

## PUTTING MONEY IN THE OFFERING PLATE IS A TANGIBLE WAY TO GROW OUR FAITH

This morning we are going to go back to our series on “God, Giving, and Gifts.” Why should a pastor preach on money? Because the Bible has to say a lot about it—to the tune of **2350** verses! For perspective, there are roughly 500 verses about **prayer**—and less than 500 about **faith**. It is also important to realize—and remember—that **Jesus Himself** said a lot about money. In fact, 16 of the 38 parables that Jesus taught dealt with money or possessions! One man pointed out that in the Gospels there are 288 verses with the subject of money—**one** verse out of every **ten**!

And because “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine”—and because Paul “declared all the counsel of God” to the church in Ephesus—one of my responsibilities is to do what I can to teach you the **whole counsel** of God.

I’m not going to review all that we’ve looked at so far in this series—this is the 9<sup>th</sup> sermon so that would take a while—but I do want to remind you of **six reasons** we should put money in the offering plate. I’m going to do my best just to give them to you and not make too many comments—except for the last one.

1. Because it is a way to **give to God**
2. Because it is a way to **worship God**
3. Because it is a way to **maintain our building**
4. Because it is a way to **take care of your pastor**
5. Because it is a way of helping the **needy and widows**
6. Because it is a way to help **spread the gospel!** Mk 16:15 “And He [Jesus] said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

I think you’d agree that it is physically impossible for **each** of us to travel the whole world and bring the good news of salvation to **every person** in **every place**!

But...we can help **financially support people** that God calls to various places in His harvest field and by doing so, we are helping carry out Jesus’ command. Not only that, but Paul told the Philippians that by supporting him as a missionary, “fruit” would abound to their account (Phil 4:17)—meaning they would be laying up treasures in heaven—and that God would supply all their needs (Phil 4:19).

This morning, we are going to look at a **seventh reason** for putting money in the offering plate: Because it is a tangible way to **grow our faith**!

### 1. What is faith?

Please take your Bibles and turn to Romans 4. Here we have what I believe is one of the best—and easiest to understand—definitions of faith. The chapter focuses on the faith of Abraham—and that who is being referred to in **vs 19**. Please follow along as I read vs 19-21.

What was the faith of Abraham **based on**? It wasn’t based on a wish...or whim...or hope...or dream—it was based on the **promise of God!** Vs 20 – “He staggered not at **the promise of God** through unbelief....” Vs 21 – “And being fully persuaded that, **what He had promised**, He was able also to perform.”

Faith, then, is the belief that God will do what He says based on what **He promises**. Sounds a lot like the first part of the theme song we used for our VBS last month called “Faith is Just Believing.” Here are those words: “Faith is just **believing what God said He would do...**”

That’s it, isn’t it? Faith is simply taking God at His Word. It is believing what God says—and doing what God says—**even if it doesn’t make sense to us**.

--It didn’t make sense **for Noah** to build an ark because it had never rained before—but he believed God and did it anyway!

--It didn’t make sense **for Abraham** to offer up Isaac because Isaac was the one from whom would come many nations, but Abraham was willing to do it anyway!

**God stopped him**, of course, but Abraham proved that he believed what God said.

In fact, Heb 11:19 says that Abraham had come to the point where his faith was such that if God had him kill Isaac, God would bring Isaac back to life!

--It didn't make sense for **Joshua and his men** to capture the city of Jericho by simply marching around it for 7 days, but he believed what God said and did it anyway.

--And it didn't make sense **for Peter** to cast his net where he had fished all night, but he believed what Jesus said and did it anyway!

In each of these instances, faith was based on believing—and obeying—what God (or Jesus) said. Faith has to be **based on something** besides our whims and wishes—it needs to be based on what the Bible says!

So...if giving is a tangible way to **show—and grow**—our faith, God must make **some promises** to those who give! And He does—in both the Old Testament and the New Testament!

## **2. The promises God makes to those who give**

### A. Old Testament Promise

Please know that there are **several promises** in the OT regarding God's blessings upon us those who give, but they are directed specifically to the **children of Israel**. So rather than share with you promises that are not specifically **to us**, I'm going to share with you one **that is!**

**Prov 3:9-10** "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:

<sup>10</sup> So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

This is an OT promise—but I believe it is still applicable to us. Why? Here are two reasons:

1) Because underneath these verses is **this principle** found throughout the OT—**God blesses obedience!** Here are a couple of verses where that principle is stated.

**Josh 1:8** "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou **mayest observe to do according** to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt **make thy way prosperous**, and then **thou shalt have good success**."

**Psalm 1:2-3** "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. <sup>3</sup> And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that **bringeth forth his fruit in his season**; his leaf also shall not wither; and **whatsoever he doeth shall prosper**."

2) The second reason I believe Proverbs 3:9-10 is applicable to us is this: because they sound a lot **like what Jesus said** in the NT!

### B. New Testament promises

**What** did Jesus say in the NT? **Mt 6:33** "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Jesus is saying that if we put Him first in all areas of our life—including money—all "these things"—our physical needs—will be added unto us.

**Luke 6:38** is even more specific. Again, as a reminder, these are Jesus' words: "Give, **and it shall be given unto you**; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and **running over**, shall men **give into your bosom**. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

And in the context of giving, Paul told the Corinthian believers this in **II Cor 9:6**: "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which **soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully**."

As a general principle, then, God promises to take care of us when we honor Him with what He has given us.

### **3. A Biblical example of honoring God with our substance**

Please take your Bibles and turn to I Kings 17. The Biblical example we're going to look at is a familiar one—the widow of Zarephath feeding the prophet Elijah. We actually looked at this passage back in March of 2022—about 18 months ago. Since I don't remember doing that—I had to look it up 😊—you probably don't remember it either! Besides, last time I emphasized the faith **of Elijah**—this time we're going to focus on **the woman** and her "honoring the Lord with her substance."

First, let's consider... A. The prophet of God and his request (vss 8-11)

Look at vss 8-9. God told Elijah that He would be using a widow woman to "sustain him."

--Not a **working man**...or a wealthy woman. Instead, a widow woman.

--Now vs 10. Somehow God conveyed to Elijah that this woman was the one who would be feeding him! Elijah asks her for a drink of water, then follows it up with a request for “a morsel of bread” (vs 11).

**How much** is a morsel? Probably a small loaf or cake. What makes me say that? Because of her response in vs 12!

#### B. The predicament of the woman (vs 12-13)

--“I have not a cake...” ‘I don’t have **any bread** to bring you! All I have is a handful of meal—meaning flour—and a little oil. Not only that, this is the **last of** my flour—and the **last of** my oil—and it is for the **last meal** for me and my son.’

--She was not lying—and she was not exaggerating. This was in all honesty **the last** of her substance. This was literally her “last supper” before she and her son started the slow, painful process of dying of starvation!

--Now vs 13. “And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said...”

--In other words, ‘Go make a cake like you said for you and your son. **But**—make me a cake **first—then** make one for you and your son!’

--Was Elijah **being selfish** for wanting a cake **first—before** the widow and her son had one? I’m going to answer that question with a question: **Is God selfish** for wanting the first—and best—of what we have to offer? God is **not selfish**, is He, and Elijah wasn’t being selfish either!

--Elijah—as God’s representative—was asking her to **put God first**; to **honor God** with her substance as it says in Proverbs 3:9. And by doing so, God was putting **her faith to the test!**

What about us? Does God put **our faith**—our trust in what He says—**to the test** sometimes? He certainly does! In fact, I’m not sure our faith can truly grow **without trials!** Here’s why I say that:

**James 1:2-3** “My brethren, count it all joy when ye **fall into divers temptations** [various trials]; <sup>3</sup> Knowing this, that the **trying [testing] of your faith worketh patience [endurance; perseverance].**”

The testing of your faith produces the ability to endure—meaning having more faith!

**I Peter 1:7** “That the **trial of your faith**, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:”

--The trial—the proving and testing of your faith—though not pleasant, brings praise and honor and glory to Christ when we pass the test!

--The widow woman’s faith was put to the test—and **yours will be too** if you want your faith to grow!

#### C. The promise from God through Elijah (vs 14)

Elijah’s instructions to the widow did not just put **her faith to the test**—God also used Elijah to **give her a promise!** What was the promise?

Vs 14. “...The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.” ‘Your flour won’t run out—and neither will your oil—until God sends rain and ends the drought!’

Let’s pause here for a moment. Is this a **conditional promise**—is there an “if” attached—or was it going to happen “no matter what?” Although there is no “if” stated—there is certainly **one implied**. What would determine whether or not this promise would be fulfilled? It was dependent upon **her obedience!**

Would she take care of the **prophet first**—and thus honor God with her substance—or would she fail to trust God...and thus fail the test...and not have her faith grow...and ultimately starve to death?

#### D. The purposeful performance of what God said to do (vs 15a)

We see her obedience—her doing what Elijah said—in the first part of vs 15 – “And she went and **did according to the saying of Elijah...**” Did she **think about it** for a long time? Was it a **long struggle** in her heart and mind? We don’t know! But we do know that she **obeyed what God** told her to do!

--**Why** did she obey? We really don’t know! Someone could argue, I suppose, that her attitude was, ‘I’m going to die anyway, why put off the inevitable?’ Do you know why I don’t believe that was her attitude?

Because **Jesus used her as an example** of obedience and faith!

**Luke 4:25-26** “But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; <sup>26</sup> But unto **none of them was Elias sent**, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.”

E. The provision from God for the widow (vss 15b-16)

Her faith was rewarded, wasn't it? We see that in the second half of vs 15 and vs 16. The flour and oil continued—many days—“according to the word of the Lord.” How long was “many days?” We don't know for sure, but it is possible she fed Elijah **two years**—or even more!

I said it once; here it is again: For our faith to grow, it **has to be tested**. If you **want** your faith to grow, **expect to be tested!** When the test comes, you **must obey God**—even if it doesn't make sense to you!

**4. A personal example of honoring God with our substance**

I don't mind sharing stories from my personal life—like **swamping canoes**—to help illustrate a point. I'm a **little more reluctant** to do so when it comes to a topic like this, though. Why? Because I don't want you to think of me more “highly than you ought to think!”

**I am not** by any stretch of the imagination a “super-Christian”—whatever that is—and share this with you for one reason—to **encourage your faith!** It is good to be encouraged from examples **in the Bible**—but it is also good to be encouraged by people you know that **God is still working today!** I also know that **some of you** could share similar stories of how God has taken care of **your needs**.

I have here in my hand my first journal, the first entry being September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1979. That's 44 years—and one week—ago! Some of the pages are difficult to read due to fading, not to mention the fact that I'm a very sloppy writer! So... because it's hard to read—and I don't want to hurriedly flip through some of the pages—I typed out excerpts of what I wrote that I'm going to read to you.

What I hope you take away from what I read is this: **God provides for our needs** when we “honor Him with our substance”—just like it says in Proverbs 3:9! The first entry I'm going to read from you is from a letter to my Dad dated **January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1985**. **How** do I have a copy of a letter to my Dad? I used to put carbon paper in between the pages when I wrote a letter so that I could keep a copy!

Before I read part of that letter, here is the scenario when I wrote this: I had just turned 24, Louise and I had been married for 3-1/2 years, and we had two boys (2-1/2 and 10 months). Here goes: “Yesterday I joined the ranks of the unemployed for the first time in my life...” After explaining some of the details of the job and the plant closure, I wrote: “I'm so thankful that God knows what He's doing, even if I don't. I'm firmly fixed on the fact that ‘All things work together for good to them that love God’ and that if He seemingly takes something away, it is to accomplish something in my life or to give me something better.”

**On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1985**—roughly six weeks later—I wrote the following to my pastor's son in Georgia: “The Lord taught us [Louise and I] so much in our early marriage that it seems to have prepared us for now. We are meeting our needs on \$117.00 per week and **still giving the Lord at least 12%.**”

**On April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1985**, I wrote this in my journal: “Our backs seem to be continually against the wall financially. Unemployment owes us 2 checks and very likely 3. After **tithe and rent** were paid, we had a total of \$20.00 for gas and groceries for the entire week. We got our statement back, however, and found we have an extra \$18.00 in our checking account. It has been discouraging, but God is helping us through this test. As of 2 days ago, I've been claiming **Proverbs 3:9-10** ‘Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: <sup>10</sup> So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.’”

**The entry continues:** “The Lord still needs to work. I still do not have a full-time job and we just found out that Louise is pregnant! No insurance, at least for now. Also facing the fact that a 2-bedroom apartment is not big enough for 5 people. God has not let us down. We are late in a few bills (clinic and dentist), but when we get our tax returns that will be taken care of.”

Maybe you caught while I was reading that I mentioned—twice—that we still gave at least 10% of our income to the Lord. **Why** did we do that? Because we believed what God said!

We believed that if we **honored God** with our substance like He says we should do in Proverbs 3:9 that He would take care of our needs. So just like the widow took her last bit of flour and made Elijah a cake **first**, we gave 10% of our tiny income to the Lord...even though—humanly speaking—it **did not make sense** to do so!

**Did God** take care of our needs? Yes—exceeding, abundantly above all that we could ask or think! Not long after this I got a full-time military job that not only paid well, but also had excellent insurance. The bills were paid...the baby bill was paid...we moved into a bigger place...and the list goes on.

Our “barns” were indeed filled with plenty!

Having our needs met was not the only positive thing that came out of this, though. It also **grew our faith!** We got to see God work in a very personal, tangible way—just like the widow woman did! And because we got to experience that, it **increased our trust in Him and His Word** for trials that came after that.

I’m almost done, but there is one thing that I really want to make sure you don’t miss. What was the **key ingredient** in this whole experience—besides faith?

--Having a **pre-determined amount** that you are going to give to the Lord—no matter what!

--Why is that important? Because if you don’t have a pre-determined amount **before** the trial comes, you probably won’t give anything **when the trial** comes!

--And if you don’t **give anything when the trial comes**, you are passing up an opportunity to see God work!

--How much should that pre-determined amount be? We’ll talk about that next week!

So what would God have us do in light of what we’ve heard this morning?

1. Should we make an honest assessment of our **giving**?

--Yes; I believe we should!

2. Should we make an honest assessment of our **faith**? Yes; I believe we should do that, too!

--If you want to grow in your faith, one tangible way to do that is to **set a pre-determined amount** that you are going to give—no matter what!

3. But don’t just look at your giving and your faith, **look at God**—the Giver and the Faithful One!

--Learn—and claim—His promises!

--Learn from the Bible how He has cared for others—and is able to care for you!

4. Lastly—but most importantly—what are you trusting in to get to heaven? Don’t think for one second you can buy your way into heaven; your soul is worth more than all the money in the world and you don’t have all the money in the world!

Our forgiveness of sins is only possible through the death of Jesus. Do you have Him?