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**Feb 2 – Week #1**

**Firstfruits Giving - Midweek E-Devotion**

**CONSIDER TITHING**

When we give, we are responding to God’s grace. Tithing serves as a guide to our giving. Without the tithe, we would lack guidance as to what would be an appropriate response to God’s goodness. Through faith, there are brothers and sisters at Our Savior who give well beyond the tithe.

In the book *Holy Smoke! What ever Happened to Tithing?* J. Cliff Christopher and Herb Mather wrote, “The tithe is a benchmark along a journey rather than a mark of having arrived at the destination. When we travel on highways today, we need roads, signposts, and other benchmarks such as motels, restaurants, and gas stations. These are institutions. Their purpose is to serve the public on its journey. Likewise, benchmarks such as tithing serve the person on the spiritual journey.”

Tithing is no longer a requirement, but it can still serve as a proper benchmark for our faithful response to God for who he is and what he has done for us. The big issue for us today? *God doesn’t FORCE us to give. Instead, through Christ, he gives us the gift of being able to give.* May God help us to see this key difference!

Jesus said, *“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”* (Matthew 5:17). Because Jesus kept the law of tithing perfectly for us, we are no longer living under a command to tithe. However, living in the grace and forgiveness of Christ, we are asked to give freely (Matthew 10:8) and generously (1 Corinthians 16:2). The tithe can now serve as a *joyful benchmark* instead of a *burdensome command.*

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**Feb 9 – Week #2**

Proportionate Giving - Midweek E-Devotion

### **What Should I Give? On What Should I Live?**

Last week’s e-Devotion discussed the matter of *firstfruits* giving. The teaching of firstfruits giving takes aim at the *attitude in the heart* instead of dictating an *amount in an envelope.* This past weekend, we moved forward another step in our understanding of Christian stewardship. Scripture teaches that our giving is to be *in proportion to our income.* To quote Martin Luther, “What does this mean?”

Randy Alcon’s book *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* has some thought-provoking information on proportionate giving:

When there was an impending famine, “the disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea” (Acts 11:29). God says when it comes to giving, “each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income” (1 Corinthians 16:2). (Emphasis added)

The Old Testament tithe was proportionate, not fixed. If someone earned five hundred pieces of gold, he tithed fifty. But if he earned only twenty pieces, he was required to tithe only two. Tithing was proportionate to income.

But proportionate giving is not equal giving. (Emphasis added) It’s a much greater sacrifice for someone who earns ten thousand dollars a year to give a thousand than it is for someone who earns eighty thousand to give eight thousand. Although it’s true that the second person is giving away eight times as much as the other, he’s also left with eight times more to live on.

It’s easy for us to describe someone as a generous giver based solely on the amount given, but true generosity is determined by how much a person gives of what he or she has. A financial counselor wrote to me, saying, “I’ve worked with wealthy couples who are making a million dollars a year, with a net worth of $10 million, but they’re giving $15,000 a year and feel very generous.” Some people would think that anyone who gave $15,000 a year must be generous. But not necessarily. It all depends on what’s left.

One person can give $25 in an act of great sacrifice, whereas another can give a million dollars and not sacrifice at all. If someone makes $10,000,000 a year, gives away $9,000,000 and spends “only” the other million on himself we may be impressed, and it may be a relatively wise eternal investment, but is it really sacrificial in God’s eyes? This is one reason why it’s unhealthy and misleading to publicly laud large donors in the Christian community. Often their sacrifice is far less than those whose names will never be known.

One study showed that American households with incomes under $10,000 gave 5.5% of their income to charities, whereas those earning more than $100,000 gave 2.9%. This disparity shows that true sacrifice in giving typically decreases, not increases, as people make more money.

Believers…can increase the proportion of their giving as God blesses them financially or as they learn to trust him more. Hence, over the years, may believers give a higher and higher percentage to the Lord.” (Alcorn, pp. 209-10)

In the Gospel Lesson from Sunday, we heard that the master of the house entrusted different portions of his estate to different servants (Matthew 25:14-30). So too, the Lord has blessed each of us in different ways and at various levels. What should our thoughtful, prayerful response be to these blessings? That’s where the Bible’s teaching about *proportionate giving* is such a help. For some families with fewer resources, the practice of giving 10% of their income might be a significant leap of faith. For other families with more resources, the practice of giving 10% may be a starting point for faith-filled giving.

St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in *keeping with your income*, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made” (1 Corinthians 16:2). The Christians of our area will be blessed as they put God’s principles of proportional giving into practice!

**PRAYER**

Lord, I cannot even begin to list my own needs and desires, much less your blessings. Give me the power of your Spirit to take up the task of using these wonderful products of your generosity to glorify your name. Amen.

**10 FOR 10 REMINDERS**

* Your commitment packets are in the mail this week. Please read the letter, use the planning tools included, and prayerfully consider what your response will be to the our **Ten for Ten** emphasis.
* Commitment Sunday will be the weekend of February 23rd. Your personal commitment cards will be gathered that weekend. You may place them in the offering plate during the gathering of the offering.
* Your commitment cards will not be opened. After ten weeks, they will be returned to you for your prayerful reflection. PLEASE DO NOT PLACE OFFERINGS IN YOUR COMMITMENT ENVELOPES. All **Ten for Ten** offerings use our regular weekly envelopes.

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**Feb 16 – Week #3**

**Sacrificial Giving - Midweek E-Devotion**

**In Christ, There Is No “Giving ’til It Hurts”**

Last week’s e-Devotion explored the topic of *proportionate* *giving.* Whereas *firstfruits giving* addresses the issues of the heart’s *attitude,* *proportionate giving* begins the conversation about the *amount* given. We saw that a key question for proportionate giving is not so much what percentage is given, but how much remains for us to live on. A millionaire who gives $100,000 has “only” $900,000 left to live on. A single mom who makes $30,000 and gives 10% has only $27,000 left to live on. The percent given was exactly the same. The amount of sacrifice behind the two gifts was extremely different. In other words, the millionaire could easily give a more substantial offering than 10% with precious little impact on daily life.

This week we come to our final **Ten for Ten** topic: *Sacrificial giving.*

Sacrificial gifts have a significant impact on daily life because they are given out of faith in God’s promises to care for his children. Sacrificial gifts both stretch our faith and provide significant resources for the Lord’s work. Randy Alcorn shares some biblical thoughts on sacrificial giving:

*Describing the Macedonian Christians, Paul writes, “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability” (2 Corinthians 8:2-3).*

*How do “severe trial,” “overflowing joy,” “extreme poverty,” and “rich generosity” all fit together in one verse? Among other things, we see here that giving is not a luxury of the rich. It’s a privilege of everyone. (Emphasis added)*

*There are three levels of giving—less than our ability, according to our ability, and beyond our ability. It’s fair to say that 96 percent of Christians in the Western world give less than their ability. Perhaps another 3 percent or more give according to their ability, and less than 1 percent give beyond their ability.*

*What does it mean to give beyond our ability? It means to push our giving past the point where the figures add up. It means to give when the bottom line says we shouldn’t. It means living with the faith of the poor widow. For most of us, giving according to our means would stretch us. Giving beyond our means would appear to break us. But it won’t—because we know God is faithful.*

*Giving sacrificially also means giving the best. If we have two blankets and someone needs one of them, sacrificial giving hands over the better of the two. Sadly, much of our “giving” is merely discarding. Donating secondhand goods to church rummage sales and benevolence organizations is certainly better than throwing them away. But giving away something we didn’t want in the first place isn’t giving; it’s selective disposal. It’s often done because we want a newer or better version.*

*King David said, “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24). Sacrificial giving is parting with what we’d rather keep. It’s keeping the old and giving away the new or giving away both. The giving of the first Christians was spontaneous, unguarded, and uncalculated…*

*We may not like risky faith. We may prefer our safety net below us, a backup plan in case God fails. Our instinct for self-preservation leads us to hedge our bets…*

*A disciple does not ask, “How much can I keep?” but, “How much more can I give?” Whenever we start to get comfortable with our level of giving, it’s time to raise it again.” (Alcorn, p. 203)*

In other words, sacrificial giving is never an effort at “getting blood from a turnip.” Sacrificial gifts are gifts that are inspired by the promises of God’s continual care and the totality of Christ’s sacrifice for us. May these truths transform each of us into Macedonian Christians for our day and age—a people who *“gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people” (2 Corinthians 8:3-4).*

A Christian never “gives ’til it hurts.” Instead, the Christian eagerly looks for opportunities to grow in the grace of giving—sometimes even beyond our ability. How is that possible? Simple, we give with the mind of Christ—not according to the ways of the world!

**PRAYER**

Lord, remove the obstacles in my heart that would keep me from trusting you and following you. Do not let me stop giving just because some local needs have been met, but, as you give the ability, lead me to provide for the saving gospel to be heard in places far removed from my home. Give me a spirit of joy and an increase in eagerness for the work of your kingdom. Thank you for the great sacrifice you made for me and my sin upon the cross. Let your once-for-all sacrifice inspire my sacrifices for you! Amen.

**TEN FOR TEN NEWS AND NOTES**

If you weren’t able to pick up your **Ten for Ten** commitment packet, it was mailed to your home via first class mail last week. Why first class? Because the contents are important. Set aside some time within the next few days to read the letter, use the planning tools, and prayerfully consider what your response will be to our **Ten for Ten** emphasis.

* This coming weekend your commitment cards will be gathered via the offering plates. If you would like another copy of the commitment card, they are available in the back of church or in the church and school offices.
* PLEASE DO NOT PLACE OFFERINGS IN YOUR COMMITMENT ENVELOPES. Your commitment cards will not be opened. Your commitment card is not between you and Our Savior Lutheran Church. Instead, it is meant to be an exercise of faith in the Lord’s promises. All **Ten for Ten** offerings utilize our regular weekly envelopes.
* **Ten for Ten** has promoted the thought of tithing and/or increased giving for ten weeks. The ten weeks of enhanced giving will begin the last weekend in February. During these ten weeks, you will receive printed encouragements in your bulletin. Take them home. Read through them. Pray through them. May Jesus richly bless your use of them!