

The Holy Gift

By Lindy Baker

The Joy of Giving

As I've been reflecting on our good God who desires to fill us with joy, I've thought about the many ways that God has brought joy in my life. One way that was unexpected was found in the joy of giving.

To find joy in giving shouldn't be a surprise. We have a very generous God and it is clear that He enjoys providing for His children. Not only does He provide for all our needs, but He encourages us to let our requests be known to Him, in a desire to answer prayers and remind us of His deep care and love for us. God's generosity knows no bounds, even to the point of offering His son.

*But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:19)*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes
in Him wouldn't perish, but would have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

God wants His people to reflect His generous nature. He wants us to give to His church. He wants us to give to the needy and underprivileged around us. The Bible is full of examples of giving. It doesn't matter whether God has made us wealthy or if we only have enough to get by. Regardless, when we give to others and to the church we are changed. Instead of being people who "hold on" to our possessions and seek more for ourselves, we become people who "let go" and generously give to others, people who "care" about others, and people who "build" and "invest" in the future. In giving away our money and possessions we trust God to continue to provide for us. After all, our God has unlimited resources.

*Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the
Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.
(Deuteronomy 15:10)*

In the topics to follow, we are going to look at some scriptures in the Bible related to giving. We are going to look at Tithes and Special Gifts, Filling the Storehouse, Building the Temple, Giving to the Needy and Legacy Giving. Join us as we trust God in this area of our lives.

Tithes and Special Gifts

When I first became a Christian, making a tithe to the church was a new concept to me. I was familiar with putting money in the offering plate when it was passed, but did not really understand what it meant to tithe.

For those who are unfamiliar with this concept, tithing refers to returning the first 10% of your earnings back to God. In the Old Testament, earnings could take the form of harvests, cattle, or even wages. In giving a tithe, God's people recognized that God was the source of everything we receive in

life. It also showed faith and trust that God would continue to provide for us in the future. Returning 1/10th of one's earnings was a form of worship and thankfulness to God. This was also the one area in which God invited us to test Him.

Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. (Deuteronomy 14:22)

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. (Malachi 3:10)

In the Old Testament, tithes were given to the Levites. Their job was to be priests and lead the congregation in worship and understanding of God's word. Today, tithes are usually given to local churches to support their ministry budget and daily operations of the church.

In my life, there was a journey to achieve obedience in this area. It began with knowledge – learning what it meant to tithe. It was followed by a heart's desire to love and obey God fully. And finally, a re-prioritization of my finances had to take place. To make room for tithing in one's budget, a person may have to pay off debt, adjust their financial obligations, and gradually set aside funds for this purpose. For my family, we started at giving 1% and increased our giving each year until we were able to give 10%.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:7-8)

To be in a position to be generous, meet other's needs, and even to tithe requires us to be in control of our finances.

Filling the Storehouse

In the previous sections, we looked at the joy that comes from giving and what it means to tithe a portion of our earnings to God. Another type of giving we find in scripture is that of filling the storehouses.

In Genesis, we read about one of the sons of Jacob, Joseph, who was sold into slavery as a young boy and taken to Egypt. When Joseph was thirty, the Pharaoh had two dreams (Genesis 41:1-39)—one with seven fat and lean cows and the other with seven healthy and lean heads of grain. The Pharaoh's cupbearer remembered that a man he met in prison, Joseph, was able to interpret dreams. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams as foreshadowing seven years of famine that would follow seven years of plenty in the nation. Joseph recommended that the Pharaoh begin to prepare for those days of famine by “filling the storehouses” during the time of plenty. Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of the effort of setting aside a portion of the harvest so that they would be ready for leaner times.

They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. . . Joseph stored up

huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. . . . When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses . . . (Genesis 41:35, 49, 56)

Another way we might think about this type of giving is similar to our personal savings account or emergency fund. Just like individuals save for the future or for times of unexpected calamity, the church also builds reserves. We fill our storehouses as we prepare for the future.

Hope Church has reserves set aside for unexpected events like major equipment repairs, special one-time needs, and future expansion. Generally, special needs are shared with the congregation at the end of the year in our annual financial report. Also, before reserves are spent, they are brought to the church council for review and approval.

Individuals make special contributions to these reserves, on top of their regular offerings and tithes. These gifts to our reserves can be designated for a specific purpose or they can go the general reserve fund. Each individual should give in this area as he is led by the Lord.

Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you. (Deuteronomy 16:17)

Building the Temple

The house of God belongs to the people of God. It is their responsibility to provide for its construction and maintenance. A dedicated building is used for the general assembly of believers and worship. It also enables Christians to have a public presence in their community.

When it comes to building the house of God, the Bible does not teach us to do the bare minimum. In fact, quite the opposite. As we consider this facility is a place of worship, additional importance and priority are appropriate. Consider how King David directed his son Solomon in regards to building the temple. “This task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God” (1 Chronicles 29:1). Just as we don’t bring God the leftovers from our earnings as offerings, rather instead we bring the first fruits and the best of our earnings, we should have the same attitude toward the house of God. We should treat this building with respect and it should be presented as holy and spotless to God.

In our current culture we have shifted to an informality and casualness in our place of worship. If we are not careful, this casual attitude can infiltrate into our personal worship and spiritual disciplines. While we can worship in different ways toward God, we must never forget who God is—a King of kings and Lord of lords. Our building and worship should reflect the One we worship. As we continue reading 1 Chronicles 29:1-8, we see this reflected in the gifts brought for the construction of the temple—gold, silver, bronze, iron, precious stones, marble and financial gifts. This generous over-the-top giving brought joy and reward. “The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD” (1 Chronicles 29:9).

In providing for the building and maintenance of our church, there are two ways you can give. A portion of your monthly offering or tithe goes to general maintenance, such as utility bills, cleaning, and supplies. Major repairs or expansion of our facilities are usually funded through one-time gifts or special

offerings. During the financial report at year end to the congregation, capital projects and special needs are identified.

As a body of believers, I encourage each of you to give freely and wholeheartedly to your church and to provide for its needs. There is no better way to show the reverence and high esteem you have for the one you have built it for—God .

Giving to the Needy

Houston is full of generous self-sacrificing individuals. If you are sitting in rush hour traffic or shopping during the holidays, this may be hard to believe. But just a few months ago, in the midst of a catastrophic flooding event named Hurricane Harvey, we saw the underlying, self-sacrificing and giving nature of our neighbors as they helped rescue flood victims and then clean out and rebuild their homes.

Our church also had an opportunity to help in our community with McDonald's food cards, buckets of cleaning supplies, warm meals, clothing, Christmas cheer, and more. People from around the nation sent money to our church to distribute to those in need. What a great opportunity to reflect God in our community. As it says in Isaiah 58:10, "if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday."

On the first Sunday of every month, a special benevolence offering is collected. This offering is on top of the general offering, which is used to support the operating budget and programs of the church. These benevolence offerings support ministries that provide direct help to the needy in our community and globally, as well as support for those involved in mission work and church planting.

"Benevolence" is used to describe the nature of this offering. Deuteronomy 15 describes this type of giving as "openhanded", "generous", and "free" . . .

If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites [Houstonians] in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. . . Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. (Deuteronomy 15: 7-8, 10)

Jesus noticed those less fortunate in life—those who were afflicted and struggling on the sidelines of every day life. He spoke to the undeserving, healed them and showed compassion for their suffering. As he said, "it is more blessed to give than receive" (Acts 20:35). Let's make a New Year resolution today to be generous, openhanded, and to give freely to those in need in our community. Let's shine our light brightly as we honor God in this area of giving.

Legacy Giving

What will be the legacy of Hope Church? The leadership of our church has been giving this question a lot of thought over the past few months. As we approach a milestone in our church – saying goodbye to

a beloved founding pastor of the past 32 years and welcoming a new pastor sometime in the summer of 2018, this question will define not only who we have been as a church but who we are going to be.

Throughout scripture we see a God who has an eternal perspective. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He sees eternity – past, present and future. The recorded testimonies of the scriptures show us the lives of past believers and nations. His precepts and commands guide our actions in the present. Biblical prophecies and promises of God reveal the future He has in store for us. Clearly, God is a God of generations.

We have a part in creating a legacy for our church. The importance of teaching our children and future generations about God, His attributes, and His commands is taught in the Bible. “We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done . . . so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.” (Proverbs 78: 4, 6-7).

Giving is also a part in creating a legacy. It establishes a financial foundation for Hope Church. It enables us to support our staff and to have a building (temple) in which to worship. It enables us to have adult, youth, and children ministries that build the faith in our members. It enables us to have outreach to our communities. It enables us to perform benevolent deeds and provide financial gifts to the needy in our community and beyond. It enables us to support missionaries as they spread the gospel to nations around the world. It enables us to plan for the future.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Your offerings and financial gifts to Hope Church have an impact that go far beyond our small group of believers. Your offerings and gifts support our efforts to lay a foundation for a spiritual legacy that we hope to pass on to our families, community and world. Hope Church greatly appreciates all that you give—financially, in service, in ministry, and in prayer. Thank you.