

God Wants Us To Be Givers

What Money Seminars Will Never Tell You

There's an old story about a circus act that used to tour the country, with a strongman who had these huge biceps and massive hands whose specialty was squeezing the juice out of an orange. He would stand before the crowd, holding the orange over a measuring cup, and would squeeze it until it was absolutely dry. Then he would offer \$100 to anyone who could come up and squeeze that orange harder and get one more drop of juice out of it. All sorts of strong men tried. Farmers who had been shearing sheep with blade shears would try. Body builders would try. Forestry workers would try, but no one ever collected the \$100. Then one day a weedy little guy with thick glasses and a bit of a squint stepped up on the platform and announced that he would like to try for the \$100. Everyone roared with laughter, but the skinny little guy took his jacket and tie off, rolled up his sleeves and squeezed. Out come one more drop of juice, then two, then five until he had squeezed an extra ten drops of juice from the orange. People gasped in amazement. "How did you do it?" they asked. "I do this all the time" he said. "I'm the treasurer of the local church".

Last week I spoke about the way the spirit of mammon seduces us into accumulating money for ourselves. Today I want to talk about Godly principles plan for the use of the money he has entrusted to us. What you are about to hear is not the sort of thing you are likely to hear from a financial planner or at some wealth creation seminar. I want to outline some biblical principles in using money that will not only result in blessing for us, but make us a blessing to Gods work in the world.

1. The way we handle money and possessions is an indicator of our relationship with the Lord.

Think about these scriptures.

- ***"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38)*** When Jesus was speaking then, he was talking about forgiveness. But the scriptural principle goes beyond forgiveness. He's talking about a generous spirit in our lives. That generous spirit overflows into the way we use our money, our possessions and our talents and our time. The happiest people I know are people who are givers. How come? Because they have given out with a big bucket and God has used a big bucket to pour back in. Look at the people who give of their time to serve others. They are some of the happiest people around. Look at the people at Westlake who give of their time in service. They serve in preparing communion, teaching in Children's ministry, leading Youth Ministry, lead small groups, leading worship, or play a musical instrument. Then there are those who see their workplace as their ministry place and generously serve the Lord there. God just keeps pouring back into their lives with a full measure. Do you want an egg cup sized blessing from God? Then give out with an egg cup. Do you want a big bucketful of blessing? Then give out with a big bucket.
- ***"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)*** I understand that scripture to be saying that the person who cheerfully gives, lives in the wonderful love of God. God keeps whispering to cheerful givers "I love you so much". And do you know what happens? When God keeps telling you he loves you, it makes you want to be a cheerful giver! Don't you love the descriptions of Barnabas in the New Testament? He was such an encourager. It's so great to have people like Barnabas in a church. How did Barnabas get to be that way? Here is the answer. ***"Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." (Acts 4:36 & 37)***
- ***"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)*** If your heart is already in heaven, that's where your treasure will be. If you are still tied to all the money and possessions of this world, that's where your heart will be.

Keith Tondeur has been the Chief Executive of Switch Card Services in the United Kingdom. When he was a young Christian the young people in his bible study group used to mark correspondence Bible Studies for people in Third World countries. One day a bible study course came in for marking from a high security prison in South Africa. The writer also asked for a bible. The young people saved up their money and

bought a bible which was sent to this African prisoner. About 10 weeks later a letter came back. This is what it said. "I cannot thank you enough for sending the bible. I've been reading it for hour after hour, and what is more, in these last two weeks since the bible came, six brothers have come to know the Christ as their Lord and Saviour. I am not sending the next part of the course back as we are all being executed tomorrow." Those 6 men came into the Kingdom because a bunch of young people went without a hamburger to buy a bible. Can you imagine what it's going to be like when those young people meet those 6 men in heaven? It's so worth it, investing in the Kingdom.

2. Money is a blessing from God.

They won't teach you that in a financial seminar either. Two weeks ago I talked about the spirit of mammon behind money, but money can also be one of the ways God blesses his people. God promised to make Abraham rich and prosper him, and he did. God made Isaac wealthy. Job was a man of great wealth, and after all his trials, God made him twice as wealthy as before. Solomon's wealth was regarded as a sign of Gods favour. In the New Testament, the wise men brought their wealth to Jesus as an infant. Wealthy women helped support the disciples. Zacchaeus, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were all rich and found their way into the Kingdom. Barnabas used his land investments to bless the early church. So did Lydia. It's a wonderful thing when people see the money they have as a gift from God, to be used for Gods purposes.

God gave Robert Le Tourneau the ability to design and manufacture huge earthmoving machinery. That man used the money from that God given talent to bless heaps of Christian work. You can read about his life in the book "Mover of Men and Mountains". Some of the biggest companies you can think of were grown by Christians who God blessed with lots of money, and then they generously used that money for the kingdom. Colgate, the toothpaste magnate. Kellogg's, Kraft Cheese, Heinz foods. These were all people who used their wealth wisely for Gods purposes. These people understood that when God gives a blessing, it's to be given away to someone else.

Here's the third thing you won't learn in a money seminar.

3. God Wants Us To Be Givers.

Let's get down to some practical teaching here. In the Old Testament the principle of the tithe was established right from early on, 400 years before Moses instituted the law. The tithe principle simply said that the first tenth of everything belonged to God. Not the last tenth if there was anything left over, but the first – the best. In the book of Malachi, God accuses his people of robbing him by not bringing their tithes. ***"Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me. 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 you will not have room enough for it."*(Malachi 3:7-10 NIV)**

Now just a couple of comments on this. What is the storehouse? A storehouse is the place you get fed from. So wherever you get your spiritual food from, that's where you give your tithe. Over the years I've had Christians tell me that they use the tithe to support their kids through Christian schools, or to support missionaries, or to give to whatever cause takes their fancy. People, if the local church is the place where you are getting fed, and where your kids are getting nurtured in the faith, then that's where your tithe belongs. Let me put it this way. If we all used our tithe to support missionaries or other Christian causes, then Westlake would be closed up within a week.

In my last church we did a little exercise. The treasurer and I worked it out how much a person would be living on if they received an old age pension, which is just about enough to survive on. Then we said, "What if everyone who attends our church was on that level of income, and we all gave 10% of our income to the church. What would happen?" We were staggered to find that on the barest of incomes, if we all tithed to the local church, we would have doubled the church budget.

Here's another thing for you to think about. Three years ago we had to put our cat down, as she was just too old to look after herself. She was 18 years old. She was only a little cat, so she was cheap to run. She cost us about \$3 a week in cat food. But I worked it out that in 18 years we spent over \$2800 on pet food. Some of you have got dogs, and some of you have big, hungry dogs. I want you to ask yourself if you aren't spending more on your cat and your dog than you are giving to the Lords work.

As far as the Lord was concerned the tithe was His. The people of Israel didn't need to ask God whether they should tithe. They didn't need to pray about it. That money was Gods. In fact in the book of Malachi, Gods accusation to the people was that they were robbing Him of what was rightfully His by not tithing. And by the way people, the people of Israel didn't just give 10%. Over and above the tithe were the freewill offerings, the trespass offerings, the costly journeys to the temple. It all added up to about one fifth of each mans income. That's 20%. Now I hear lots of Christians say "Ah yes, but that was under the law. We are not bound by Old Testament Law. We are under grace. That's true. We are living in the era of grace, not under some legalistic tithing system. We are not bound by the Old Testament laws on tithing. Grace goes far beyond law. So are we who are under grace, who are so grateful to God for all He has done for us in Jesus, going to give far less than what was required under the Law? Surely if we are under grace, then our gratitude to God would cause us to do far more than what would be required under law. Are we going to put pocket money in the offering and then sing songs of praise thanking God for his generous gift of grace? For some, a tithe of a tenth is far too little. If our annual income is \$100,000 a year, a tithe leaves us \$90,000 to live on. If our income is \$10,000 a year, a tithe leaves us \$9,000 to live on. Some of us don't need a huge amount to live on, and so are able to give far more than a tenth. The focus in the New Testament is on generosity, not on legalism.

Let me tell you how I understand my responsibility to God as a New Testament Christian. My tithe belongs to the work of the local church. That's the minimum starting point. Then over and above my tithe are my offerings. My offerings go to support missionaries, which Lyn and I do on a regular basis. My offerings contribute toward any need in the Kingdom that the Lord lays on my heart. Then in addition to my tithes and offerings, I read in my bible that we have an obligation to help the poor. It's called almsgiving in the New Testament. So there are times when prompted by the Holy Sprit, I give to those in need who are much worse off than me. That's not my tithe, and it's not my offering - It's responding with Gods love to the need around me. Now you may think I'm a wonderful giver, but I'm not doing much more than what was required under the Law.

Even after I have done all that, I still have to remind myself that everything I have kept back still belongs to the Lord anyway. It's not mine. I'm simply the Trustee. God has given it to me to look after until Jesus comes back again.

In 1993 a movie called "Schindlers List" told of the life of Oskar Schindler. Oskar Schindler was a German businessman and a Nazi Party member who saved the lives of hundreds of Jews during World War Two. What began in a small way in saving the lives of a few people from the Nazi death camps became an increasing passion in his life to save more. In this video clip Schindlers factory is about to be overrun by the Russians. Schindler is with the 1100 Jews he has saved from certain death. They present him with a letter of safe conduct and a ring as an expression of their gratitude for saving their lives. Schindler is filled with regret that he didn't use his money to save more lives. He looks at his Nazi Party gold pin, and his car, and realises that each of them represents more lives that he could have saved.

The sound track isn't all that clear, so you will have to listen carefully to what he says.

VIDEO CLIP FROM "SCHINDLERS LIST"

The only thing we can take to heaven with us is people. When we stand before the Lord, the last thing any of us want is to be filled with regret that we didn't do more with the opportunities and resources that God put in our hands. Let's get this area of money right in our lives, and see what God does in blessing us and through us, blessing others.

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