

# The Lens of Blessing Influences Giving – Malachi 3:8-10

## Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

### Introduction

There was once a father who wanted to help his young son learn an important lesson in stewardship

So one Sunday he gave the boy a quarter and a dollar bill and told him to contribute whatever he felt was right and whatever money he didn't give he could keep for himself

After church the father asked his son how much he had put in the offering plate and the boy said:

“Well, I was all set to give the dollar but before they passed the plate the preacher said, ‘The Lord loves a cheerful giver’ and I knew that I would be a whole lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter and kept the dollar; so I did.”

The Bible has a great deal to say on the subject of money

Jesus himself spoke about money and our relationship to it more than he did on any other subject

In fact, Jesus talked about money more often than he did heaven and hell combined and the only subject he mentioned more often than money was the Kingdom of God

I believe Jesus occupied himself with money and our relationship to it as much as he did because he knows how prone we are to become preoccupied with accumulating and controlling it without ever realizing how much power it has over us

Still, God knows that money is a necessary part of our lives on this earth so the focus of the Lord's teaching on money isn't to avoid it but on how to have a proper relationship with it

This week we are going to look at how prone we are to view money through wrong lenses that cause us to want to cling to it and keep us from holding onto it loosely and from giving it freely

**Because how you view the resources you possess will have a direct bearing on how freely you give**

### *Money: an uncomfortable subject*

Now I know that money is an uncomfortable subject for many of us and we resent any implication that we may not be doing well in the area of giving

We like to focus on the Lord's words in [Matthew 6:3-4](#) which tells us –

*But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

We like to point to that passage and say, **“I don't think it's anybody's business what I give to the church!”**

And actually, you're right

How you give is between you and God and no one else – in most cases

The only exception I would make is when someone is seeking a position of leadership in the church – then their life pretty much becomes an open book to the rest of leadership as they need to be examined before being entrusted

But one of my duties as your pastor is to instruct you on how to live in a way that gives honor to God and that includes teaching you what the Bible has to say about giving

Whether or not that teaching convicts or confirms you is the job of the Holy Spirit

Let no one say, “Pastor Bill says we need to give more” because Pastor Bill is saying nothing of the kind

Pastor Bill is merely trying to be faithful to show you what the Bible says on this particular subject within the context of preaching a series dealing with having a biblical worldview and trusting the Holy Spirit will use it as needed

Okay? Some of you still appear to be skeptical but let's carry on anyway...

Our primary text this morning is Malachi 3:8-10 so if you'll join me there in your Bible you can follow along as I read the passage in its entirety – actually, I am going to begin at verse 6 and continue on through verse 12 so we see the passage in its context – so follow along as I read **Malachi 3:6-12**

*“For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.”*

In verses 8-10 we see that the Israelites were guilty of contributing less than their full tithe to the temple storehouse and that was considered to be robbing from God

Today the local church has taken the place of the temple and functions in place of the storehouse as the primary place for giving by the believer

And if we don't want to also be guilty of robbing God we need to look through the corrective lens of Scripture

This morning we will be looking at five different facets of the lens of blessing that influences our giving

It's kind of like having not just bifocals or trifocals but penta-focal lenses

## I. Source: Earned or Given

The first aspect we want to consider is the **source** of our possessions – in other words are they things we've **earned** for ourselves or are they things we've been **given** by God

What we see as the source of our the things we possess has a profound effect on our attitude toward those things

I am going to have the tech team show us a short video clip from the movie Shenandoah that I believe will help illustrate what I mean – if you have never seen Shenandoah I highly recommend it – Jimmy Stewart was a great actor and it's a fine movie that is well worth your time

The character played by Jimmy Stewart in the movie is named Charlie Anderson and as you watch the clip I want you to think about how you believe he would view the things he has

[Shenandoah Prayer clip]

Now, Mr. Anderson obviously believes that the effort put forth by him and his family is the source of the things he has and he's not 100% sure why exactly he should be thanking the Lord for it even as he does so

And while most of us wouldn't be quite so blunt about it, we can fall into the habit of seeing what we have as coming only from our labors, our talents, our shrewdness at investing, or some other thing that we ourselves have done

And we can begin to see ourselves as the source of what we have –that we alone have earned it

But God's Word tells us a different story

**James 1:17** tells us that God is the source of the good things we have –

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

And again, in **John 3:27** we read –

*"A person cannot receive even one thing unless it has been given him from heaven"*

In **1Corinthians 4:7** the questions Paul asks bear out the same truth –

*"What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"*

Although God isn't specified as the source in Paul's case it is most certainly implied

And very pointedly we read in **Deuteronomy 8:17-18** –

*Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, **for it is he who gives you power to get wealth***

Everything we have, even if it is the product of the sweat of our brow, is a blessed gift from God

Charlie Anderson may have been correct that everything before them on that dinner table was the product of their hard labor but did he even stop to consider who had given them the strength to work?

Who provided the seed, the soil, the sun and the rain, and the miracle of reproduction of plants after their kind?

God is the source of all good things and he gives them to us on the basis of his lovingkindness and grace – not on the basis of our merit so we can't say that we have somehow "earned" those things even as they come from God's hand

Because as we see in **Matthew 5:45** –

*"[God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" without distinction*

It's critical that we recognize that God is the source of our possessions and that he has graciously provided all that we have because that truth has a direct impact on all of the other facets we will be looking at this morning

## II. Possession: Own or Entrusted

Let's consider our second aspect which is **possession** or ownership

If we see ourselves as the source of what we have and view it as only the product of our labors, then we will most likely consider whatever we have to be ours

When you watch the movie Shenandoah you will soon recognize that Charlie Anderson is a man who takes his ownership of things very seriously

He worked for what he has until he was "dog-boned tired" and what he has produced is his

And if a person believes that he or she alone is the source of their blessings why wouldn't they think they should have complete ownership of those things?

It logically follows then that the owner should have complete control over those things and what happens with them

But again, Scripture tells us a different story

In Genesis we read how God created the world from nothing by his spoken command

Then we read in **Psalm 24:1-2** –

*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.*

And in **Psalm 50:10-11** God says –

*"Every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine"*

Everything that exists belongs to God – including you and me by the way – but we see in Genesis 1:28 the truth that God created mankind to be stewards of his creation

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

And again in Genesis 2:15 –

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*

Notice that God didn't give Adam the garden to possess; he gave it to him to tend and cultivate

We see the same truth of stewardship expressed by Jesus in parable form in Matthew 25 when Jesus told the story of the owner who entrusted his property to his servants to manage for him during his absence

It's important that we recognize that the things that we have been given – which is everything – has been given to us not in the sense that we now **own** it but in the sense that we have been **entrusted** with managing it for God

The biggest difference between an owner and a steward is accountability

Whereas an owner can do as he pleases with what he owns – that's the privilege of ownership...

And Charlie Anderson very clearly demonstrates the attitude of an owner throughout the movie

But when we consider the parable in Matthew 25 we see that the servants were called to give an account of their stewardship when the owner returned from his trip

They had freedom to do as they thought best while he was absent – they were entrusted to make decisions on how best to make use of the owner's money – but they eventually had to answer for those decisions

And while we use the possessive terms of "my" and "mine" or "ours" we would do well to remember that we don't actually own anything – it is all God's and he has entrusted us with the management of a portion of his property

And one day we will be called to give an accounting for what we've done with what God has entrusted to us

It naturally follows, since God is the owner and we are his stewards that we would be seeking to handle God's possessions in the way that God would want us to in all aspects; including how we give

### III. Amount: Fixed or Proportional

And we want to consider what God desires from us as concerns the **amount** that we give

I believe it would be interesting to take an anonymous survey that asked people to share what method they use to determine the amount that they give to their local church

For the little guy in my opening story we saw that his method was what would make him most cheerful in his giving

For many believers I fear that the answer might well be, "I don't really know how we came up with the amount. I just know it's what we gave last year, and the year before that, and, really I guess for as long as I can remember."

And I'm afraid that we would find that many approach giving as if they were paying admission to an event in that they give a fixed amount only when they are present at church

It's unfortunate but many believers have become more akin to paying customers or tippers than they are givers in a biblical sense

Because when we look at God's Word we see that God never mentions a **fixed** amount but giving that is **proportional** to how he has blessed

We see this truth in **Leviticus 27:30, 32** where the concept of the Old Testament tithe first instituted – meaning that 10% of a person's increase in produce or animals was to be set aside for the Lord

The same principle is seen in **Deuteronomy 4:22** –

*You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year.*

Giving is to be based on blessing and the amount should be proportional to what God has given to each of us

And while a strict tithe isn't prescribed in the New Testament we see the same attitude of intentional, planned, regular giving reflected in **1Corinthians 16:1-2** where Paul writes –

*Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come*

The same intentionality is seen in the first part of **2Corinthians 9:7** –

*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart,*

While there is no specific percentage requirement in the New Testament we shouldn't understand that to mean that the concept of proportionality has also been abandoned

God still expects us to give in accordance with how he has given to us and giving a deliberate, predetermined percentage of all your sources of increase is the best way to know that you are honoring that expectation

Committing to a percentage in advance does a number of positive things for us

First, it can help to keep us from being tempted to fudge the amount downward

I used to work for a company who used outside sales reps to bring in business and they contracted with them to pay a certain percentage of the sales that they brought in – I believe it was 3%

All was well until the day a salesman brought in a contract that would have resulted in the company paying out more than they thought reasonable even though it was still only 3% - and they demanded the salesman accept less

I have always thought the company acted foolishly because they stifled the incentive of the sales reps to increase their sales and their 97% portion of those sales all because they thought the commission got too big for them to honor

But when we are wiser and commit to give a fixed percentage no matter how richly the Lord blesses us and are then faithful in doing it, we open ourselves up to even more abundant blessings

When that happens we will see giving rise in proportion to the rising incomes while the sacrifice remains the same

Committing to proportional giving also forces us to consider how God has blessed us because we need to know that number to come up with the amount to give

There will be no more mindless writing of a check because we will need to look at all our sources of blessing, whatever their source might be, as we prepare to present our offering

Faith is trust put into action and proportional giving provides us with the opportunity to exercise faith in the area of finances because it forces us to rely on God's promise to take care of our needs as we give to him first and use what is left for ourselves

## IV. Motive: Budget or Response

Giving proportionally also assures that we are giving from the right **motive**

Preparing this message made me realize that I have perpetuated an unbiblical worldview regarding giving in the past

Now, I must say I did it innocently enough and it is a common thing done in churches but I was brought up short when I recognized what I had done – let me explain

One of the unavoidable duties of leadership in the church involves looking at the financial picture of the church

Church leadership prepares and presents a proposed budget for approval and then monitors the budget as the year progresses

And the sneaky, yet unbiblical temptation that creeps in is that you begin to view the purpose of the offerings given as being to fund the **budget** and not as a **response** to God's blessings

And when that happens it's a short step to receiving the offerings given as a practical matter and not a form of worship and thanksgiving to God for how he has blessed

The giver can also fall into wrong thinking if they give to fund the budget and not as a response to what God has done

When that happens it's all too easy to decide that you don't like the budget so you're not going to give to it

Or that the budget is doing just fine so you can limit your giving – after all, you have a greater need for the money

Or you'd rather give to a project that interests you more than the general, day-to-day expenses of the church so you will control how your gift is used

God's plan for stewardship doesn't involve giving simply to keep the church functioning so when we are motivated to give only or mainly to fund the budget our motivation is wrong

That would be spiritually unhealthy for us because we would be tempted to believe that as long as the church doors remain open all is as it should be and start to withhold all or some portion of our giving

And according to **Malachi 3:8** when we give less than the full amount that God requires we are robbing from God

Rather, giving God's way involves giving proportionally, freely, and regularly from God's blessings as a means of worship that reflects just how much God has blessed in order to see God's kingdom work accomplished

## V. Attitude: Compulsion or Cheerfully

Lastly, when we look at giving through the lens of blessing and have all of the above aspects in order we will find that we are able to give from the right **attitude**

Look with me again at **2Corinthians 9:7** this time in its entirety –

*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

This is the verse that was quoted by the preacher in our opening illustration that led to the smaller donation

And this is where the world lies to us as we are told that accumulating wealth and hanging onto it for ourselves is the way to happiness

But we know that true happiness is found in faithfully doing the will of God

We should all strive to give **cheerfully** according to what we see as being appropriate of one of God's stewards and not out of a sense of **compulsion** laid on us

Far too many sermons have been preached and appeals made to try to compel people to give more

The plain truth is that God has entrusted each of us with certain provisions and possessions and he gives us the freedom to do with them as we will

He has laid out his financial plan and it is more than generous toward us as he permits us to use the vast majority of those provisions and possessions for ourselves and only asks for a faithful percentage back

And we will undoubtedly reap a harvest of enjoyment from the things God gives us

In fact, Paul tells us in **1Timothy 6:17** that God *"richly provides us with everything to enjoy"*

Money isn't inherently evil or good; it's morally neutral but our relationship to it and what we do with it can be good or evil

One of the lessons that Jesus teaches is that we shouldn't focus too much on money because it has the power to distract us from what is truly important

Look with me at **Matthew 6:19-21** and you'll see what I mean

***"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."***

The key teaching there is to not put too much focus on earthly wealth because it will steal our hearts away from the things of God

Another reason to not focus on money is that it doesn't last as we see in that passage from Matthew and again in **Proverbs 23:4-5**

*Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.*

**But as wise stewards we realize that fleeting wealth can be managed in a way that increases God's eternal glory and the prospect of doing that should bring us a great amount of joy**



## Conclusion

Giving back to God is meant to be a privilege and not a duty and it really is a very personal matter and each believer must also determine what kind of a steward they want to be

Still, it behooves us to keep in mind that God considers it robbery to give in any way other than he has prescribed

God blesses us with possessions for us to use first in order that we might give back to him and then for ourselves

And looking through the corrective lens of Scripture should help us to make wise choices

Recognizing that God owns everything and that he doesn't **need our money** but rather that he **desires our obedience** and our love and that by giving back to him a portion of what he has first given to us we can please him should motivate us to be biblical givers

And we should see that we all have the same opportunity to be equally faithful regardless of our economic status

Because faithful giving isn't a dollar amount, it's a set portion of what God gives so the dollar amount may be completely different for each believer while the sacrifice God desires is exactly the same from everyone

Look at the account of the widow in Mark 12 who gave just two copper coins which together only added up to a penny

The Lord blessed her offering even more than the larger amounts given by the wealthy because of her heart attitude in the giving and the faith in God that it demonstrated

You know, we all have the tendency to think that we couldn't possibly make due on what would be left if we gave God his portion first and then used the rest to live on

But we demonstrate faith in God's economy and show that we trust what he says when we do it anyway

God doesn't expect any of us to give more than we can afford

Look with me at **2Corinthians 8:12** - *For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.*

And he promises to take care of our needs when we are faithful to giving as he prescribes

**Luke 6:38** tells us – *give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*

When you stop to think about it, God is giving us the opportunity to partner with him in the funding of his work and then he blesses us by giving us the funds to invest and then blesses us further when we invest faithfully

Our focus this morning has been on finances or "treasure" but as I like to point out stewardship also includes our time, our talent, and the truth of the gospel and that all of those things come from God

And as resources all of them can be **wasted, spent, saved, or invested**

We can waste them on bad or worthless things; we can spend them on good or worthwhile things; we can save them for future wasting or spending; or we can invest them and multiply their value

And when we invest them for eternal purposes we multiply God's glory and that should make us all cheerful givers

We just need to trust that in doing things God's way we will be cared for as we see again in **Malachi 3:10**

*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*

Let's pray