

The Treasure Principle, part 4

Tithing..say what?

3/30/14

Introd

PROPS: white board, basket of 10 apples, treasure principle images from the treasure chest

Good morning

Drama

I hope you are enjoying reading the book The Treasure Principle. Each week I'm suggesting a reading plan, and I'm encouraging you to read it twice so read chapters 1-3 again.

We've looked some key treasure principles. This far we've looked at

1: Since God owns all my stuff, I'm simply His money manager (for me only-hold up images)

2. My heart always goes where I put God's money

3. Heaven, not earth, is my home

4 I should live not for the dot but for the line.

5 Giving is the only antidote to materialism (from The Treasure Principle book by Randy Alcorn)

I want to reiterate the elephant in the room as I have every week: what is that-preachers talking about money.

I realize that when any pastor talks about this subject, it can appear self-serving because offerings pay for my salary. I totally get it if appears that when pastors talk about money and generosity it

appears self serving. I want to acknowledge that some of you may be thinking that.

Each week I want to repeat my disclaimer in case you weren't with us in previous weeks.

I practice what I preach. We give a tithe plus to West Park and support other ministries as well. I don't do this to get rich.

I don't count the money. I don't sign checks. I don't even like taking an envelope from someone who asks me to put it into the offering if they missed it.

So, as I've said each week, I encourage you to let your guard down and just listen and consider. If what I say offends you, don't come back. However, I will challenge you to look at how you are currently giving.

The Apostle Paul referenced the giving of one of the early churches and in doing so gives us a significant reason to talk about money in the church. ***Phil. 4:17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.***

We talk about money not because of what we want from you, but because of what we want for you. (andy Stanley) This scripture speaks to the result of generosity, certain kinds of blessings come to the generous giver, the Apostle Paul here describes as something "credited to your account." God does not want our money so much as he does not want our money to have us. **(andy Stanley)**

Today we're going to look at a practice called tithing, which means 10% or 1/10. Next week/insert we are challenging everyone

who calls West Park home to tithe on that Sunday, even though you may have never tithed before. That is, we encourage you to look at what your gross income is for one week, and give 10% of that as your offering. So, if you make 1000 a week a tithe would be 100. If you make 100 a tithe would be 10. See the insert. And, everything that comes into the general fund, we will in turn take 10% and give it to (show asia and then cuba ministry slides)

The big idea today: You can grow a heart of generosity by making four choices

We are going to start out in the OT book of Malachi/last book of OT. Malachi was an OT prophet who apparently served as the prophet-leader during Nehemiah's absence.

He spoke against the spiritual slippage that occurred in Nehemiah's absence. One area of spiritual slippage involved their lack of generosity.

Bibles to Malachi

Mal. 1.6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' 7 "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. 8 When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty.

What was happening here?

In that day much of the way you got goods and services was through bartering rather than through using currency/dollars. For example, you might trade your sheep for some grain. So, the offerings to God at this time were often in the currency of produce and livestock.

The law required the first of your produce and the first born of your livestock as long as it was a good animal. The law required that you bring an offering which was the first and best of your flocks and herds and produce.

But the priests allowed the people to bring offerings of sick and diseased animals, what the giver really didn't want or could use. They were supposed to bring the first and the best and they brought their refuse, leftover, diseased animals. No real loss or sacrifice for them.

9 “Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?” — says the LORD Almighty.

After doing this, they wanted God's blessings without honoring him with their giving. That would be like an employee wanting a raise when he hadn't even performed his current job expectations.

14 “Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord.

Here God, you can have this three legged, diseased goat. No skin off my back. I'm offloading something I really don't want anyway and was a burden for me.

Choice 1: Assess your current giving level.

Answer this question in your mind right now. How much do I regularly give, either in percentage or amount? What would your monthly bank statement say about your giving? If there is nothing there, that says a lot. If it is regular and generous, that says a lot.

I think there are maybe 7 kinds of givers—white board. Now I'm talking about professed followers of Jesus. If you are not a follower of Jesus, I'm not talking to you.

1. **Zero givers.** For whatever reason, some Christians seldom if ever give anything. They may have not thought about it that much. Perhaps they think some denomination or diocese gives money to the church. Perhaps they think giving is for rich people.
2. **Impulse givers.** This is the person that will toss a couple of dollars in the offering plate so they don't feel guilty. They are the spur of the moment giver. They don't plan their giving. They give what they have in their pockets at the moment kinda like when we put a couple of dollars in the Salvation Army kettles at Christmas.
3. **Regular cash givers:** they give faithfully the same dollar amount each week or month, but don't relate it to their overall income. They've probably given that same amount for years. And it's probably not a very large amount.
4. **Percentage givers.** This person will give a percentage, though not 10%, causes that's kinda crazy giving that much. Only

crazy people or rich people give that much. But they have built into their budget 2% which is about the above average evangelical Christians give.

5. **Tithers.** This person has done it their entire life. Tithe means 1/10, 10%. If they make \$100 per week, they give 10. If they make \$1000 per week, they give 100. They may or may not tithe unexpected income or their income from other sources not their wage. 12% of N Americans.
6. **Tithe plus givers.** This person gives more than 10%
7. **Living expense cap givers.** These are rare but these people decide what they can live on and give the rest. I've even heard of some who live on 10% and give the rest away.

So, where would you assess your giving?

The average American loses \$100.00 a year in spare change, and 23 percent of church members give less than that¹

2. Correctly understand tithing.

Tithing was practiced in much of the ancient world. People would give a tenth of the produce of the land and spoils of war to their priests and kings.

Scholars differ a bit, but there were probably 2-3 tithes in the OT. The first tithe was to the Levites who were the employees in the Temple. A second tithe was for the service and upkeep of the temple (supplies, building upkeep, etc). And the third tithe was one every 3 years for the poor. So a tithe was anywhere between 13-23%, depending on if the first two tithes were seen as together. Plus they had special offerings on top of top of that.

But for today's message, when I use tithe I mean 10%. It's like this. Remember we said a few weeks ago and in principle 1 that

¹ Driscoll, M. (2000). *Mark Driscoll Sermon Archive 2000-2004*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

God owns everything and we are his money manager. Tithing is really giving back to God what he already owns anyway.

So as a simple illustration, imagine a friend came by who owns an apple orchard. Out of the goodness and generosity of his heart, he brings you a bag of 10 delicious looking apples. He drops by and says I thought you might like these. (Count out 10 apples). You chat a while and as he leaves he asks, oh mind if I have one? What would any decent person do? They'd say sure. Because without his friend he would have 0 apples. He's letting you keep 9 of them. He's just asking for 1.

That's a picture of tithing. God gave us everything, the ability to work, our jobs, our education and our money and tithing says, you keep 90 % of what I just gave you. Just give me 10%-1 apple.

3.8 “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.”

The word *rob* here is a very rare word. It's not at all the normal Hebrew word for robbery, which, of course, would just mean to take something that's not yours. It's only used one other place in the Bible, and it's a word that really means to pillage, to plunder.

It's the sort of word you would use to describe a wealthy powerful country coming in and plundering, pillaging, and raping a weaker or poorer town. It's a very violent word. It's a word that means to oppress²

Nobody here is going to come to the church after midnight and steal stuff. That idea was on their mind, though. Of course we wouldn't rob God's stuff from the temple. We would never do that.

² Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

“But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’

“In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse — the whole nation of you — because you are robbing me.

He’s saying you are robbing me by spending too much on yourself and not giving enough away by withholding the tithe.

So if you take the context and the use of the word, He’s saying to these people you are plundering, pillaging from God. It’s beyond stinginess. It goes much deeper. He is speaking about greed, which we seldom see in ourselves.

Greed has the power to blind us to its reality, unlike say a sin of adultery or taking out your anger on your kids. We know when we commit those sins. Not so with greed though.

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.

Tim Keller quote in italics below

, storehouse is a Hebrew word for treasury. You could translate it “Bring your treasure into the treasury.” The storehouse was the place where the silver and the gold and the jewels were, where the wealth was.

In every temple in the world you had a treasury, and out of the treasury was supported the worship and salvation system of that particular deity. When God says, “Bring me the whole tithe; put the whole tithe into my treasury, into my temple, into the service of my salvation, into the worship of me,” the implication is that if you’re not doing that, your tithe is in some other temple in some other treasury.

Keller then gives 3 examples

If you find it's very hard to give away money (it's just hard writing those checks; it's just difficult) but you find it's so incredibly easy to spend money on clothes (it's like falling off a log; you have to watch yourself, it's so effortless), your wardrobe is the real treasury of your real temple. What you're really doing, no matter what you say you believe, is looking to your personal appearance and how people perceive you physically to get that sense of desirability and acceptability and lovability rather than looking to the love of God.

If you find it difficult to give your money away but very easy to put it into a beautiful new house, that's your real temple. What you're really doing is saying, "Look at where I can live, and look at who I am." You're looking to that to make you feel important, to that to make you feel significant, rather than to the knowledge of God.

third illustration. There are a lot of you who look at people spending money on homes and clothes, and you just sneer. You say, "I've had this thing for two years." You just sneer at all that, but you sock it all away into savings and securities and investments, and you're so proud that you live in a small apartment and don't have a whole lot of money. You're just very, very proud. You are as much under the power of money as they are.

If you find it's very hard to give money away but very easy to save it, then your bank is your temple. Your brokerage is your temple.

It's effortless to spend money on that which is your real god. The money just flows into the treasury of your real temple. Anything that's just easy to spend money on is your real god. It's your real savior and lord. It's the real source of your hope, your meaning, your happiness, your significance, and security, no matter what you say you believe.

Now, since we are unpacking the real meaning of the tithe, what do you think is the biggest objection NT Xns give about tithing?

It's Old Testament. It's the law. And we are under the NT, under grace. Right? Here's how I respond to that concern.

Matt. 5.17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

I believe these words of Jesus should prompt us to ask, Does grace dumb down the faith? Does being under grace decrease commitment to Jesus? Does Jesus revise spirituality downward?

It seems to me and I could be wrong that Jesus is saying that the righteousness of grace should exceed the righteousness of law, and most certainly with a different motivation.

We walk in righteousness and live righteous lives not for God's approval and favor. Jesus death paid the price for God's favor to be

upon those who accept Christ. A righteous, obedient life is the outflow of a heart that has been radically changed by Jesus.

Jesus fulfilled the Law in the sense that he gave it its full meaning. He emphasized its deep, underlying principles and total commitment to it rather than mere external acknowledgment and obedience.

Jesus is not speaking against observing the requirements of the Law, but against hypocritical, Pharisaical legalism. Such legalism was not the keeping of all details of the Law but the hollow sham of keeping laws externally, to gain merit before God, while breaking them inwardly.

It was following the letter of the Law while ignoring its spirit. Jesus repudiates the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law and their view of righteousness by works. He preaches a righteousness that comes only through faith in him and his work.

Jesus took issue with outward conformity with no inward heart change. Yet, Jesus approves of many of those outward things, done with the right heart. I believe he does the same with tithing.

Matt. 23.23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

They literally would pick off the leaves of their spice plants and count them out.... 1, 2, 3 and then 1 for you God. They were legalistic.

Jesus doesn't say give up tithing, but rather he was taking issue with these guys who were so legalistic that they limited giving to 10%. They felt that as long as they tithed, they could keep the rest.

Jesus said, boys, you're missing it. Sometimes justice, and mercy and faithfulness demands that we go far beyond the mere 10%. But a legalist would stop at the 10% no matter the need.

Some Christians take objection to the tithe as an excuse to dumb down spiritual commitment to salve a guilt conscience. My opinion. You can disagree if you want.

So, here's what I believe. A heart truly transformed by Christ is not going to dumb down godly acts, like generosity, like proportional giving, like tithing. We could never expect God to say to his New Testament people, with greater blessings and greater privileges, that we should expect to give less than the Old Testament people of God. That doesn't make any sense.³

My guess is the reason it is not mentioned more is because we are not to see it as a legalistic guideline, but more of a baseline, a rule of thumb, a beginning, a marker for generosity.

You may be saying, practically speaking, that's just nuts. My budget is so tight theirs is no way I could do that. If in your heart you truly want to be generous and there is truly a budget issue, I believe that god will make a way so that over time, you can be where god wants you to be. It may not be tomorrow, or next week

³ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

or even next year. But God knows your heart and if your heart is truly there, you will make a way over time to be a generous giver.

Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

What does it mean to test God? I believe for the NT believer how we use our money, and how we give our money is related to faith. Do I trust God enough to build into my budget, giving away a portion, a tithe, some healthy percentage, and then trust that He will take care of me?

Money is related to faith. If God gives you money and you say, “Well, I can’t share that. I can’t distribute that, you’re saying, “I don’t trust God to give me more even though he just gave all this to me. I don’t trust God that if I let some pass through my hands that he will ever put anymore there.”⁴

Prov. 11.24 Sometimes you can become rich by being generous or poor by being greedy.

A very wealthy man came to his minister and said, I’m having a problem with this tithing thing. You see I made \$500,000 dollars last year. If I gave 10% then I’d have to give \$50,000. I can’t do that. And the pastor took him aside and said, would you pray with me, “Dear Lord please reduce this man’s income so that he can afford to give.” (source unknown)

3. Create a realistic giving plan.

Shoot for nothing and you will never miss. If it’s not on paper, it doesn't exist.

⁴ Driscoll, M. (2000). *Mark Driscoll Sermon Archive 2000-2004*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

This scripture I believe lays out a good template that gives guidelines on what a plan should include.

1Cor. 16: 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income

1. systematic: first day of the week you should set aside a sum

Build it into your budget. If you plan it, it takes the emotion out of it. It helps us avoid the fickleness of emotion at the moment which often can't be trusted.

I encourage you to make your giving to the Lord should be one of the first checks we write because it indicates a priority. Better yet, pre-plan it through planned debits. You can get a form at the welcome center.

2. personal: each one-This is something you must decide for yourself. It's a commitment you and God make. It doesn't matter if you are a teen, adult, married, or single. I recognize that for some of you women, your husbands are not believers and think you are crazy if your family gives money to the church. Don't force the issue. Just trust God and don't let guilt eat you up.

3. proportional: keeping with his income

It's not that everybody gives the same. We all make different amounts of money. But proportional giving spreads the responsibility around. That's what tithing is-proportional giving. You wealthy people, who have a lot, you should be up here.

4. Start

Take a first step. Start somewhere. I recognize that some people's budget is a mess. We'll offer a budgeting class this

Don't let the enemy use guilt against you. Simply start somewhere knowing that where you start is not where you eventually want to end up.

Cautions:

1. Don't wait until you think you can afford it. The more money people earn, the less percentage people give.
2. Don't wait until you are dead. Give it now so you can see God's blessings.
3. Don't wait until you have more money. One large survey asked people how much money they needed to know they had enough and could live comfortably. It didn't matter the current amount made. The average response was, about twice what I currently make.
4. Don't wait until you fully think it through. Neuroscientists have discovered that the more we mull, think about, ruminate about whether or not we will become more generous, the less likely we are to give. The more you think about it, the more time you have to justify not giving.

It takes courage to step out in faith. It takes courage to believe that God will take care of me. It takes courage to begin giving when it sometimes makes the least sense. It takes courage to believe that "My hope is not in riches but in him who richly provides." (quote source unknown)

It may be a struggle. Steps of faith aren't easy.

Jesus said where your treasure is your heart will be also. Every treasure but one will make you pay to get it. Jesus is the only treasure that died to purchase you.

2 cor 8.7 But just as you excel in everything ...see that you also excel in this grace of giving. ...9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

When you see him dying because you were the treasure of his heart, then, and only then, will he become the treasure of yours. When you see that he made *you* the treasure of *his* heart, that will make *him* the treasure of *your* heart, and suddenly money won't be significance; it'll just become money because *he's* the significance. Suddenly money will not become security; it'll just become money. *He'll* be the security, and you'll be free. You'll finally be free.⁵

So, will you take the tithe challenge next week?

⁵ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.