

GIVE BEYOND THE TITHE

Mark 12:41-44

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Our vision at Church Acadiana is to reach unchurched people and help them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus. And specifically, we want to reach parents for Christ and then teach them to disciple their kids in the home.
2. The next step for us is to build our first building, and to do that we're about to start raising money. Where is the money going to come from? It's going to come from us. We are going to have to give over and above our tithes and offerings to come up with the money -- \$350,000. We are about to embark upon a two-year journey in which we will all have to stretch ourselves to reach our financial goal and get this equipping center built. We are asking you to make a pledge -- to make a commitment to give a certain amount of money, over what you normally give, to help us build our first building.

II. GIVING EXERCISE NUMBER 1

1. Let me give you an idea of what that might look like for you.
2. There are three levels of giving:
 - Beginning givers: You give 0-4% of your gross income to the church.
 - Consistent givers: You give 5-9% of your gross income to the church.
 - Tithing givers: You give 10% or more of your gross income to the church.
3. For us to build our building, we're going to need everyone to give over and above what they normally give.
4. If you are a Beginning Giver or a Consistent Giver, I don't want you to give to Build to Equip. I simply want you to make a commitment to increase your giving to the church general fund.
5. If you are Beginning Giver, I want to challenge you to become a Consistent Giver, giving 5-9% of your gross income to the church.
6. If you are a Consistent Giver, I want to challenge you to become a Tithing Giver, giving a full 10% of your gross income to the church.
7. If you are already a Tithing Giver, then Build to Equip is especially for you. I want you to pray about giving above and beyond your regular tithes and offerings, and designate that extra to Build to Equip. For example, if you give 10%, then pray about doubling that, or tripling that. You keep giving the same amount to the church general fund, but then the extra amount is what you will designate to Build to Equip.
8. That's what I want you to be praying about. And I want you to come on October 16 ready to make your pledge.

III. THE GENEROSITY LADDER

1. To prepare us for this season of giving, we are doing a special sermon series on generosity called "The Generosity Ladder." The goal is to help us grow in generosity.
2. Why are we calling this series "The Generosity Ladder"? We are talking about the sequential steps that have to be taken for a person to go from a stingy heart, to a generous heart. Take a look at the picture on the screen.

3. The third step is to start with the tithe, because generosity doesn't technically begin until after you have tithed. The first ten percent is required; generosity begins when we freely and joyfully give over and above the tithe.
4. The fourth step on the generosity ladder is to go beyond the tithe.
5. A lot of Christians tithe, but that's all they give. But God doesn't want you to stop with tithing. Tithing is not the goal of giving, it is the starting point. Tithing is the training wheels of Christian generosity. Tithing is just kindergarten, but God wants you to go on to get your PhD. in generosity. God wants you to start by bringing the tithe to the local church, but then He wants you to be generous, giving over and above your tithe to advance God's kingdom and help those in need.
6. Remember that true generosity doesn't begin with the tithe. A tithe is just obedience. Anything less than a tithe and you are robbing God. Generosity begins when you give above and beyond the tithe.
7. Today we're going to look at the example of a woman who gave way more than a tithe. In fact, she makes tithing looking silly.

IV. TEXT: Mark 12:41-44

1. 41 Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. 42 Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins.
2. 43 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. 44 For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on."

V. EXPLANATION

1. So Jesus is in Jerusalem and He sits down in the Temple with his disciples. This would have been the part of the Temple called the Court of Women, which is where Jewish women and children were allowed to worship (SHOW A PICTURE). And He sat down near the collection box. In this part of the Temple there were 13 collection boxes, or offering boxes (DRAW A PICTURE). They were called shofar-chests. A shofar is a ram's horn. A shofar-chest would have a ram's horn attached to a wooden box, with the wide on top, and the narrow end going down into the box. This was intended to prevent theft. Jesus was watching as the crowds put their money in the shofar-chests. Many rich people put in large sums of money, but a poor widow only gave two small coins. Now being a widow today is much different than it was back then. Today widows have social security and public assistance, they might have retirement accounts and life insurance, and they might have their own careers. But back then, they had none of that. If a woman didn't have children, or if her children died, or if her children were poor, then she was on her own. Many widows back then lived in extreme poverty. And that seems to be the case with the widow in this story, because it says she was poor. That means her late husband wasn't wealthy, and she didn't have wealthy children providing for her. She was all alone and she was poor. So she could only give two coins. The two small coins she dropped in were the smallest, cheapest coins in circulation at that time in Palestine. Each coin was called a lepton; the plural form is lepta. A denarius was worth a day's wage for a laborer. Two lepta amounted to one-sixty-fourth of a denarius, or about

five minutes worth of labor. She didn't give much, or did she? In the next paragraph Jesus said that the woman gave more than all the rich people. How is that possible? She only gave two lepta. But those two lepta were all she had. She gave everything, but the rich people only gave a small part of their wealth. She gave 100%, but they only gave a small percentage.

VI. 4 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT THE WIDOW'S GIFT

1. **She gave everything.** She didn't just give a tithe (or ten percent). She gave it all. She didn't just give everything in her purse; she gave everything.
2. **She gave more than she could afford.** After she gave, she had nothing left over to pay for food and necessities. This would be like you getting paid at the beginning of the month, and you need that paycheck to pay your bills the rest of the month, but you just drop the entire paycheck in the offering box.
 - i. **C.S. Lewis** "I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc, is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them."
3. **She gave voluntarily.** Remember that there were 13 offering boxes, and each was labeled for a different offering. Some were labeled "Freewill Offerings", or offerings given out of love for God. Because her offering was so little, we know it was a freewill offering. Not only did she give everything she had, but she didn't have to. She could have kept it for herself, but she gave it.
4. **She gave even though her offering wouldn't make much of a difference.** One of the things the freewill offering was used for was Temple construction, or renovations to the Temple. Well, two lepta aren't going to help much with Temple construction. It would have been very easy for her to think, "My offering is too small to make any difference; there's no point in giving." But she gave anyway.

VII. 4 LESSONS ON GENEROSITY

1. **God watches your giving activity.**
 - i. One of the generosity challenges that many Christians face is they want to keep God and money separate. They love God, but they don't want think about what it means to love God with their money. They are hoping that God isn't really interested in money. But this story proves otherwise
 - ii. **Mark 12:41** "Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money."
 - iii. Imagine how awkward it would be if every Sunday Jesus stood by the offering box and watched as you dropped your money in. Do you think that might change people's giving habits? Well guess what? Jesus does do that. Jesus is highly interested in your giving activity. Just as He watched these folks, He is watching us today. He is watching us every week as we pass by the offering box.

- iv. Don't assume that God doesn't care what you give; or that God isn't interested; or that God and money don't mix. They do. Fifteen percent of everything Jesus said had to do with money. Two-thirds of His parables were related to money.
- v. **Mark 12:30** "And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength."
- vi. In other words, God doesn't just care about spiritual life. He wants you to love Him with every part of your being, including your money. Let me put it this way. Your giving record matters to God. He watches every cent you give. And the widow knew this. That's the reason she gave. There's no reason she would have given such a small, unnoticeable amount of money unless she truly believed that God was watching; that God was highly interested in our giving record.

2. Hardship doesn't mean you shouldn't give.

- i. Sadly, when some Christians run into financial hardship, they become stingy. If they lose their job or something like that, it becomes an excuse to stop giving. They assume that generosity is only something that you do in good times. They tell themselves that they will be more generous when they earn more money. But this story blows that theory out of the water. The widow was poor, but she still gave. Not only that, but she gave everything she had. Hardship is no excuse for not giving. Not only that, but let me make a prediction that I think you can count on. If you are greedy and stingy with little, and then you will be greedy and stingy with much.
- ii. Let me suggest a new way to think about giving. Instead of asking, "Can I afford to give?" ask, "How much is God calling me to give?"
- iii. There is one thing you will never have to do as a Christian, and that's worry about how you're going to afford to live. Jesus said to focus on building His kingdom, and He will meet our needs (Mt 6:33). You don't need to worry about what you can afford. You simply need to ask, "Lord, how much do you want me to give?"

3. No gift is too small if given to God.

- i. Let's say that you have tithed, but then after that you don't have much money to give; only a few dollars. In that case, it can be tempting to not give because you might think your offering won't be missed; your offering won't make a difference anyway. But that's why this story is so amazing. She gave her two small coins, even though they wouldn't be noticed.
- ii. God is able to take something small and turn it into something big. He is able to take a small donation and use it to make a big difference. Do you remember the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand people? A little boy gave his lunch – five loaves and two fish – and Jesus was able to feed the entire multitude with that.
- iii. God doesn't need our money. He wants our love and obedience and faithfulness.

- iv. Don't worry about the amount. You give what God calls you to give, and God will do the rest.
- v. **Elizabeth Elliot** "Sometimes obedience means willingness to do the apparently useless thing, in order that God may do the great thing."

4. The value of your gift is not how much you give, but how much it costs you.

- i. This may be the primary lesson to learn from the widow's example. The word "more" in this story is very powerful. Jesus compared the value of the widow's offering to that of the rich people. They put in a lot, she put in only a little, yet Jesus said that she gave more. Why? Because the value of the offering is not how much you give, but how much it costs you. Another way of putting it is that God measures giving not by what we give, but by how much we keep for ourselves.
- ii. One of the most bizarre but true realities is that as your income goes up, your giving tends to go down. It's true. This is proven by research. In America, the more a person makes, the less they tend to give away. Why is that? To the surprise of many, giving gets harder as your income goes up because you are giving more away. For example, a tithe of \$3,000 is only \$300. But if your monthly income increases to \$10,000 a month, then suddenly your tithe is \$1,000. So here's what some people do. They compare the size of their donation to everybody else's, and since theirs is equal to or more than others, they pat themselves on the back. But God doesn't look at how much you give, He looks at what it costs you.
- iii. This is why many Christians make it a point to increase their giving as God increases their income. When you first start tithing, it is difficult. It feels like a lot. It is a stretch of your faith. But the longer you've tithed, and the more your income increases, the easier tithing gets. It becomes a habit. It no longer takes faith. It's no longer a challenge. Even after they've tithed, they still have much more than they need; much more to share; and so they give more and more.
- iv. God isn't impressed with your money. He's not impressed with the size of your donation. It's not about the amount, it's about the cost. It's about how much you are keeping for yourself. And those who have little shouldn't look down on the small amount of their offering. It's not about amount. It's about percentage. It's about proportion. It's about what it costs you. It's about what you keep for yourself.
- v. As we raise money for Build to Equip, everyone cannot give the same amount because everyone does not have the same income. However, we can all sacrifice the same amount. That's what impresses God. That's the kind of offering that God blesses.
- vi. Some of you may not like Rick Warren, but after this story you'll respect him more. Rick Warren is the pastor of one of the largest churches in the country. He and his wife started the church in 1980. When they got married, they made a commitment to increase their tithe to the church by 1% every year. Year one they gave 10%, year two 11%, and so on. In 2002, Rick

published a book called *The Purpose Driven Life*. It became the best-selling non-fiction book of all time, after the Bible. This of course meant a huge financial reward for Rick Warren. What did he do with the money? First, he didn't change his lifestyle; he didn't buy a new car or a new house. Second, he set up two foundations – one to help hurting pastors around the world, and the other to help hurting children who have been orphaned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Third, he became a reverse tither – instead of giving ten percent and living on the rest, they gave 90% and lived on the rest. Fourth, he stopped taking a salary from the church. And fifth, he paid back every penny the church paid him since the founding of the church.

- vii. If you aren't tithing, then make it your goal to get to the tithe. But if you are tithing, then don't stop there. That's just the starting line. As God increases your income, consider increasing your giving. Live with open eyes and an open hand, ready and willing to share with those around you as opportunities arise.

VIII. CRAZY GENEROSITY

1. Generosity is about sacrifice. It's not about how much you give, but how much it costs you.
2. Don't stop with the tithe. Don't tithe and then say, "I've done my giving for the month." Let the tithe be the starting line, and then make it your goal to give beyond the tithe. As God increases your income, increase your percentage.
3. If a small group of people like us would get serious about generosity, and like the widow give sacrificially, give until it hurts, then God will do amazing things in and through us.

IX. GIVING EXERCISE NUMBER 2

1. I want to close with a giving exercise to help you determine how much God wants you to give to Build to Equip.
2. I want you to write down two numbers on your Worship Guide.
 - i. What could I reasonably give? This is a financial question. You know how much you have in savings. You know how much margin you have every month. So, without praying about it, without thinking about it much, what could you reasonably give? Write this number down.
 - ii. What could I reprioritize and be able to give? If you made some simple sacrifices. If you intentionally changed adjusted your patterns, made some changes. This is See the chart. This is a math question. Tally that up and write that number down. Then add this number to the first number, and this is your second number.
3. The amount that God wants you to pledge is probably somewhere between the first and second numbers. After praying, it may be more.
4. Here's what I want you to do. October 16 is Commitment Day. I want you to come ready that day. I want to pray and ask the Lord how much He wants to provide through you to Build to Equip, and then I want you to come ready on October 16 with that number.