

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY GIVING?

'He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."' (Matt 22.37-39)



'Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received' (1 Peter 4.10)

Giving is not just about money. The Gospels challenge us to be **generous in every aspect of our lives**. Generosity is also about offering hospitality, giving our time and using our skills in the service of others. And not just in our churches, but also in our homes, our workplaces and communities - well beyond our family and friends.

Living generously may be costly. It may involve us actively embracing a simpler lifestyle, which can be hard when we live in a society that places great store on material wealth. The pressure from advertising and marketing can be hard to resist, but St Paul urges us to 'learn contentment' with what we have.

It's good to make time on a regular basis to look at our budgets – not just in terms of how we spend our money, but in **how we 'budget' our time and energy**. People in Britain work longer hours and own more possessions than ever – but none of the studies suggest we are any happier than we used to be.

Why not set aside an hour to think prayerfully about your lifestyle? What values do our bank statements reflect? What do our diaries say about our priorities? Are there ways **we can be more generous** in the way we live?

CONTACT

Through our Christian Giving and Funding Adviser, the Diocese of Oxford provides churches with resources designed to help encourage generous giving. In particular, 'Mission-shaped Giving' is intended to help churches understand where stewardship and giving fits into their regular prayer, planning and communications mix.

For more information, contact:

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RESOURCES

- www.oxford.anglican.org/christian-giving-and-funding
Information on Christian giving and funding from the Diocese of Oxford
- www.givinggrace.org
Some good notes on liturgy, preaching and prayer resources from the Diocese of Liverpool
- www.parishresources.org.uk/givingforlife
Material to help in preaching and teaching about giving, including information about Gift Aid and legacies, produced by the Church of England
- www.southwark.anglican.org/what/trio
'The Responsibility is Ours' programme from the Diocese of Southwark
- www.themoneyrevolution.net
Help in applying Christian principles to handling your money
- www.churchlegacy.org.uk
Practical help on wills and legacies

'We love because he first loved us.' (1 John 4.19)



GIVING A SIMPLE GUIDE



We have an abundantly generous God. Jesus's death on the cross was the ultimate demonstration of that generosity. How do we as Christians respond? Giving is an outworking of our faith. It's all about living generously, something that's at the heart of our 'Living Faith' vision. Generosity is part of our discipleship; it's how we make a difference in the world, and it's an indication of the vibrancy of our Christian communities.

PRAYER

*Generous God
you give us so much.
Every breath is a gift,
every sight, sound, taste and touch;
every friend and loved one.
Teach us now to respond to such abundance
with love and imagination
and to share your generosity with a needy world
through a servant Church.
May ours be a 'living faith'
that makes a difference in the lives of others
through the extravagant love of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen*

John Pritchard
Bishop of Oxford



A GENEROUS GOD

'All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.' (1 Chron 29.14)

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.' (John 3.16)

We have a **generous** God who gives us good things in great abundance. God's love for humanity is overflowing. He gives graciously in his creation and the daily sustaining of life. Above all, he gave us his Son Jesus, who gave of himself utterly, to the point where he died on the cross for us.



The Bible shows us time and again that **God's giving is extravagant**. The earthly life and parables of Jesus show this generosity in action. Remember the wine overflowing at Cana and the 12 basketfuls leftover on the hillside. Think how many of the events of his life and the stories he told involve celebrations and feasts, and the unstinting sharing of himself with others. The Gospels show Jesus outspoken in his rejection of any meanness of spirit.

Through his example, Jesus showed us a **radically different way of living**, one that sees justice restored and the hungry fed. As Christians, trying to become more Christ-like, we are challenged to live in a way that helps bring about God's kingdom and shares in the flow of his generosity.

Generosity, then, is **part of the outworking of our faith**. It is part of our discipleship. And it's not just about the giving of our money. Rather, it's about the way we spend our time, our talents and our possessions. If we can learn to live generously, it will have an impact on our whole lives.

WHY SHOULD WE GIVE?

'If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbour. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.' (Deut 15.7)

'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' (Matt: 6: 19-21)

There are more than 2300 verses in the Bible about money and possessions. More than a third of Jesus's parables were about our relationship to wealth.

The emphasis of his teaching was not about how much we should give and to whom. It was about where our heart is – what's most important to us and where we find security. Jesus knew that for those of us who are rich (and everyone in Britain is unimaginably rich compared to most of the world) it's hard to learn what it means to trust God. There's a real danger that wealth dulls our spiritual appetite.

The Bible suggests that generous giving should be:

- **A priority** – rather than about 'spare change'
- **Prayerful** – an act of worship and thanksgiving
- **Planned** – but not prescriptive
- **Proportionate** – realistic to our income
- **Communal** – for the needs of others, and with others for a common purpose
- **Sacrificial** – reflected in our lifestyles
- **Cheerful** – given as an offering to God.

People sometimes feel that 'the Church' is always asking for money. It costs a lot of money to train, resource, house and pay the clergy and to run our historic buildings. Meeting the parish share can feel like a massive struggle. But there's a difference between *paying* for the running of the church and *giving*. As someone once said, 'Giving is what we do when the paying stops.'



HOW CAN WE GIVE?

'Honour the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.' (Prov 3.9-10)

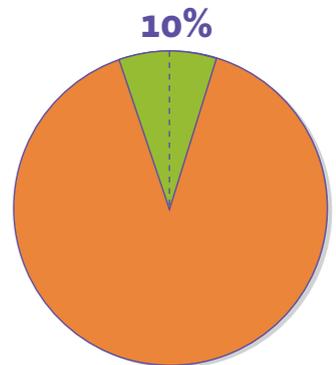
'Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.' (2 Cor 9.7)

When John Wesley was young he gave away a tenth of his income. As he grew richer he continued to live on the same amount as when he was young, and gave all the rest away. A priest in our own time advised, 'Think of the amount you can give – and then double it.'

It's a good idea to think about our giving prayerfully and regularly, as our circumstances change. You may like to remember the phrase 'live simply that others might simply live'.

TITHING

In the Old Testament, tithing was the law. Tithing means giving one tenth of all one's total income. Today some people give 10% of their income after tax, others from their total income.



PART TITHING

The General Synod of the Church of England encourages us to give 5% of our income after tax to God's work through his Church, and a further 5% to charities.

FIRST FRUITS

We may prefer to give our first fruits. This means calculating how much we earn each week, dividing this by the number of hours we work, and giving an hour's pay.

PROPORTIONATE GIVING

We may prefer to give some other fixed proportion of our income after tax.

Don't forget that our giving can be worth substantially more to the Church or charity through the **Gift Aid** scheme. Talk to your parish stewardship promoter or treasurer for advice.