

THE GOSPEL- CENTERED GIVER

Why “God Wants Your Money”
is a Wonderfully Biblical Truth

by BRYCE MORGAN

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God Wants Your Money

Do you want to hear a dangerous statement? *God wants your money.*

In a culture where every place you turn there seems to be some solicitation or scam, in a culture where every place you turn many people are still struggling to make a living, it seems dangerous to talk about God wanting your money.

But more than that, in a culture where so-called preachers appear on your television begging you to send money, in a culture where Christian ministries and ministers have been indicted on charges of fraud and embezzlement, and consequently (and understandably), in a culture that often throws stones at the church and declares, "They just want your money!", it seems like a dangerous statement, doesn't it?

But even among those of us who believe God is the Creator of all things, and the Sovereign King over His creation, the owner of the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10), the All-sufficient One who needs nothing from us (Acts 17:24-25), it just seems to be a dangerous thing to say.

But none of that changes the truth: God wants your money. How can I say that? Because the teaching we find in the Bible leads us to that conclusion. In fact, the Scriptures have a lot to say about money. Did you know there are well over 2000 verses on money in the Bible? Did you know it was a common topic in the teachings of Jesus? And because it is such a common topic in God's word, we shouldn't shy away from talking about it, no matter how uncomfortable it can make us feel.

The Example of the Macedonians

Here's a helpful passage in understanding this idea that God wants your money: II Corinthians 8:1-5. The background here is that the Apostle Paul and his co-laborers were collection an offering from non-Jewish churches for their impoverished brothers and sisters in Judea. Listen to what Paul tells the Corinthians about how God was at work in the churches in Macedonia, a region in northern Greece. This would include the churches in Philippi and Thessalonica. Listen to what he writes:

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, [2] for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. [3] For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, [4] begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—[5] and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

What we have here is a beautiful illustration of genuine giving to God's work. In light of this passage, think about what we can learn from these ancient disciples about giving to God's work:

1. Our Giving Should Be *Grace-Inspired* Giving

In verse 1 Paul describes the incredible giving of the Macedonian churches by first talking about, not their gift, but God's gift to them:

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia...” God’s grace was at work in these churches. God’s grace was transforming their minds, reordering their priorities, and softening their hearts. Before Paul begins to lift up the Macedonians, he is quick to make sure the glory goes to God and God alone.

2. Our Giving Should Be *Unconditioned* Giving

Moving on to verse 2, we quickly realize that God’s grace is the only way to explain what we read here. Paul writes: “...for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.” What’s hard to miss in this passage is that the condition of these churches was anything but ideal when it came to the issue of giving. These churches were characterized by “extreme poverty”. But amazingly, these conditions did not affect their giving. It was unconditioned giving. If anyone had a reasonable excuse to get out of giving, it was these people. But the Macedonian Christians nullified that classic excuse, “Well, I’m just not in a position to give at this time.” They gave in light of poverty... out of their own poverty!

3. Our Giving Should Be *Joyful* Giving

In verses 2-4, we learn more about the motive behind this uncommon generosity. Because of their “abundance of joy” (v. 2) these believers gave “of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints” (vs. 3-4). So

not only did this church give when their circumstances seemed to prescribe just the opposite, but they gave, not out of an overpowering sense of obligation or pressure from Paul, but they gave freely, with great joy; even begging to be a part of this charitable work. Ask yourself a question about being this kind of “cheerful giver” (9:7): “What kind of heart or perspective must someone have that would lead them to beg for the opportunity to give their money to someone else... especially when they had so little to give?”

4. Our Giving Should Be *Others-Focused* Giving

But don't forget what Paul told us in verse 4 about the goal of their giving. They were giving “for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints”. They were eager to give so that others could be blessed. It was the need of their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and Judea that stirred their hearts. You see, the Macedonians were responding partly out of gratitude for the spiritual blessing they received from the Jewish people because of Jesus the Messiah (cf. Romans 15:25-27). Additionally, Paul goes on the next chapter to describe how this giving is “not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God”, so that now “they long for you and pray for you” (9:12, 14). Consider that: are your financial gifts producing thanksgiving and prayers to God?

5. Our Giving Should Be *Gospel-Centered* Giving

Let's go back to that earlier question: “What kind of heart or perspective must someone have to give in

this way?" And that leads to additional questions: "Where does that perspective come from? How can people like us, who so often worry about money, who so often cling to money, who so often chase after money, who so often mismanage money, who so often waste money, who so often find our security in money, who so often feel we never quite have enough...how can people like us be people like this?"

Thankfully, Paul goes on to provide an answer in verse 5. In light of the Corinthians' example, Paul writes, "[it was] not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us." The Macedonians only gave with such hope and joy and generosity because they had first given everything they were, and everything they had, to Jesus Christ in faith. You see...

**They gave their money to God because God
already had their hearts.**

And when God had their hearts, they had God's heart. And when they had God's heart, they recognized that giving to Paul, that giving to the poor in Judea was giving to God. So this is why it is perfectly right to say that "God wants your money". Because if God has your money, then it usually confirms that God has what he really wants: your heart. God wants your money, because God wants you... all of you.

You see, that to which you give your money in this manner, with eagerness, in spite of circumstances, that is the very thing to which you are giving your heart. Think about this hard question: What would your checkbook log tell us about to what or to whom you have first given yourself?

When you give yourself to Jesus Christ, you are giving yourself to His priorities. You are giving yourself to the things that matter to God. You have new eyes to see that your money is not simply a tool for your own provision, but a means of blessing. You have new eyes to see that everything you have actually belongs to God. When we give ourselves first to the Lord, we have new eyes to see that what matters most financially is that which causes others to “glorify God because of our submission flowing from our confession of the gospel of Christ” (II Corinthians 9:13). That is a worthwhile work. That is an eternal work. That is the work of the church.

Are you a grace-inspired giver? Are you an unconditioned giver? Are you a joyful giver? Are you an others-focused giver? You cannot be unless you are first a gospel-centered giver. Listen to how Paul expresses the unchanging gospel message in this particular context:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (8:9)

A gospel-centered giver is driven to give because of Jesus’ gift to us: the gift of his life. He gave himself over to an agonizing death on a cross, all because of love. And our response is not to first give him our money. The only right response is to respond in like manner and give him your life. And when we do that, by faith (because of the grace of God), we will naturally give our money as well to His purposes. We will give our money to that which will help others know the richness of life that comes because of Jesus’ poverty on the cross.

“God wants your money”. God chooses to use money in this world, not first as a means of getting things accomplished. He can send manna from heaven. He doesn’t need a dollar from you to buy bread. No, he chooses to use money because he chooses to use people in order to extend His blessings. And because He uses people, he uses money to refine us. He uses it as a window into our hearts.



On God and Money (A Short Q&A)

Q: When laying a solid foundation in terms of understanding godly giving, where should I start?

A: To begin with, we must embrace the fact that everything belongs to God. Everything you have was given to you by and ultimately belongs to Him. That includes every item in your house, every dollar in your bank account, the lost change under your car seat, your investment portfolio, and the list could go on. That means we are not owners of what we have, but stewards (or managers) of what God has given us. Over and over Scripture confirms God's ultimate ownership: “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.” (Deuteronomy 10:14); “The earth is the LORD's and all that fills it, the world and those who dwell in it.” (Psalm 24:1); “...nor is [God] served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:25). And if we believe that our

own labor and strength are the source of our money and possessions, we need to “remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth...” (Deuteronomy 8:18) This understanding is absolutely foundational. As long as I think that what I have is ultimately mine, being a faithful steward will always be beyond my reach. If a friend gave you a \$1000 to invest, how careful would you be with that money? Shouldn't we be even more careful with God's money?



Q: In addition to giving to the poor (as we saw in II Corinthians 8), to what other needs does God's word call us to give?

A: Other books of the New Testament describe several, different needs for which Christians were called to regularly give. Philippians 4 tells us these same disciples in Macedonia also gave generously to Paul in order to support his ministry of evangelism and church planting (4:15-16—cf. 1:3-5). The book of Acts describes how the first Christians gave in order to meet the needs of others in their own church (2:45; 4:34-45), especially those were struggling to care for themselves. Finally, I Timothy 5 tells us that pastor-elders who rule well, and excel at preaching and teaching should be financially supported in their work (5:17-18). All of these emphasize the principle of giving to and through the local church. Galatians 6:10 tells us, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” From the context it's clear Paul is talking here

about the local church. According to Scripture, the church is the only organization through which God is carrying out His work of grace. This, of course, doesn't keep us from giving to other causes, it just means the church should be our priority, because it's His priority.



Q: What if I find that fear of not having enough hinders my desire to give?

A: In the very next chapter of 2 Corinthians Paul describes the confidence we can have about our gifts and our giving. He writes, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work... He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." (2 Corinthians 9:8, 10) As the Macedonian believers desired to give, amazingly, God gave according to their desire. It's also important to remember this well-known verse from the Apostle Paul: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) Did you know Paul said that while talking about money? The strength he describes in that verse is the strength that God provides to get us through any and every situation: times of plenty and times of need. That's why, in light of their monetary gift to him, Paul goes on to encourage the Philippians (again, these same Macedonian believers) by writing in verse 19, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

This lines up with the Old Testament, and the reassurance it gives. If God has the 'first place' in your heart, then He should have the 'first place' in your weekly or monthly spending plan. As we read in Proverbs 3:9, 10, "Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine."



Q: *How much should I give? Does the Bible talk about a specific amount or percentage?*

A. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about this collection for the poor, he instructed them, "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, *as he may prosper...*" (I Corinthians 16:2) Concerning this same project, we've already heard how the Macedonian believers "gave according to their means" (II Corinthians 8:3). Though (wonderfully!) the Macedonians ended up giving "beyond their means", these verses are reminders that God's general instruction is to give *proportionally* (i.e., to give in proportion to the way that God prospers you individually). What does that mean practically? Well, it's going to mean something a little different for each person. But a good place to start is with what the Bible calls the "tithe", that is, giving the first tenth of what God has given to you. When it comes to percentages, let me stress the most important number: God wants one-hundred percent.. of you! He wants you surrender everything to him. But when we do that, we also discover that throughout the Bible, giving ten percent was a very

common practice. Abraham and Jacob gave God a tenth in the book of Genesis, well before the Law of Moses. The Law itself called the Israelites to give a tenth back to God. And Jesus said this to the Pharisees in Luke 11:42, "But woe to you Pharisees! For you *tithe* mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." (Luke 11:42) Jesus didn't condemn the practice of tithing here. He condemned the Pharisees' failure to walk in justice and love. To be clear about this: I am not saying that giving God a tenth of your income is a biblical requirement. But it's clearly a biblical precedent, and it's a precedent we should take seriously when we think about giving "according to our means". If you cannot give a tenth, that's okay. But give something regularly, and make giving a tenth your goal. And as God prospers us in new ways, we can also give in new ways, above and beyond that tithe.



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