they were unfaithful and disobedient.

"Return to me and I will return to you," says God.

"How are we to return," they ask?

Malachi explains, one way is by returning
To giving their tithes and offerings.

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Now, a tithe is the first 10% of a harvest.

They consider this the Lord's portion.

Giving it to God was an act of faith.

Deuteronomy 14:23 So that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

According to the Bible

Tithe is giving to God what is right
Not what is left.

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In Malachi, God mentions tithes AND offerings.

We interchange the words tithes and offerings
As if they mean the same thing.

They don't. Their meanings are different.

As an example, here is how Nigerian Christians
Understand giving to the church.

The first 10% of the actual harvest
Is reserved for the church.
This is their TITHE.

When the harvest is over
The church celebrates a harvest festival
Somewhat like in our Thanksgiving.

The members bring the tithe to Sunday worship.

And in the most joyful manner
They carry their baskets of grain on their heads
Dancing and singing down the aisle
Presenting their tithes to God.

For an affluent American Christian
It is quite a moving experience.

For many of these people are dirt poor
But joyously they give their TITHE.

The church sells what it needs to help finance the church
And the rest is available to those in need.

Then on Sundays, during the rest of the year
Nigerian Christians give their weekly OFFERINGS.

This is how they interpret Malachi's phrase
TITHES and OFFERINGS.

Tithe is the first ten percent of your income
Whether it's harvest or equal portion in cash
And the offering is up and above your tithe.

Nigerians' understanding is that the tithe, the 10%
Is the Biblical MINIMUM requirement.

That's pretty generous isn't it?

But that's how they interpret giving in the Bible.

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It is based on the Malachi's tithes and offerings.

But there are those who know their Bible
That would argue that the NT never mentions tithe.

Yes, God wants us to be generous givers
But God doesn't demand 10%.

They say since we now follow Christ
We are no longer under the law of Moses.

We no longer follow the Old Testament law
We are now New Testament people.

There's nothing in the NT stating we should give that much.

Ok, so let's look at the early church.

Acts 2:44-45 NLT

⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.

Acts 4:32, 34-35 NLT

³² All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. ³⁴ There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them ³⁵ and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.

So what about Jesus?

What did Jesus teach about giving?

Matthew 19:21 NLT

Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Okay, so maybe I have taken this text out of context

This instruction was pointed toward one rich man.

So let us look to our NT Scripture lesson.

Jesus, in our Luke passage

Draws attention to a poor widow

Who drops two small coins

In the plate as it was passed.

Compared to the others, rich people, Jesus calls them

She gave so very little.

So, should her contribution be the standard?

ABSOLUTELY!

Because Jesus went on to say

Luke 21:3-4 NLT

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. ⁴ For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”

After making the comparison

We are better off with the simple 10% tithe

The law of Moses in the OT prescribes

Rather than following the examples of the NT.

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Either way, what is difficult to understand is this;

Why is church giving so poor in the United States?

It averages to about 2.5% of their income.

People gave more during the Great Depression, 3.5%.

We are, by far, the most affluent Christians

The world has ever known

And yet, this is what we give the church.

You would think the opposite wouldn't you?

That American Christians

With the most wealth and prosperity

Would be the most grateful and the most generous.

Not true.

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What would it look like

If every churchgoing Christian gave a 10% tithe?

The numbers would be shocking.

Relevant Magazine calculated there would be

An additional \$165 billion for church use and outreach

\$165 billion!

The global impact would be phenomenal.

Here are just a few things the Church could do

With that kind of money.

- \$25 billion could relieve global hunger, starvation and deaths from preventable diseases in five years.
- \$12 billion could eliminate illiteracy in five years.

- \$15 billion could solve the world’s water and sanitation issues, specifically at places in the world where 1 billion people live on less than \$1 per day.
- \$1 billion could fully fund all overseas mission work.
- \$100 – \$110 billion would still be left over for additional ministry expansion.

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In Ron Sider’s book written back in 2008

“Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don’t Give Away More Money

He begins by saying the book is

“About the pitifully small charitable donations Of the richest Christians in history.”

His conclusion is the same.

Reasonably generous financial giving of ordinary American Christians would generate staggering amounts of money that could literally change the world.

It makes the statement in Malachi that much more cutting.

Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me (Mal. 3:8).

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Here’s the thing . . .

This passage in Malachi is the only place in the entire Bible
That God challenges us to test him on this and see

. . . if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

Giving is more than a responsibility.

It is a privilege.

It is more than an act of obedience
More than a spiritual discipline.

It is an act of faith.

When you give to God
You discover that God gives to you.

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I want to leave you with three principles for faithful giving.

First principle, God challenges us to give more than we do.

Someone once said, *when it comes to giving until it hurts, most people have a very low threshold of pain.*

C. S. Lewis wrote:

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more that we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little.

If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us. I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures excludes them.

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Secondly, giving should be a joyful occasion.

As we have learned and maybe are learning
Or maybe should learn

Is that possessions and wealth do not make us happier.

One of the spiritual disciplines we studied
Was living a simple life.

We discover there is joy is giving.

As Jesus said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

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Thirdly, we give as we have been given.

If we believe in the basic faith statement
That God loved the world so much
That he gave his only son

So that whoever believes in him shall not perish
But have everlasting life.

We realize
We will never be able to give as God has given.

We will never be able to pay back what God gives freely.

We live our lives in humble awareness
Of God's great gift in Jesus Christ.

I close with the Apostle Paul's words on the subject.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 NLT

⁶ Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. ⁷ You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." ⁸ And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.

May it be so.