

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Feb. 22 : The stewardship of giving stimulates growth_20904

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The stewardship of giving stimulates growth

Malachi 3:6-12; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

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On a Sunday morning at Christmas time, our church's mission committee joined hands in a circle at the front of the auditorium. Nearly 100 gaily decorated shoeboxes were stacked on either side of the Lord's Supper table. They were filled with candy and toys, destined for underprivileged children in countries throughout the world. A member of the committee prayed God would bless each child who received one of these boxes.

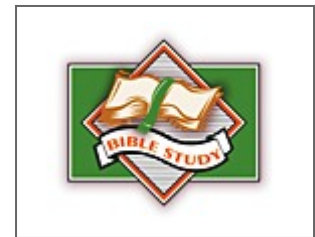
Afterward, several people mentioned to me they felt a deep sense of remorse that we so take for granted the blessings of our affluent society in light of the destitution throughout the world.

God has blessed believers with abundant spiritual blessings. Often we are guilty of forgetting our unworthiness as recipients of his bounty. We

demonstrate this forgetfulness in failing to return to God a portion of our material blessings in tithes and offerings.

Who is the true owner of our possessions?

Many harsh words of judgment appeared in Malachi's prophecies to the priests and people of Israel. The people were rebellious before God. But what stands out like the snow-capped peaks of a mountain range is God's extended mercy in spite of his wounded love. In the Malachi Scripture passage in this study, we see God's generosity declared along with the fact we cannot outgive him. Because God is so generous toward us, we must strive to obey him in all things. Particularly this is true in the total stewardship of our lives, which includes our possessions.



Before facing the people with their failure to bring their tithes and offerings to the Lord's storehouse, Malachi reminded them God was unchangeable. That he does not change is reflected in his name, Jehovah (Yahweh), which means "who is that he is." His promises are true and constant. Their fulfillment may be delayed because of our lack of faith. Yet still, God will do what he has promised.

God wanted his people to know that in spite of their disobedience and sin, he would save them from destruction. He told them plainly they were guilty of robbing him by withholding their tithes and offerings.

The promise of blessing

What would the people have to do to escape God's judgment because they had robbed him of tithes and offerings? They were to begin again doing what they knew was right. They were to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, which was the house of God. The temple in Jerusalem was the gathering place for all of the produce the people brought. The Levites then apportioned the part of it that was to be offered as sacrifices to the Lord and then kept enough for their own needs and for whatever emergencies might arise.

In verses 11-12, God told the people through Malachi the extent to which he would pour out his blessings upon those who were faithful in bringing their tithes and offerings to the Lord. Farms, orchards and vineyards abounded in that society. God's blessings would have to do with the increase of the fruit of the earth. Not only would the people prosper materially, they also would be a testimony to the surrounding nations who would take note of the way their God had blessed them.

Biblical giving is a part of worship

Paul had begun a project among the churches he had established in Europe and Asia Minor to gather an offering for the believers in Jerusalem who were suffering because a famine had struck that area. Actually, he had presented the idea first in Corinth, but problems had developed in the church, and they were not responding as eagerly as some of the other congregations. Paul urged them to complete the collection and to do so by bringing their gifts "on the first day of the week." This was the first day after the Sabbath, or Saturday. This is an indication that Sunday was the day on which the early Christians worshipped regularly. One of the early church fathers, Justin Martyr (second century A.D.), wrote that contributions to the church were received on that day.

Paul also indicated giving was to be proportionate. All were to participate,

both rich and poor, in keeping with their income. As a pastor, I encourage those who begin to tithe to deduct the tenth, God's portion, before anything else is spent.

Then Paul stressed the regularity of their giving. This particular offering was to be regularly set aside “every week.” In other words, Christians ought to consider paying the tithe and giving offerings as a part of their worship in the Lord's house. Receiving the offering during the worship hours on Sunday should be just as much an expression of worship as any other part of the service.

As we ask God to help us discipline ourselves in general worship, in prayer and in Bible study, so should we seek to be equally disciplined in our total stewardship.

Questions for discussion

♦ What should be a Christian's motive in paying the tithe and giving offerings to the Lord? In what ways do we “rob God” by failing to be faithful in our stewardship?

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.