

Tough Questions/Real Answers: SHOWERS OF BLESSING

**Malachi 3:8-12
II Corinthians 9:6-15**

Why does God want our money?

A sermon preached by
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I remember a story about two boys who were waiting on their special Saturday morning breakfast. Their mother was making pancakes. Kevin was 5, and Ryan was 3. As they began to see the pancakes turn golden brown, they began to argue about who would get the first pancake, hot off the griddle.

Mom saw an opportunity for a lesson, so she said, "If Jesus were here, he would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'"

Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "OK, Ryan, you be Jesus!"

Somebody ought to be like Jesus. But when it comes to sacrificing our wants and desires, it almost always ought to be someone else.

I had a man several years ago approach me in the fall and tell me, "Pastor, I want you to know that I have been praying about our finance campaign."

I said, "That's great. That's what we want you to do."

He continued, "Yeah, I've been praying for some millionaires to join our church!" Not exactly what we had in mind, but at least he was praying!

One of the things I've discovered over 40 years in the ministry is that nothing gets personal as quickly as talking about money. Actually, people love to talk about money—what things cost, what people are making, what investments are lucrative and what's tanking, the state of the economy, and so forth. But if the conversation turns to generosity, what people give, suddenly it becomes a very personal matter.

Not that being personal has ever stopped me from talking about anything. Personal means important, and when it's a matter of faith, we want it to get personal.

The tough question I want to ask and answer today is a little bit personal: "Why does God want my money?" The underlying principle here is that when we give to the church or some other Christian ministry, we are in fact giving to God. We are not just giving to a community organization to help pay the bills or provide services. There is a deeper meaning to it all. We are giving to God.

But why? Why does God care what we give? What difference does it make to be faithful in our giving, when we worship a God who is spiritual, not physical? God doesn't have to buy clothes or food or cars or send kids to college. Why does God want our money? That's a tough question! Let me suggest three real answers today.

First of all, God wants to be first in our lives. It's the way God is. God is God, and we are not. It's a God-thing: God wants to be first in our hearts, in our minds, in our worship. This became very clear on the holy mountain when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The very first commandment is, "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.*"¹

The reason God wants our money is because God wants everything else that we might worship to be secondary to God. And we can certainly worship wealth. God doesn't really need the money; God just needs our money to be less important than our relationship. God doesn't need the cash; God needs the obedience. God needs each of us to be in a relationship of servant to Master and to put God first.

That's why the amount of our gift doesn't matter. It doesn't matter to God one bit how much you give. What matters is the proportion of your wealth that you give to him. The proportion—the percentage you give—is what represents the amount of yourself you are giving to God with your gift. For some, a hundred thousand dollars would hardly be a drop in the spiritual bucket; for others, ten dollars a week would be a significant proportion and a meaningful gift. The proportion indicates who comes first.

Bob Russell, a retired pastor from Kentucky, tells about a moving testimony that he got several years ago during a building campaign. Jackie Nelson, a woman in his church, told him, "I am a single mother of three teenagers. My ex-husband does not help. I barely get by. We really want to do our part in this three-year campaign so our new building can be built. But when we discussed it as a family, we realized that we can't give any more than a tithe. (They were already giving 10% of their income to God!) So we decided that our gift would be to pray every day for the success of this program.

"But in the middle of our discussion my oldest son said, 'Mom, we've got cable television. We don't have to have that.' So we've decided to give up our cable TV for three years so we can do our part."² In terms of building a multi-million dollar church facility, that amount of money was fairly insignificant. But in terms of giving to God, it was a sacrificial gift for a family who was already tithing to give up cable television. That represented putting God first in their lives. Making priority decisions like that pleases our heavenly Father.

The good news is, with the commandment always comes the promise. In II Corinthians, Paul encouraged the Christians at Corinth to help the saints in Jerusalem who were destitute, then he promised them, "*You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others.*"³ This is how we give our thanks to God: put God first.

The second reason God wants our money is because **God wants all our priorities to be right.** Putting God first is our top priority, but then God wants to help us get the rest

of our lives in order as well. Giving is part of that. Giving our money to God helps put material things in perspective.

The late Tim Keller, one of America's best-known pastors, wrote in his book *Giving Power*, "You will always give effortlessly to that which is your salvation, to those things that give your life meaning. If Jesus is the one who saved you, your money flows easily into his work, his people, and his causes. If, however, your real religion is your appearance, your social status, or personal comfort, or pleasure, your money flows most easily into those items and symbols."⁴

We have a tendency, because we are physical beings, to overrate material things, to put them too high on our list. The reality is, we are not physical beings who occasionally have a spiritual experience; we are ultimately spiritual beings who for a little while are having a physical experience. When we understand that, giving is an easier thing to do.

I get it. It is a continual battle to keep from worshipping material things. But in the end, all our stuff is just stuff. Giving our stuff—our money—to God helps us keep our list straight: God first, then family, then church, then vocation, *then* stuff: toys and leisure and Razorbacks and golf and dessert and all the other stuff we really, really like, but in the end really, really doesn't matter at all. Keeping our priorities straight will ultimately bring us the victory.

God wants our money for one more reason: **God wants us to be happier than we can imagine.** This is counter-intuitive, because we normally think that having more stuff and better stuff will make us happier. In our heart of hearts, though, we know that is not true. Happiness will come, and come in abundance, only when we align our lives with the will of God, and the will of God for our lives includes our giving.

This is the point of those powerful words in the Old Testament, spoken by the prophet Malachi: "*Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, 'How are we robbing you?' In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. ... Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.*"⁵

This text starts off in a negative way, as most of the prophetic literature does, but the point is that if the people will faithfully give their tithes, then God will bless them and bless them abundantly, and the whole world will see how good they have it. What was happening to Malachi's congregation is the same thing that happens to us. They were suffering from what Steven Covey calls a "scarcity mentality."⁶ Times were tough; there had been a plague of locusts; and the crops had not come in very well. So the people had quit giving like they should. This seems reasonable enough. We don't have as much; there might not be enough to go around; God doesn't really need it; so we'll take more for ourselves.

We're doing pretty good in terms of locust plagues, but there have been plenty of stressors in our nation recently. We had a pandemic that killed a million people in our country. Recovering from the pandemic, inflation went up, and although inflation has leveled out, prices have not gone down. We have been suffering political turmoil. And our denomination has been under attack. The churches are all affected by this.

Different research organizations give different results for the number of tithers in America. It varies by the group you're talking about. Overall, somewhere between 5 and 10% of American Christian adults tithe.⁷ How can we expect God to bless America or our church or our lives if less than 10% of us are doing what God asks us to do?

God does not operate from a scarcity mentality. God has an abundance of everything. Faith is the ultimate abundance mentality. What does the Scripture say God wants to do to us? *"Put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.... Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight."*⁸

Paul wrote: *"The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work."*⁹ God wants you to be blessed abundantly, to be happier than you can imagine.

Generosity works like a boomerang. We throw it out, and God brings it back. We give of ourselves faithfully, and God promises to bless us in abundance. Jesus said, *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."*¹⁰ That's the economy of faith.

This is such awesome good news! It astounds me that people cannot or will not hear it that way. They hear sacrifice, obligation, pain, and poverty. That's not what God wants for us at all; the Bible says so. All we have to do is to obey God's Word, then trust God to be faithful to the promises God has made. Do you think we can do that? If we can, we won't end up counting our sacrifices; we will end up counting our blessings.

In *The Upper Room* devotional magazine, Karen Gallagher wrote about a friend of hers named Anne. Anne was single and did not have a high-paying job, but she tithed to her church and gave extra gifts to missions. She lived comfortably, but not beyond her means. Anne had a joy and confidence about her life that was contagious. So one day Karen asked her for her secret.

Anne said, "I follow God's plan and trust him." She went on to explain that her tithing wasn't an obligation but a privilege and a way of showing honor to God. "God has never let me down, even during the hardest of times," Anne said.

Karen felt God asking her to test this principle. So she began to tithe and has never looked back. She wrote, "God has faithfully kept the assurances given in the Bible, and blessings flow out to me day by day. Because God is faithful and generous, I always have enough."¹¹

What it's all about, when all is said and done, is trust. It's about relationship. God has shown us what God wants. God wants to be first. God wants us to have our priorities straight. God wants to make us happier than we could ever imagine. Building that relationship is why God wants our money. Building that relationship is why we give. That's one way we can be like Jesus, *and* enjoy our pancakes.

¹ Exodus 20:2.

² Bob Russell, *Leadership* (Fall 2002), *PreachingToday.com*.

³ II Corinthians 9:11-15.

⁴ Tim Keller, *Giving Power*, cited on *PreachingPlus.com*.

⁵ Malachi 3:8-12.

⁶ Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 219.

⁷ <https://www.vancopayments.com/egiving/church-giving-statistics-tithing>
<https://www.barna.com/research/what-is-a-tithe/>.

⁸ Malachi 3:10, 12.

⁹ II Corinthians 9:6-8.

¹⁰ Luke 6:38.

¹¹ Karen Gallagher, "Tithing," *The Upper Room*, September 23, 2009.