

## Maximize – Maximizing Your Treasure: Part 2

Feb. 2 – Pastor Randy

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Matt. 25:14-18

*“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip. “The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money.”*

Today is the second part of a two-part message I have entitled, “What is in your hand?”, focusing on the subject of Christian stewardship. Jesus told a story to illustrate the responsibility his followers have to be good stewards, or managers, of the resources God has entrusted to them. In this story found in Matt. 25, Jesus told of a lord of a wealthy estate who went on a journey and entrusted varying amounts of money to his servants to manage for the sake of his earthly estate or kingdom. The first two servants put their master’s money to work and doubled it. They were each commended, promoted, and celebrated because they were faithful. The third servant put no effort into investing the money. He buried it. The master scolded this servant for his dereliction of duty, his laziness, which showed an utter lack of respect for his master. Last week we began by noticing that followers of Jesus are stewards of God’s resources and that means they have a responsibility work at managing them faithfully. The third principle we learned was:

### **Principle #3: God Does Not Micromanage His Stewards.**

The master entrusted his resources to his servants. That means he trusted them by giving them freedom to make decisions informed by the Word and influenced by the Spirit. We do not find in the Bible a universal budget that all Christians must follow. What about tithing? Didn’t God tell us to give 10% to the church?

Most churches encourage their members to practice tithing in order to support the work of the local church. Others have argued that tithing is not

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taught in the NT and should not be practiced by Christians because it was part of the OT law and to encourage tithing is to place Christians back under a law from which Jesus has set us free. There are some merits to that argument. There are problems with suggesting that the practice of tithing is binding on Christians in the same way that it was on the Israelites. The tithing practiced by Christians today does not follow the specific commands on tithing found in the OT. Scholars aren't even in agreement as to whether there was one tithe or two tithes paid each year. This means the Jews in the OT possibly tithed up to 20%. Under the Mosaic Covenant, no tithes were paid in the seventh year. No church tells people to stop tithing every seventh year!

When we encourage tithing we don't do so because we feel the need to abide by the OT law. We encourage it as a scriptural principle rather than a law. First of all, the principle of tithing is found in scripture prior to the OT law. The OT tithing commands reveal the wisdom of God in providing a system for the regular support of the Kingdom of God.

You can recognize God's wisdom in instituting the tithe and employ it as a principle in your life just as you might do with the Sabbath. Neither are binding on NT Christians but they still reflect wisdom from God for his people. It can be practiced as a wise discipline, motivated by God's grace and the Holy Spirit. The problem I see with those who oppose tithing based on the premise that the NT teaches that we are not under the law but under grace is that this argument is almost always made as a reason for giving less than 10%. Behind the argument often lies the attitude that giving is a burden put upon us rather than a blessing to us. The OT tithe established a bare minimum. God's grace shouldn't lessen our generosity, it motivates us to be more generous and less selfish.

There are some very practical benefits or blessings of tithing.

1. Tithing is a regular planned offering. A good steward plans his spending. A financial budget is not only for those whose spending is out of control. Planning is what wise, responsible, Spirit-led, people do. Tithing helps Christians to establish a consistent starting point for their giving.

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2. Tithing turns giving into a habit. Our habits form our character. The habit of giving makes giving a part of our character. Tithing is almost always most difficult for people when they first start practicing it. After a while it becomes second nature.

3. Giving the tithe of the first of one's income was a directive from a wise God who wanted his people to learn to place God first. When you give to God first your actions preach about the priority of God's kingdom. The 10% minimum is a good way to preach to ourselves that we value God's work.

4. Giving the tithe of the first of one's income was a directive from a wise God who wanted his people to learn to trust him. Giving a tithe to God first teaches us to trust him. There is no trust involved in giving leftovers.

5. The command to tithe created a consistent and clear expectation for everyone regarding their responsibility to the community.

Potential Pitfalls with Tithing:

1. Some people oppose tithing because they feel it removes the heart and spontaneity from giving. It can, but it doesn't have to. Giving doesn't have to be spontaneous in order for it to be Spirit-led. You can plan your giving and still be led by the Spirit in your planning. Pray about your %.
2. Tithing only out of obligation. Giving nothing less, AND nothing more!!
3. Tithing, or any giving, practiced under compulsion is contrary to NT teaching. *"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

We already established that everything we have belongs to God and needs to be stewarded for His glory. Tithing can be a problem if it leads to us leaving God out of the picture when managing the other 90% of our income. All our resources need to be managed for God's glory, our good, and the good of others. God has given us freedom because ultimately he wants us to make decisions that are informed by his Word and influenced by His Spirit.

**Principle #4: Faithful Managers Don't Compare and Compete.**

A couple of weeks ago I warned against comparing your gifts and talents

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with the gifts and talents of others. The same applies to financial resources. Last week Jessie mentioned that God had shown her and Fabio the foolishness of “keeping up with the Joneses”.

Giving is not a competition. God never called you to out-perform others in your service to Him. What he is looking for is faithfulness to do **what you can with what you have**. The servants were entrusted with **varying amounts** of money to manage according to their **varying abilities**. The reason the third servant was punished was not because he didn't do as much as the others, but because he didn't even do the least that he should have done. He did less than the least. He did nothing!

Comparing and competing is one of the most destructive traps that Christians can fall into. It turns teammates into opponents, coworkers into competitors. Even worse, when giving becomes a competition it corrupts the motives of the giver, transforming it from an act of love for God and people into an act motivated by a desire to gain attention and praise for oneself.

For many of my years as a youth pastor we would gather once a year for an annual youth convention, during which awards would be given to the churches that gave the most to STL. I'm sorry to say, but the thrill of the competition and the hunger to be recognized as one of the top giving churches was often a greater motivation than the desire to spread the gospel to those who have never heard.

God is concerned with faithfulness, not a particular level of performance, because faithfulness is measurement of love whereas performance is a measure of capacity or ability. God is more concerned that you love Him than he is with what you accomplish for Him.

I'm glad I don't need to present God with a resume in order to be accepted into his eternal kingdom. I am glad my acceptance is because I am his child through faith in Jesus. But I would love to hear God say, “Well done!” I pray that one day when I stand in God's presence and He shows me the impact of **my** stewardship, I will not look back with regret and realize that I squandered my resources. I hope I will hear him say, “Well Done, well done”!

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Put your resources to work, yes! But **do not** work for God's approval, work for His glory and for the good of His kingdom.

**Principle #5: God blesses the faithful...so they can be more faithful."**

At the end of Jesus parable about the three stewards we read the master saying, "To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance." This notion, that God increases the capacity of those who are faithful and generous with the resources God has given to them, is also taught in 2 Corinthians 9:6-12,

*Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the **one who plants generously will get a generous crop**. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say, **"They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever."***

*For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, **he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you**. Yes, **you will be enriched** in every way **so that you can always be generous**. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.*

The context of this passage is Paul's appeal to the Christians at Corinth to be faithful to a promise made earlier to take up a sacrificial offering for their Christian neighbors in Jerusalem who were in great need due to a famine.

Unfortunately, some preachers have used Jesus words in Matt. 25, and Paul's in 2 Corinthians, to teach a "give to get" mentality. This is a tragic irony because the message in these passages is not "Give so you can get" but "Give so you can give even more". Let's pray that God will increase our financial resources. Why? So we can raise the money to build a Bible school in the Amazon in Ecuador; so we can support more missionaries like the Barrale's; so we can fulfill the vision God has given us to build a multi-purpose center.

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For those who don't know, we are asking God to increase our financial resources so we can build adequate space for our Calvary Kids and Illuminate youth ministries; and so we can expand our outreach to children and youth in our community; and so we can expand our Food Pantry ministry to our community. It will also provide us with a space where our whole church family can gather together. When we give generously to God's Kingdom priorities, God will generate something great from our generosity.