

**Series: Sermon on the Mount, Chapt 6**  
**Sermon: Giving - Why Should I?**

**Matthew 6:1-4**

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

**Malachi 3:6-12**

“I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. 7 Ever since the time of your ancestors 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?’

8 “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’

“In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 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. 11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the Lord Almighty. 12 “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the Lord Almighty.

I shouldn't say it, but there are only 82 days left until Christmas. Somewhere between now and then, we will get Christmas trees and presents and cards and parties and concerts and everything that we associate with the holiday season. The reason I bring up the upcoming Christmas extravaganza is that I was thinking about the reasons we give Christmas presents. And it got me thinking about two different reasons we give gifts to each other. One of these is a good reason and the other is not so honorable. I don't know how your family does it, but we draw for names in our extended family gatherings. Everyone gets the name of someone and has a preset limit on what they can spend. A couple of years ago, I gave a gift that smacked on the wrong reason to give. I had the name of a relative and I remember as I was walking through the mall filled with people, “I am fulfilling my duty for the Holiday Spirit.” I was giving because there was an expectation, and I had a sense of duty and family pressure to come up with a gift. It had the face of unwanted responsibility and fulfilling an obligation rather than for giving because I wanted to give. Bah Humbug. There are days that we give because we think we have to give. And in the

end we become resentful and tired. But there is another way to give. Another Christmas, I received my brother's name in the annual drawing, and I came up with many different gifts that I wanted to give him. I remember being excited at the possibilities and the joy that he would receive when he opened up his gift. I didn't feel like I had to give out of a sense of duty or expectation, but from a sincere desire to give from the heart. I remember seeing his face light up when he tore open the paper to find a horn for his truck, one of those horns that goes, "UUUGGGGAAAHHHH". We had one of those horns on a boat growing up and I remembered that he loved that thing. Now he has one for his pickem-up truck. Sometimes we give because we think we have to, and sometimes we give because we want to, and there is a big difference.

I've been here at Oregon City for only 2 years now, and I have yet to give a sermon on giving. And I have to tell you that I'm uncomfortable with this preaching topic. And I think it's because I've heard way too many bad sermons on giving. You know the ones I'm talking about, "give because we need, give you should, give because you're a bad person if you don't." That kind of sermon just puts a bad taste in my mouth and makes my stomach queezy. But deep down, I know I need to give a sermon on giving, not because "we need it", but because it is one of the most spiritual things you can do. It's true, where your put your treasure, there your heart lies as well, according to Matthew Chapter 6. Someone asked me during the summer, "What Spiritual Discipline can I pick up beginning in the fall?" and I mentioned, "Tithing", and they asked, "Could you give me something else, I hoping for something less personal?" Money is one of the most personal subjects that touches the human soul. It's why we work, it's how we play, it's how we live. Jesus talked a great deal about money. Sixteen of thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. And I always thought about how selfish that was of Jesus. Of course, the person who receives the money will always ask for more and more. But if you look back into the scriptures, every time Jesus talked about giving, it was always someone else who was receiving - not him. In his parables, he preached about giving to those who needed it most. In his lesson with the widow and the two coins, he praised the widow for giving all she had to the temple courts, the very people who were against Jesus. How high of importance did Jesus think of giving? Even if you gave it to the people who would later crucify him, it was better than not giving at all. This morning, I wish to give you some insights and tidbits to think about as we assess our own level of giving and the reasons we give.

First, I believe that we give because we feel gratitude towards God. This is the first and foremost the reason to give. We give in response to God's gifts to us. And we carry on those blessings that we have received to others. That's how it works in families, does it not? Loving parents create loving kids. Who we are is what we have already

received. There are exceptions, of course, some kids end up not so good despite the most loving parents, and some kids end up being the greatest people you'll ever meet despite their parents, but for the most part, who you are is what was given to you. The same with God. We give because we feel ourselves richly blessed. It is out of thankfulness and our response back to God. God gets joy out of giving to his children. Likewise, we feel joy when we participate in that sacred ritual. We feel good when we give. That's the way it was supposed to work. God loves a cheerful giver, because that's what God is. God wants us to receive, he wants us to be blessed. Granted, we would like to tell God how to bless us, but the fact remains that God desires every one of his children to grow in faithfulness and love - IE, blessed. His love is for everyone. Some of my greatest memories of growing up is when I gave. A volunteer hour here, a visit to the nursing home there. In college, I still remember giving away anonymously some hard earned money to a family that I was close to who were in need. That's been two decades ago. As a college student and into seminary, I received scholarship help from a family at my church whom also remained anonymous. Every semester, they gave \$2000 to help fund my education. I can't tell you how thankful and how humble that makes one feel. And now, years later, Steph and I help support other college students as they go through their years of torment, er, education. We give because we have received, and there is great joy in giving. We are made in God's image, and God loves to give, therefore, we were built to give. If we don't give, we die. If you look at a map of the middle east, of the places that they speak about in the Biblical texts, you see two lakes. The first lake is the lake Galilee, or the sea of Galilee. The Jordan river flows into it from the North and leaves from the south. The lake receives the water and later gives it up. The lake is teeming with life, towns are built around it and it's fishing industry provides for the population. Jesus fished upon the sea, as did the Disciples. It is clean and filled abundant life. As the Jordan goes south from that lake, it empties into the Salt Sea, sometimes known as the Dead Sea. Water enters that lake, and it doesn't leave - there are no outlets. The water is either absorbed into the desert air or seeps into the ground. The Dead Sea doesn't give anything that's given to it, and nothing lives within it's waters. There is no life within it's depths, and towns and people don't abide there. A giver brings forth life, and those who hoard ultimately have nothing to show for it. We give because we have received.

Secondly, we give because we see giving as a part of our spiritual relationship with God. Not only do we give because of thankfulness of past gifts, but we give because we see it as a part of God's plan. We give so that other people can be thankful. My favorite scripture about giving comes from the Malachi text that we have this morning. Malachi asks the ludicrous question, "Can anyone rob God?" and the answer is yes. God, who has everything, and yet does not need anything, still asks us for our tithes and offerings. Instead of us thanking God for what he Has done, we give in anticipation for what he will do. "Test me in this", says God. "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." I have not met a single tither who has said, "I tithe, and boy was that a mistake." I have not heard of a single tither who wishes that they haven't done it. God says, "Test me". And we know God's promises are true. It would be impossible to say,

“God, I trust you” and keep a closed wallet. It would be like saying, “I trust my doctor”, but never going. Or saying, “I trust the batteries in my flashlight” but never going out at night because I’m scared of the dark.” “I trust my gas gauge in my car, but I’ll stop at every gas station just in case.” These examples sound silly, but so does not trusting God in His promises. Test him, and see if what he says is true. I haven’t heard of a single tither who hasn’t found it rewarding.

But Pastor Mike, you might say, I want to tithe, I want to give, but there is nothing left at the end of the month. Our accounts are depleted by the 30<sup>th</sup> and live paycheck to paycheck. This is where it really becomes a spiritual matter. And I can speak to this with honesty and sincerity. In my wedding couple premarital sessions, one of their last assignments is to make a budget. They have to show what they have going in, and going out each month. I don’t ask to see it, but I want to make sure that each side knows where the money is going. It’s the main cause of divorce nowadays, financial management. Not cheating, not abuse, not staleness, but where the money goes. And when I first started doing this, I thought I would hear things like, “I don’t know how we’re going to make it”, “There’s no way that we can survive.” That’s not what I generally hear 90% of the time, I hear, “Wow, at the end of the month we’re supposed to have X amount of dollars. We don’t know where that goes.” That’s what I hear most often, “We’re not sure what happened to that \$800.” It’s a spiritual issue because we waste so much of God’s blessings on things we don’t even see. The world nickels and dimes us to death and we have nothing to show for it at the end of the month. In college, I made so much a month. It wasn’t a great deal, but I could live on it. There is no way that I think that I could go back to that earning level and survive. I don’t think I can do it. Ask anybody. If you take away a portion of their income, they’re not sure how they can make it. Ask someone who makes \$20,000 a year. Could they make ends meet if you took away \$3,000? They wouldn’t think so. What if you ask a family that pulls in \$40,000 year. Could they make ends meet if you took away \$10,000? They wouldn’t think so. What if you ask a family that makes \$100,000 a year. Could they make ends meet if they gave away \$25,000? They wouldn’t think so, even though they would still net \$75,000. That’s human nature. We live at the means that we make, and we don’t see how we could easily get by with less - if we made the conscious decision to do that. I heard it like this, and this will stick with me until I die. We make so much money. We spend it on what we want. If there is money left over at the end, we put it into savings. If we discover that we have money after that, then we give it back to God. It goes Us, Savings, then God. But that is the opposite of the way it should be. We need to flip that around. We need to give to God first, the first fruits of our labor, and I don’t care if it’s 5, 10%, 15%, 20% - whatever you feel is spiritually right. And then we need to put a certain percentage into our savings - rainy day fund. We pay God, then our future, and lastly, we pay ourselves with what we have left. We live within the means after what we pay to God and our future. Of course, that’s all in a perfect world. We have a horrible time setting things aside for savings, let alone tithing. And we also carry with us an enormous amount of debt. We sacrifice our savings and our tithe because we want to live beyond our means today. I don’t think that any church would be in any financial

difficulty if it's members gave to the church what it gives in credit card interest payments. Take a look at just what you pay in interest each month. If that is more than what you give, then there is a huge spiritual problem. Where your money is, that is where your heart lies.

This sermon is not about making the church budget or even supporting it's programs. But it's about something more important than that. It's about our giving habits and our spiritual needs to be giving people. We have a need to give. It's programmed into us, that we find happiness when we give. Test me, God says, and see if you don't receive more than you can possibly fathom. And the gifts that you do give to the church - you have a say in where they go. They don't just disappear. In a few weeks, will be looking at our budget for 2016, and the church council - those voted in by our members, will be finalizing our budget in the next few months. That is the final reason people should give. They believe in the purposes in which their funding supports. You decide our budget. You decide our priorities. And we'll make the budget together, putting together our giving and the ministries in which they will support. I hope that you will look at your giving patterns, and see if your giving is out of a sense of obligation or out of a sense of desire. God loves a cheerful giver. God doesn't want your gifts if you think you have to give. Let's face it, that would be extortion. But He wants the gifts to be given out of thankfulness and faithfulness, that His love might be shown through the ministries and mission of your church. Maybe it's time for a life change, maybe it's time to test God and see if what He says is true. Thanks be to God, the giver of all good gifts. Amen.