

The priorities of godly giving

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[0 : 00] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved. Good morning, everyone. You'll find on the back of your service sheets an outline which we will need today. Because unlike what we normally do, which is work through a book of the Bible, today we're going to be dotting around a little bit. Let me pray as we start.

[1 : 14] Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time to come to your word. And we ask that you would help us now to think how best to use our money for your glory.

Father, we long to sow bountifully. And to reap bountifully. And we pray that today's time would help us.

And that your word would speak to each one of us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, we come now to the fourth of our series in money.

If you're visiting us here today for the first time, well, you come to a sort of practical session. We've been looking at some of the principles of money and of what difference it means to know Jesus in terms of how we treat our money.

When we come to Jesus, he makes us a new creation. Completely changes us. And that includes how we act, how we deal with money and what our attitude is to it.

[2 : 36] But today we're going to get practical. Just before, I mean, I'm going to be wagging on the tea. We have ages, by the way.

We normally don't. You know, I could drone on for ages. I won't, don't worry. But I'm going to waggle on the tea just a little bit. There might be a few sort of slightly random thoughts, which I hope we will be able to weigh up, each of us individually.

But we've spoken of the two biggest dangers, I think, for us as Grace Church Dulwich, when we come to the issue of money. The first is that we judge one another.

Look at what we've all got and what we do with our money, and quietly we think to ourselves, well, I'm better than them, or that doesn't seem to be very godly, does it? Well, that's a real danger.

1 Timothy 4.4 for us, if that's us. Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

[3 : 42] Stuff is not bad in itself. Wealth is not bad. It is part of good's creation. Everyone must decide in his own heart, his or her own heart. Giving is a matter of personal decision, and there should be no judging of one another within the church.

The second danger is hiding behind the caveats. So hiding behind the caveat, everything is good, wealth is good, God has given good things to enjoy, and we take that and we don't allow God's word to challenge us into radical generosity with the resources that we've been given.

Paul asks us in 2 Corinthians, will you sow bountifully, and reap bountifully, or will you sow sparingly, and in eternity reap sparingly?

So it's easy for us, I think, let's face it in quite a wealthy part of a wealthy city, to set our bar just below the world around in terms of what we do with our resources, rather than allowing God's word to shape us radically.

I hope we've been challenged freshly by Jesus' words in Luke, to set a course for heaven, to travel light, challenged by the Macedonians as they gave beyond their means, trusting that God would provide.

[5 : 07] I remember someone describing it like this, the Christian becomes someone through whose fingers wealth flows like water.

We may all have a different flow of wealth, a different sort of breadth of degree, but the Christian becomes a person through whom wealth flows like water.

We don't trust it, we don't treasure it. Our treasure is Christ. Today we come on to the practical question, given we've been challenged to be generous givers, where should we direct our resources?

What are the Lord's priorities for the money that he gives us? If we're youngsters here listening in, do you get pocket money? There will be some principles here for us, so listen up.

Listen in to what's said, and see what you might think about what you might do with your money.

Before we get on to the practical questions, just a comment on how much we should give.

[6 : 20] Okay, I know that's a practical issue. We came on to it a tiny bit at the end of the last talk. Come to 2 Corinthians, if you've got your Bibles. 2 Corinthians chapter 3, firstly.

I don't know what page that is, actually. Sorry. Is it 965? Say again. 1162. Thank you.

2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 6. Paul says that God has made him to be a minister of the new covenant, not the old.

tithing was part of the old covenant. And if you come to chapter 9, verse 7, chapter 9, verse 7, where we were a couple of weeks ago, Paul says, each one must give as he's decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Okay, do we or don't we tithe as Christians? In the Old Testament, the people of God were required to give 10% of their harvest to the Lord as a matter of obedience and trust.

[7 : 45] The Christian is no longer under that law. 10% is neither a requirement nor a limit for the follower of Jesus.

Paul says, each one is to give as he's decided in his heart. The attitude, therefore, is not, here's a box, 10%, let me tick it, but more, how generous and radical can I be with the resources that God has given me?

This book, Neither Poverty Nor Riches, you could get it if you want, is written by a guy called Craig Blomberg, and he's on a sort of seminary professor salary, whatever that is in the US.

I think it's quite a lot, actually. But he was saying, he actually gets very practical at the end and tells us how much he gives. He gives, him and his wife together, give 30% of their resources elsewhere. It's quite interesting. At the same time, we're not under the law. 10% is not a requirement, and perhaps when we're just scraping by, well, that's okay.

[9 : 03] We give what we can. For someone just starting out in giving as a Christian, you could take 10% as a pretty good starting point and prayerfully aim to increase that.

So that is a brief word on how much. It's between us and the Lord. Now, the rest of our time, I want to spend on where and who. What does the Bible say about what our priorities should be?

Now, if I was going to recommend one book for you to read, there's a book called The Money Mentor by Ash Carter, which is a fantastic, practical, simple book.

It's called The Money Mentor by Ash Carter. He says a lot of the stuff that I'm going to touch on much better and in more detail. On this service sheet, I've put here what I think are five areas in rough order of priority, but you will have to weigh this up yourself.

Number one, number two, joint third and then fourth. Okay, and we're just going to trace through these five areas. Number one, family.

[10 : 14] Nuclear family. Do you see there? If anyone is not willing to let him work, to work, let him not eat. To Thessalonians 3.10. Clearly then we have a responsibility to put food on the table for our family and for ourselves.

First things first. It's right to use our money to pay for the shopping, which is increasingly a lot of money, isn't it? And for what we need as a family to clothe our children.

That is money spent exactly as God wants. It's a priority. Then also, notice for wider blood family in need.

And that's that second verse on the sheet. If anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially members of his household, he is denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Household there refers to broader than just nuclear family. It refers, if you look at the context, to parents and grandparents. The context is a mother or mother-in-law who has been widowed without help and with no state provision.

[11:26] Paul says, if you're not willing to provide for your own relatives when they're in that kind of need, you've denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever. Even they do that.

So, what does that mean? It means that sometimes our giving may have to be directed away from our local church or other places in order to provide for a family member in need to looking after ageing parents.

That would be a good thing. An absolute priority. Just a word of caution here. Both of these texts under this first heading are about, I think, providing needs.

The responsibility, therefore, to our family, to our children or wider family, is to make sure that they've always got food on the table and a roof over their head. It's not about providing a certain lifestyle either for our children or for our family.

That's clearly not what Paul intends with these verses. Now, there's a tricky issue here when it comes to children. I suggest that parental generosity to children is only ever seen as a good thing in the Bible.

[12:47] Think of God with his children. However, some of us have come from or live among subcultures where children are idolized and no expense is spared.

Well, we should be different. We'll have to ask, when does godly generosity to our children, in so far as we're able, not everyone can provide more than the basic needs for their children, if you think of the church globally.

But when does godly generosity cross into something that means we can't fulfill our other financial obligations, which we're going to come to in a second. or, frankly, spoils them with every material thing now rather than trains them to be content with Christ and his promises and to wait for our good things.

These are things that we all need to weigh up and think about in our situations. Others of us will come from or live in subcultures where perhaps children have been neglected. But we should be different as Christians.

So, firstly, family. The second priority, church family, and by that I mean local church family.

[14:07] Now, there are two main elements to this and they are both clear in the New Testament. Firstly, we have a responsibility to love our brothers and sisters in financial need.

This is so important and it is noted by, it's so important that as in our reading it's noted by Luke as one of the marks of the first church.

Just look down at Acts 2. They were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as they had need.

Isn't that amazing? The immediate impact of the gospel was a beautiful generosity and desire to love other Christians in this way, materially.

It's reiterated at a number of points. James 2. If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food and one of you says go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

[15:11] Matthew 25. Jesus, I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. Naked and you clothed me. Truly I say to you, as you did to one of the least of these, my brothers, he's talking about Christians, you did it to me.

Ephesians 4. Let the thief no longer steal but rather let him labour doing honest work with his hands so that he may have something to share with anyone in need and the context there is church family. We are members of one another. Again, the needs seem to be basic needs though some cases are undefined and most of these texts I think imply an informal sharing and generosity.

Acts 2, they laid the money at the apostles' feet but the rest of those texts imply an informal sharing and generosity.

So what does this mean? I think this could mean a couple of things for us as a church. Firstly, we should have our eyes open for people in need within our church in your growth group or others who may come and join.

[16:32] We should have our eyes open. Secondly, if we are in need, don't be proud but willing to receive help. More of a blessing for the person who gives.

You serve them by letting them know that you need help, by letting them help you. I heard of a recent example, a lovely example of a wife of a Christian who has been diagnosed with cancer. the NHS treatment has failed so far but it was suggested she could try a pioneer treatment but it's private and it would cost thousands.

Someone organised a crowd fund which spread through their church and within four days they'd raised £16,000 in order to pay for the first round of treatment that she needs.

It's the kind of thing, isn't it? Wonderful generosity. Sharing. Things like that may be smaller. Let's not be slow as a church but eager to share.

[17 : 42] If we are in real financial need and it's not because of the Bentley we're renting or the many expensive foreign holidays but genuine needs, well please ask for help.

Perhaps mention it discreetly to your growth group leader. there will be people probably in your growth group who would love to help and if you're not in a growth group go and speak to Marcus or Ben, the church wardens.

Informal sharing. The second thing under this heading of church family is the duty of the local church to provide for our set aside teachers and leaders.

verse, just that final quote there from 1 Timothy. Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour especially those who labour in preaching and teaching for the scripture says you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain and the labourer deserves his wages.

The assumption here I think in the early church very interesting is that teaching and preaching will take so much time that for it to be done well they won't be able to earn their living in the normal way.

[18 : 57] Now in one sense this is an embarrassing thing for me to teach of. In another sense it's the word of God and it's my job to teach you what it says.

There should be a godly desire in whichever church you end up in to make sure that your teachers and their families are well provided for. Well this would be the moment for me to say how grateful Anna and I are for you being so generously willing to buy a house for the minister.

It means a huge amount to us and we won't be at the mercy of the rental market and we feel so honoured by you. Thank you so much and actually the fact that you've looked after Andy and Alice so well in the past by doing the same.

There are different dynamics here for the part of the gospel worker I speak to staff here or those listening online including myself and our wives we should not stand on our rights there should be no sense of entitlement on our part Paul was prepared to forego his rights 1 Corinthians 9 we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel.

there can be a kind of strutting around of gospel workers a demanding attitude we deserve this that or the other no that's not godly for our part we should be prepared to forego our rights there is no place for that kind of entitlement among gospel workers for the church's part this is the word for you 1 Timothy 5 honour your teachers the labourer deserves his wages that's a serious responsibility we've come to the part of our I guess the part of our responsibilities that comes to giving to the central pot in the local church number 3 mission this takes us beyond the needs of the local church and just have a look down with me at this verse from Philippians 4 no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only not that I seek the gift but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit so from the beginning the Philippian church were not only looking after their own needs the family and the needs of their local church providing for their ministers they should have been doing that but also beyond that they had a concern for the advance of the gospel they wanted

[21 : 47] Paul to be able to keep preaching the gospel further and further afield and Paul commends them saying their giving towards mission is a fragrant offering a sacrifice pleasing and acceptable to God he says it's an investment that the fruit will increase to their credit once we've supplied the needs of our family and of our local church we should be eager to support mission with our money think of Phoebe in Romans 16 she has been a patron of many and of myself as well she is named by Paul first up in that list of names place of honour for Phoebe who had made herself a patron of the gospel's advance giving to mission because she had a concern for the name of Christ to be proclaimed throughout the world well that is money well spent for the glory of

God why because it advances the name of Christ and for the salvation of people for eternity now you might be asking how can we give to mission well firstly by giving to Grace Church their mission giving was corporate in Philippians so they gave together as a local church to Paul this is why as a church we have mission partners in South Africa Ireland London Doncaster Naples what a great

legacy it's been for me as a pastor to inherit what you guys have already been doing for years 9% of our total incomings go towards mission and the work of Andrew Burke and Esty so important to administrate this isn't it do thank them for it should we try to increase this percentage 9% I think so well we could do that if our regular giving increase but I would suggest also that giving towards training is giving towards mission so in that sense I think we already are shaping up to give more than our 9% because think of Charlie as we give in order to train Charlie starting in September I think that is giving to mission isn't it we're training up a man we're not intending for him to stay here forever we want to send him out wouldn't it be great if in 2026 we were able to offer another training position to an apprentice as we seek to serve the mission of the church in the next generation people are saying there is a drying pipeline of new people coming through many are talking about it well let's invest as a church it's our responsibility to train and send out well that's the mission that we support as a local church but there's nothing to stop us making decisions for our giving to spill over to mission in other directions if we're involved in lunchtime talks I hope we give to that that means less to grace church that's fine give to your lunchtime talks there's nothing wrong with giving privately to mission that's on our hearts so you know crosslinks be a great place to start they've got all kinds of missionaries all over the world you can give to individual specific causes it's a trusted mission organisation if you'd like to do that can I recommend crosslinks well third equal and I've put third equal I cannot tell an order of priority between these two in the New Testament they're both described as very important investments thirdly the wider church in need it's a very big deal in the New Testament when we were in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 that was the issue the saints in material need in another part of the world this is not mission but love for brothers and sisters beyond our church wanting to share with them when they're in need now I think I'm doing a lot of thinking about this you may want to puzzle it out yourself do we do this well enough as a church I think in our context there is an overlap between mission and the wider church in need so our mission partners think of Christ Church Soweto is that giving to brothers and sisters in need or is it mission well it's kind of both I think they need help to support their local pastor because they have very little we can bless them with that but it's also mission as we seek to get behind a mission minded church in Soweto and pray for the gospel to advance I think the lines kind of blur a bit same in Naples but beyond this giving to Christians in need across the world would be a very good thing to do beyond what we do as a church there are various trusted organisations that you could do that through Barnabas Aid would be one you'd want to check their trustworthiness and exactly where the money goes but as you give to Grace [27 : 47] Church you are giving I hope to both of those mission and the wider church in need though I'm sure we could be doing things better finally the wider world what about the wider world love by which I mean financial help or relief for unbelievers I've put a question mark there cheeky question mark because there's very little in the New Testament about this it's not an emphasis if you look carefully at the love your neighbour references in the New Testament almost always about loving brothers and sisters Christians in fact the clear message of the New Testament I think is that the best way that we can love the world with our money is two things number one by loving one another by this people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another and number two by giving to mission so that more people can find true eternal riches in Christ the only riches in the end that are worth having those I think are the two best ways we can love the world with our money you can weigh that up others have said I think helpfully the world will look after the world so there are many good charities giving to help relief but the world won't give to mission and the world won't give to Christians in need that's our priority having said that we should not be blind to the material needs of those around us surely but kind and compassionate where we have opportunity think of Jesus in the Sermon on the mount give to the one who begs think of Paul in Galatians do good to everyone especially to the household of faith it's not a priority either for the church I think or for the individual to give financial resources towards the relief of material poverty of the world around it's not wrong and we certainly shouldn't be blind to it I just mentioned here the Weber Street charity which I think is fantastic I was on their website yesterday go and have a look at their website we do give to them a little bit I think as a church it's a homeless charity but it's also a Christian homeless charity so it meets material needs and shares the gospel and people come to faith that would be a great way to give to people in material need and you could do that privately give more privately as I say we do give something as you could do that would be a great idea the

Weber Street charity so to conclude the big application of this whole series our default setting I think as followers of the one who made himself poor so that we might become rich should be can we give more we want to sow bountifully we want to be givers and we want to continue to be givers not just five years ago but now God will look after us that should be our default setting regular reviews it's worth the time radical decisions as we seek to travel light towards the promised land the inheritance the kingdom of God where our true riches lie and fear not little flock for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom he can't wait to give you the true eternal riches that can never spoil or fade that he's prepared waiting for us to give to us in heaven forever!

pray though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor father we long to honor our savior by becoming like him being willing to give generously in order that others might be relieved and rich in you thank you for the certain riches that future glory that awaits us that can never be taken away so we do pray our father that the resources you give us might as it were flow through our fingers like water that you would help us to sow bountifully in this life and not sparingly that we might also reap bountifully in eternity and we ask these things in

[33 : 43] Jesus name Amen