

Let's Get Practical

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or by going to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But thank you so much for tuning in today, and I'm just thankful that we have the privilege in this free country to get into the God's Word, but most importantly, let God's Word get into us. And I want to start off with this story about a little boy and his dad who went into an old general store that had a little bit of everything in it, and it was run by a sweet older gentleman that everyone called Stretch because he was so tall, and he loved children. So as they grabbed a few items and they were at the checkout, he looks at this little six-year-old boy and says, Son, won't you grab a handful of candy from the jar and you can have it? I'm just glad you came in today.

Well, normally you would think this little guy had never met a stranger. He was not a bashful kid whatsoever. But today, he kind of cowered behind his dad, and even though the store owner kept insisting, It's okay. Go ahead. Get you a handful of candy. It's free. The little boy just wouldn't move or even talk back.

[1 : 15] And his dad just kind of looked at him like, Dude, what are you doing? And finally, the store owner smiled, reached his own hand into the candy jar, and gave the boy a handful of candy.

And finally, he mustered up the strength to say thank you, and then they walked out. Well, when they got outside, his dad looked at him and said, Okay, I got to know, what are you doing? Are you okay? And he said, Yeah, I'm fine. He said, Then why wouldn't you talk back to that man? You're one of the most outgoing kids that I've ever met. And that's when the little boy got this mischievous look on his face.

And he said, You know how tall Mr. Stretch is, right? And his dad said, Well, yeah. And you know how big his hands are, right? And he said, Yeah. And then lifting all his candy up, which took both hands, he said, Well, you didn't raise a dummy, Dad.

I now have two handfuls of candy. You know, I think this story captures well what we've been talking about the last couple of weeks. And of course, that story is just for fun.

[2 : 19] But the truth is that God is the ultimate source of everything. And his hands are much bigger than ours. He wants, in his word, he promises to lavish his blessings down upon us in whatever way he decides to choose.

But first, we have to be willing to step out in faith. We have to give out of hearts of worship. Give out of a heart of faith and complete trust.

And today, we're going to be very practical because these are the questions that a lot of you are asking even after our worship services. And it's my prayer that every one of us have come to this point where we want to honor God and put him number one in every single area of our lives. But I think often, we don't know exactly how to do that in our giving. Maybe we even have very practical questions that need to be answered. So let's do this today.

Let's get practical and talk about the nuts and bolts of giving. If you would, turn with me to the last book of the Old Testament. This is called the book of Malachi. If you come to Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, just go back one book, okay?

[3 : 32] It's about two-thirds the way through. And as you turn into Malachi, let me kind of fill you in on kind of what's happening here in the history of Israel. Here you have the last of the Old Testament prophets, a man named Malachi.

And to be honest with you, we really don't know a lot about this guy other than he served during a time of spiritual blah, a time of spiritual apathy for the nation of Israel.

And after spending 70 years in bondage and slavery in Babylon, the Israelites had finally returned home to the promised land. They rebuilt the temple. They rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. And this gave them some measure of national pride and strength. But spiritually, this nation was a shell of its former self. They were back in God's chosen land. But man, their hearts seemed so far from the Lord. Onto the scene comes this man sent by God. His name literally means messenger.

[4 : 31] And that's exactly what he was there to do. He wasn't there to win a popularity contest. He wasn't there just to be a motivational speaker. He wasn't there to make everybody feel warm and toasty.

He came to share a message straight from the Lord. And in the first couple chapters here, Malachi confronts the sins of the people. The priests who are supposed to be leading this nation spiritually were insulting God by offering him animals that were blind, crippled, and diseased when they were supposed to be sacrificing their best just right off the top.

Basically, they were giving God the leftovers. Many of the men were leaving their wives and families to run after foreign women who worshipped false gods. And on top of all this, they were exploiting the poor, depriving the people of justice, and neglecting the widows and the orphans among them. These people, even though they went to quote-unquote church, they had hearts that were so very cold. And God, in his compassion, is calling them back to himself, showing them grace by giving them another chance, just like he does for us so often.

That's called mercy. Now, look at me here at the start of our passage in Malachi 3, verse 7. Now, I understand we have different learning styles.

[6 : 12] So if you're a note-taker, one way you can take notes is you can go to the YouVersion Bible app, click on the menu, click on events, click on First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, and then you can see our outline that way.

But here's the first very practical question that we need to answer, and our answer needs to be yes before we can truly honor God. Here's the question. Are you all in?

Are you all in? See, in this passage, when God calls these people to return to him, the word return is basically the same as the word repent that we see all throughout the New Testament.

Repent means to turn away from that old sinful lifestyle that's all about me, what I want, what I think, what I'm going to do. Turn away from my sin and my selfishness and turn toward God in his ways. I'm waving the white flag of surrender to the God of all creation. And more than just tears streaming down my face, I am making a commitment that you, Lord, you have all of me.

[7 : 21] Even the closets of my heart, even the attic of my heart, even Friday or Saturday night, even my business ethics, all of me, 24-7, 366, because it's a leap year.

Okay? And before we start pointing fingers here at the Israelites, man, we better make sure that we're not doing the exact same thing.

Because our God meets us in our darkest sins, in our wrong motives, in our impure hearts, and he can transform these hearts to completely beat for him.

In fact, 1 Timothy 2, starting in verse 3, says, And then in 1 John 4, verse 10, God's word says, And then verse 19, And before we can come to this place where we want to glorify God in our giving or any other area, our hearts have to be sold out to Jesus.

And it's amazing, amazing the response I've gotten in this Take God at His Word series, where I've had some people come up to me and say, Ray, I didn't realize that giving is so connected to my heart.

[9 : 15] I thought I had a giving problem. Now I realize I have a trust issue. They said, I've trusted Him in so many areas. And He's always proven Himself time and time again.

But now I realize I need to trust God in my giving because my offering, my tithes and my offering flow from my heart. They overflow from my faith.

And I thought, right on, preach it. See, those are the people who make preachers want to come to work on Monday mornings, okay? But on a serious note, they were right. And Jesus put it this way in Matthew 6, 21.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So it's amazing how connected our finances are. How connected our finances and stuff are to the heart.

It's another way that I choose to worship the Lord and trust Him. Okay. So now that we're all in here, let's get down to the nuts and bolts, okay? What are tithes and offerings?

[10:17] You hear people talk about this all the time. What are we talking about when we say tithes and offerings? And to answer that, let's head back to Malachi chapter 3. And now let's look at verse 8.

God's word asks this question. Will a mere mortal, that's you and me, will a mere mortal rob God? And yet, you rob me. Could you imagine God telling you that you're robbing Him?

Man, that'd be crazy. But then He says, but you ask, how are we robbing you? And God just gives them to it straight here. He says, in tithes and offerings.

Now, the first question we need to answer is this. What is a tithe? Not my opinion. Not what I want it to mean. But what is a tithe according to the word?

If you look back here at the Old Testament, a tithe was one-tenth of a person's income that was to be given back to the word, to the Lord. The word tithe literally means 10%.

[11:20] And in Leviticus chapter 27, it says, A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil, fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord.

It is holy to the Lord. Every tithe of the herd and the flock, every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod, will be holy to the Lord. So let's break this down.

During the Old Testament days, before Christ came into this world, part of their covenant with God was to give back to Him a tenth of everything. In those days, they didn't have a money system like we have today.

So they sacrificed and they gave 10% from their crops or their animals. Of course, they had a money system, but not to the level that we do today. And so let me give you an example of this from a child.

There was a preacher who had this little boy in his congregation. And one day, Dustin came to church and he had a pack of Smarties. And because we've all eaten our share of this candy, we know there's probably, what, 10 or 12 of them in there.

[12:21] And so the preacher just couldn't help himself. And he was having some fun with this little boy. So he asked him, Can I have one of those? And without hesitation, Dustin smiled and he handed one over.

Well, this happened for a couple weeks until it became kind of like a little silly tradition between the two of them. And every time Dustin had Smarties, he'd take the first one out and he'd save it for the preacher.

Every Sunday before the worship service started, he'd track his pastor down, give him one Smartie. And sometimes Dustin would even open up a pack of Smarties during the week.

And he'd always save the first piece by putting it in his pocket. And when he came on Sunday, that Lent-covered Smartie was given to the preacher who always decided to enjoy it later.

See, that's exactly what God is basically asking us to do today. He's asking that when we get our paycheck, It doesn't matter whether it's \$20, \$200, \$2,000, \$20,000.

[13:17] He's asking us as the managers of his stuff, his money, his resources, that we will simply set aside that tithe, that 10% to be given back to his church to say thank you.

Thank you, God, for everything you've blessed me with. Thank you for Jesus and going to the cross for my sins. I give this back to you so that more people can come to eat of the bread of life and drink of the living water that's found in Christ alone.

So we've answered what a tithe is, literally 10% of your income. But here's our next question that even less people understand. What is an offering?

And yes, there is a difference between a tithe and an offering. If you read through the scriptures, an offering was a gift that was over and above a tithe. It was something special on top of it.

For example, probably about 16 years ago, this church did a capital campaign. A lot of churches have done these, and they built what we call our Family Life Center. And they updated the sanctuary, did a few other things as well.

[14:26] But they asked the church to stay faithful in their regular giving of their tithe, but to pray about going above and beyond that number to help prepare our church for growth.

And praise God, this church family went above and beyond, and that's all been paid off for years now. And it has allowed us to grow and do more ministry for the glory of God. So the tithe goes to support the ongoing ministry of the church.

An offering goes to meet special needs in or outside of the church. So to put it practically, a tithe is my 10% that I give back to the storehouse, to the church, the place where I am fed spiritually.

And my offering is anything that can go wherever God places on my heart, wherever there's a need, that's where my offering goes. And that could be a special project.

It could be giving opportunities through the church. It could be another organization that you trust. One for me is Compassion International. This is where my wife and I have had the privilege now for, oh shoot, probably about 16 years, to give about \$45 a month to help a little girl named Catherine, who's from Honduras, to have food, medical attention, and education, and to learn more about Jesus.

[15 : 45] It could be helping those in need that God brings into your path. It could be millions of different things. Just follow the Holy Spirit's leading. But that offering is above and beyond your tithe, and it goes wherever the Holy Spirit leads.

And now let's go into the New Testament, to 1 Corinthians 16. And I want to start here in verse 1, where the Apostle Paul breaks down how we're supposed to give.

And he puts it like this. Now about the collection for the Lord's people, do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come, no collections will have to be made. Three things we see in this passage. Number one, give regularly. He uses the words on the first day of every week. Now, I don't think God intended this passage to be some legalistic command, because the reality is we have some who get paid every week, some who are every other, some once a month, some like farmers, others, maybe a few times a year.

But the point here is that we give regularly so that we're giving right off the top, not just leaving the leftovers for God. And it really is amazing that when we give that 10% off the top, God will bless that other 90% more than we will ever understand.

[17 : 11] So make it a habit. God's first before anything else. Because Lord, I don't want to give you the leftovers. Second, so give regularly.

Second, give personally. He says each one of you, no matter how old we are, every one of us who belong to Jesus has a responsibility to honor God.

I love to hear stories about small kids learning the power of tithing back to the Lord. I really believe as Christian parents, we should start to, number one, model it by doing it ourselves, how important tithing is.

Teach our children from a young age how they can be a part of what God is doing. And I think we'll be surprised how they will follow that lead. For instance, for all three of our kids over the years, we've bought that Dave Ramsey bank.

It has three slots in it. One for give, one for save, and one for spend. And what we're doing is teaching our children when they get their commission that God must come first.

[18 : 16] Because if you can learn to honor him first with little, you'll be ready when you start earning more. And so our kids will take their money, they'll give their 10% right off the top, they'll put in give first, and then they go to save and they give a certain percentage to save and then they get the rest that they can put in spend.

So parents or grandparents, let's start by modeling this to our kids and then training them up to be faithful in their giving as well. Now here's the third thing he says in this passage.

Give proportionally in keeping with your income. So not depending on what anybody else is giving, but based on your own income. So the people Paul was talking to here had been taught since they became believers on what it looked like to tithe and give offerings.

So I truly believe Paul is reminding them of this spiritual habit. He's saying it doesn't matter how much you make, you're not called to compete with the person next to you, you're called to be faithful with what God has given you.

And you know, I've had a lot of questions where people sincerely ask, what am I supposed to tithe from? The net or the gross? After my check has already been taxed, which is the net, or before tax, which is the gross?

[19 : 35] And my answer to that is yes. See, scripture doesn't come right out and directly say net or gross. Now I could make a case for gross based on how they would have tithed in the Old Testament.

It was right off the top of everything. But here would be my challenge. If you're not giving 10% and you have a heart to truly be faithful to the Lord in this area, then start and work your way up to the net.

Give off of the taxed income. God will honor that heart. When you get there and you see that God has already provided and blessed your faith, then work towards the gross. When you get there, you can realize that a tithe is a starting point and you don't have to stop there.

You can continue to trust God's leading in this area. A man once came up to Peter Marshall, a former chaplain of the United States Senate, and he had a concern about tithing.

He said, you know, I have a problem. I've been tithing for some time. It wasn't bad when I was making 20 grand a year. I could afford to give \$2,000 back. But now that I make 500,000, there's no way I can afford to give \$50,000 annually.

[20 : 45] Well, Peter Marshall thought about it for a minute and said, well, I see that you really do have a problem. I think we ought to pray about this. And the man said, sure. And so Dr. Marshall bowed his head and he prayed, dear Lord, this man has a problem and I pray that you'll help him.

Please reduce his salary back to the place where he can afford to tithe. Amen. And I bet that probably didn't go over well, right? But the point here is if every one of us is faithful to give back that tithe from the resources God has blessed us with instead of the 5% to 10% of Christians that most statistics say who are usually the ones who tithe, then you'll be amazed.

You'll be amazed at the work that God can do through his church to build the kingdom. Money would never be an issue for any church if even half of the church chose to tithe.

Now I'm going to close this message with these words straight from our creator. I've saved this best part to the very last on purpose and this is a promise, Malachi 3.10.

And I think sometimes as conservative Bible-believing churches, we have the tendency to run away from a verse like this because we're so afraid of those who've ran to the other opposite extreme and who follow the prosperity gospel or the health and wealth gospel, which is not biblical.

[22 : 07] And so we got to make sure we find that healthy biblical balance. And here's what Malachi 3.10 says. God says, bring the whole tithe, remember 10% into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house so that my church may be taken care of, okay?

He says, test me in this 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.

So here's my childish dare for you after hearing the Lord say, test me. I triple diggity dog dare you to take God at his word and you watch how he's going to show up and bless you in every way because he's looking for men and women, for boys and girls who will trust him fully in every single area of their lives.

And when we do, just like his word teaches, he will do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for these words of life that you have spoken over us today.

And God, I'm very aware that this is a topic that isn't always popular to preach. Nobody really gets too excited about talking about money. And yet, this is something your word talks about over and over and over because where our treasure is, there our heart is also.

[23 : 44] And you are a God that is all about the heart, all about the motives. And so Father, we just pray that the first question we ask today, that we will just wrestle with that.

This question of, am I all in? Because you can't give faithfully until your heart is fully surrendered. And so Father, if there's something in these hearts that is not all in and following you, will you deal with that?

Will you draw us to yourself so that we can come waving that white flag of surrender, saying, Jesus, you are the Lord of my life. But Father, thank you for these very practical words today.

Thank you for teaching us what a tithe is, what an offering is. And Father, I just pray for each of us listening that you will just stir our hearts, that you will just help us to be faithful, not just in giving, but in every single area of our faith.

Thank you for these words of life that you've spoken. May we receive them with a heart to grow and may we be molded into the image of Christ.

[24 : 52] We pray all these things in Jesus' precious name. And right where you are, God's people said, Amen. Hey, I want to share a little invitation with you today.

In talking about giving, the reality is that it's all about the heart, right? It's all about the heart. And so my question for you today is, do you truly have a relationship with Christ?

Do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Have you done what Scripture teaches? And that is to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that He is God in the flesh, that He died on the

cross for you, to set you free.

And then He rose again three days later to conquer death and offer life to you and I on this earth and for all eternity. And when we believe that, we confess Him as our Lord and Savior.

We repent of our sins. We don't just ask for forgiveness, but we make that commitment, Jesus, I'm going to follow you. And we get baptized into you, just like your word teaches us to be immersed into Christ and to come up as that brand new creation in you, Lord.

[26 : 06] And so I just want to give you this invitation. If you are ready to have that discussion and work through God's word and what it teaches about salvation, we would love to come alongside you as a church.

Maybe you just got some questions about your faith. Please reach out to us. Here's a couple ways.

You can call us in the church office. We're Monday through Thursday, 8 to 4:30.

We're open. Give us a call. 812-663-8488. That's 812-663-8488. Once again, First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.

My name is Ray. You can ask for me. Or you can email me at Ray at FCCGreensburg.com. Hey, like always, we are so thankful that you've tuned in to hear the word of God preached today.

And we hope that you have a blessed week. God bless you.