

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
November 23, 2014
Beginning to Give: Why Should We Give?

Memory Verse:

"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

TEST THE TITHE:

As part of our series on Stewardship, the pastor, Deacons, and Finance Committee are asking each member of Riverview Baptist to pray about "testing the tithe." We would like for each family to make a one month commitment to God to tithe during the month of December. This will not be possible apart from a deep love of Jesus, a conviction from Scripture, and a priority on obedience to God over the seasonal commercialism of the month. But we ask each person to pray and commit to testing God to see His faithfulness.

- What are our Values? (things we care about, things we prioritize, etc.)
- Why do we have Values? (ultimately, because some things are more important than others.)
- Why do have to prioritize? (We can't do everything. There's not enough time/money/resources, etc.)

A lack of time/money/resources to accomplish all that we want is called Scarcity. (When resources are scarce, it means they are only available in limited supply.)

Why is there Scarcity? Why don't we have all the time/money/energy/resources to do all that we want? (we live in a fallen world, see the discussion review below for details)]]]

----This section is just a little review for discussing Scarcity, Values and Priorities. This isn't a part of the main lesson, but it can definitely aid discussion about why we're in the position we're in and why having the right priorities is so crucial to living a godly life.----

God made this world and all that is in it. All that He made was Good. Capital "G" Good. He made man and woman. He put them in a garden paradise. He gave them jobs to do. All was as He wanted it. As it should be. Mankind had freedom. Real freedom. Freedom from disease, from want, from danger, from death . . . Freedom we can't even really imagine. God gave Man one limitation. He forbade them one thing, and Man disobeyed God and violated that limit. As a result, Mankind after the Fall is subject to many, many limitations: Death, disease, suffering, want, poverty, violence, tyranny just to name a few. Because of a lack of obedience and lack of personal restraint, we as a race are subjected to the external restraints of nature and time. After the Fall, Man knew scarcity, lacking something, for the first time, and it has been a part of our lives ever since.

As a result, we have only a short time on this Earth, because we will one day die. As a result of our impending death, we cannot accomplish everything we want because our time is scarce, limited. Because our time is limited and we can't accomplish everything we want, we have to determine what things have the most value, and prioritize those things. Therefore, things only have Value at the

expense of other things. Statisticians call this a Zero Sum Game. For one thing to gain value, something has to lose value. The more time I spend working, the less I spend exercising. Exercise might be important for my life (health) but working to pay for food, clothes and shelter for my family is more valuable to me than optimizing my health. Sports or hobbies might be much more fun than working, but most of us can't make a living at fishing or playing football, and you can't eat fun, so we go to work.

So with all the scarcity of life, we HAVE to make priorities. We have to establish values. In order to do that, we have to make some choices and the choices we make are based on information. According to the Bible, that information can come from two sources; we can listen to God or we can listen to His Adversary. Every time we choose, we either make a wise decision, according to God's word and will, or we do the will of Satan, heeding our flesh and following the way of the world. These values are important. Drastically important. Eternally important. Time and again, God invites us to ask Him for wisdom and knowledge, and God promises to give us that wisdom generously (James 1:5). So for something as important as our values and attitudes toward spending our limited resources, let's seek His wisdom in His word.

Beginning to Give: Why Should We Give?

1. Giving is a **privilege**. (2 Corinthians 8:2-4) *"In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people."*

That's right. A privilege. God gave the gift (Greek word "charis", translated "grace") of giving to 1st century church in Macedonia. Paul mentions them as a proud example of what godly generosity looks like. Though they were in poverty, they gave everything they could to Paul's ministry, and Paul even considered that some might've given more than they could afford. They did this because they considered it a privilege to be able to help other Christians. Do we consider this when we give to God? Are we joyful givers, in light of the fact that our money/time/lives will have the value of helping another and growing the Kingdom of God? Or do we gripe and grumble? Do we only give as little as we can get away with and still feel like we're not being total bums?

2. Giving is a **blessing**. (Malachi 3:10) *"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."*

Throughout the Bible we are warned not to "tempt God" or in other translations "put him to the test." What this means is we shouldn't try to manipulate God's will and mercy to accomplish our own ends, or even doing something for God, but in a way He doesn't sanction. For example, if I decided I was going to jump off the Bank of America Plaza in Atlanta and I invited Fox 5 and 11 Alive to televise it so that I could prove that God exists by letting Him keep me from dying... that would be "putting God to the test." I could pray all I wanted to, saying "God you better catch me or the people who watch this will think you're not real." But God didn't ordain this foolishness and He's under no obligation to catch my stupid self no matter how much I falsely try to invoke His power to catch me. Just like this silly example, any time you try to judge or test God, you're going to have a bad day . . . Except when He tells you to.

God says, "Test me in this. Give like I told you to and see what happens! See if I don't flood you with more blessings than you know what to do with! If you give to me from your limited resources like I've commanded you, I'll give to you from my UNLIMITED resources and you'll see that you can't Out-give God!" (paraphrased, of course.) One of the times where God invites us to put Him to the test has to do with giving. He doesn't want us to be nervous or anxious about giving. He wants us to do it confidently, KNOWING that He's going to give us everything we need and more!

3. Giving is an **investment**. (Luke 6:38) *"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."*

This isn't "seed" money. This isn't a promise of dollar for dollar return. Jesus isn't a 401k manager. He's not showing us a guaranteed rate of monetary return. He's not trying to make you wealthy in the world's terms. So take all the prosperity gospel stuff and toss it. Instead, realize the ultimate riches that come from giving in God's name. Using Jesus' metaphor, whatever measure you use to give is what you'll get in return. If your generosity is pint-sized, then you'll get about that much back. Now God is liberal with His blessings and not stingy in the least, so you might end up with two or three "pints" worth of blessings. Still more than you gave, but a sad sight smaller than if your generosity had been the size of a bushel or a barrel, or a 50-gallon drum! The greater your generosity, the more opportunity you create for God to bless you in return. So give big, give often and give joyfully because God wants to dump so many blessings on you that they run over into your lap... so much that you won't know what to do with it, except to give even more of what he's given you.

In closing, once we change our perceptions about giving, we are apt to give more and more freely and confidently and joyfully. We've seen that, looking through the Lens of Eternity, we can store up treasures for ourselves in heaven where they'll last forever. We've learned that spending our earthly wealth on ourselves or hoarding it is foolish because one day it'll all be lost to us. We've seen that God wants us to give because it blesses other and it blesses us. God dares us to step out on faith and give sacrificially because He wants nothing more than to be our provider and for us to depend on Him.

Take Home:

- Do you view giving as a joyful service, an honor and a privilege? Do you give confidently, expecting God to honor His promise and bless you? Do you give generously, expecting to see a return in blessings from God?
- The Bible clearly encourages these values, but sometimes it's hard to shake the hold of modern materialism. We're sinners, saved by grace, but still prone to return to selfishness and greed of the world if we don't constantly seek God's will.
- Be honest with God. If you feel a lack of generosity due to fear, selfishness, anger or any other reason, tell God about it and ask Him to ease your fear and give you the strength to seek His blessings through giving and worship.

Remember to challenge them to TEST THE TITHE!!!!