

## Finances

The Bible has much to say about our money and possessions, probably because God knows the state of the human heart and how we are so easily swayed by things of this world. Like any other area of our Christian life, it is imperative that we have good theology and that our doctrine penetrates how we actually live. At Venture, we teach regularly on the subject of money, primarily because:

- 25% of Jesus' words in the Gospels are related to our resources and stewardship of them
- In the OT & NT combined, there are over 800 verses that deal with a wide variety of financial topics including planning, budgeting, saving, investing, debt and tithing
- Money is one of the greatest idols in the world, especially in American culture
- Money is a critical component to the growth and health of the church

At its base level, we believe that money is simply a **tool** given to us by God. Money helps provide for our needs and enables us to enjoy things in life, but it is also a tool to bless, help and serve others. Money is not the only tool at our disposal, but it is important for us to prioritize leveraging our finances and possessions for their true purpose because **our money is most effective when it is used in line with how God calls us to use it.**

Fortunately, God provides a guide for how we should use money in His Word. The Old Testament introduces the practice of *tithing* (a tithe = a "tenth") and spells out what the tithes were to be used for:

- The people of Israel were commanded to give 10% of their income and the produce of their fields to the Levite priests as their payment for serving in the Temple, and the priests were, in turn, commanded to tithe on that income as well (Numbers 18:21-29; Leviticus 27:30).
- The tithe and additional gifts were also used to pay for festivals to build community and for celebration (Deuteronomy 12:10-11, 17-18; 14:22-27).
- One third of the Temple tithe was set aside to help the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29).
- These tithes on produce, livestock and income were given above and beyond the other offerings and gifts that were required at certain times of the year, in certain seasons of life or in thanksgiving for God's provision and acts of salvation.
- When the Israelites harvested their fields they were commanded to leave the edges of the fields for the poor and alien (Leviticus 19:9-10).
- Occasional additional offerings were also given above and beyond regular giving (Nehemiah 10:32-33).
- All-in-all, the total "mandatory" Old Testament tithe resulted in over 25% of a family's gross income.

The New Testament does not often use the word "tithe," but one instance of its use is in Matthew 23:23. In this passage, Jesus talks about religious people who are scrupulous enough to even tithe on their mint, dill and cumin. In the Torah (Law), tithing on spices like these was not required. Jesus does not condemn these religious people for the practice of giving more than is required, but He condemns them for neglecting justice, mercy and faithfulness (the "weightier" matters of the Torah) in the process. He says that they should focus on the weighty matters while not neglecting the additional tithe.

In the early church and the New Testament writings, the practice of giving to the work of God was commonly understood and was even expected. During his missionary journey in Asian Minor, Paul collected a gift from the Gentile churches there and brought it to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27; Acts 24:17). In 1 Corinthians 16:2 we see that Paul even instructed the believers in Corinth and in Galatia to give a portion of their income for this offering, saying, "On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and save in keeping with how he is prospering (CSB)." In 2 Corinthians chapters 8 & 9 Paul helps us understand this grace-centered giving, describing it as a joy and an honor, a matter of the heart and as something that should come from our "first fruits." This kind of giving should also be done regularly, cheerfully, sacrificially and is in proportion to our faith. While the amount given is between the individual and God, the giving itself is not in question. Romans 12:8 also describes giving as a special gift that some have a greater measure of; these people find great joy in giving generously to bless others.

At Venture, we want to be generous in giving our time, abilities and resources in order to bless others. We believe that when we honor God with our resources, including our income, He will take care of our needs and we will have more than enough (Proverbs 3:9-10).

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