This morning’s message is entitled: “Giving to God: How Should We Give?” This is the second sermon in a two-part series on giving to God out of our financial resources.

In last week’s message, I talked about why we give to God because I think it important that we understand giving is more than just paying bills for the upkeep of the church. That is, of course, one of the ways the money we give to God is used so that we have a place to worship; resources for teaching and discipling people; and staff to help run church programs.

But as I said last week, there are other reasons we give to God:

- Giving is a one of the ways we give back to God for the extravagant gift of eternal life God has given us through Christ.
- Giving helps us dedicate our lives completely to following God’s priorities. Because if we are not careful, we will wind up serving lesser gods and not the God who is the Creator and sustainer of all that is good in our universe.
- Giving is part of our discipleship. It helps us grow in grace and to become other-centered rather than self-centered.
- Giving enables us to take part in God’s mission in the world. It provides us the ability to help build for God’s Kingdom on earth.

In this week’s message, I want to talk about how we should give. There are two parts to the this message:

- In the first part, I’ll explore some of the things the Bible has to say about our attitudes toward giving to God.
- In the second part, I’ll talk about some biblical views on how much we should give.

Just as there are lots of different reasons for why we give to God, the Bible also provides a number of views on our attitudes for giving.
One of them is an attitude we are all familiar with:

**Giving Cheerfully.**¹ It’s the main theme on the cover of our bulletin today, and it’s a well-known expression that’s been taught in Sunday Schools and by parents for ages.

There’s a story about a mother who wanted to teach her daughter a lesson about giving. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church "Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I’d be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did."²

I’m sure that was the lesson that mother wanted her daughter to learn, nor is it what Paul intended in his second letter to the Corinthians when he says “God loves a cheerful giver.”

The main point here is that giving cheerfully means we are glad to give to God as an act of worship of praise. This makes our giving an expression of our love for God. Being a cheerful giver is one of the things that puts us on the path of spiritual growth that changes us into the joy-filled people God wants us to be. And our joy is complete when we realize that our giving makes a Kingdom-difference in the world.

**Giving Freely.** Closely related to cheerful giving is the idea of giving freely to God. This attitude is also found in 2 Corinthians 9. Here Paul encourages us to make up our own minds about our giving.

In other words: We have a choice.

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¹ The attitudes toward giving are summarized from Craig A. Satterlee, *Preaching and Stewardship, Proclaiming God’s Invitation to Grow*, (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2011), 75-87.
² Sermon Illustrations.com, article on internet, [http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/giving.htm](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/giving.htm), accessed 14 November 2013.
But our choice must bear in mind the gift God has given us in Christ. Freely God sent Jesus to save us from our sins. Freely Christ laid down his life for us. And by doing so, God raised him from the dead and promises to do the same for us someday. All because of the gift of God, freely given. We are called to respond to this—God’s greatest gift—freely out of the resources God has placed at our disposal. So we give freely because of the free gift God gave us in Christ.

**Giving Generously.** The Apostle Paul talked about generosity in giving by citing the example of the early churches in Macedonia who “during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part” (2 Corinthians 8:2). We don’t know the exact nature of the affliction these churches went through. Perhaps they suffered a period of persecution by non-Christians, one result of which is that some of the church members probably lost their jobs. Despite their suffering, they were able to give generously and freely to God’s larger mission in the world. They were able to do so because God met their needs. And when God meets our needs, we are able to give generously to God because of God’s blessings on our lives.

John Wesley, the principal founder of Methodism, summed up this attitude of giving generously when he encouraged the Methodists to: “Earn all you can, save all you can, so you can give all you can.”

**Giving Intentionally.** Like most things in life, giving to God involves having a plan. We cannot give cheerfully, freely and generously on a regular basis without a plan for giving. In his first letter to the Corinthian
Church, Paul instructed the Christians there with these words: “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn so that collections need not be taken when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:2).

In other words, Paul gave them a plan for giving—on the first day of every week and giving from the extra money they had. Giving intentionally is an important part of our discipleship. Think of it as a spiritual discipline, a way to maintain our faith commitments that ensures we continue to grow in grace as we grow in the love and knowledge of God.

**How much should we give?**

The Bible has several different models of giving that are designed to support the overall goal of helping us to grow in grace and take part in God’s Kingdom-building work in the world.

These models range from first fruits giving—that is, giving a predetermined amount of our income as the very first priority, the very first check we write every week or month—to giving more than 10 percent of our income to God.

Most of us have heard of the tithe, or 10 percent, as the biblical standard for giving to God. But many people have trouble seeing how we can attain such a level of giving. Some say it’s not practical because tithing was a practice rooted in an agrarian society in a different culture, time and place.

Some people will say that tithing is not realistic for everyone. For example, people on a fixed income in a time of rising costs will find it difficult, if not impossible, to tithe. College students with major loans to pay off, the unemployed and those struggling with costly medical care also are in a difficult position to tithe.

All of these points of view have merit.
Nonetheless, if we are to practice giving as a spiritual discipline, one that provides a path for us to follow to be faithful disciples who are growing in grace, we need a goal, a mark on the wall we can aim for.

**The model I will hold up to you today is one of proportional giving that enables us to step up to tithing 10 percent of our income to God.**

**Proportional giving has very solid biblical roots.**

From the Hebrew Bible we read the instructions Moses gave the people of Israel: “then you shall keep the festival of weeks for the Lord your God, contributing a freewill offering in proportion to the blessing that you have received from the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 16:10).

Jesus, too, spoke about proportional giving in the story of the poor widow whose gift to the Temple consisted of two small coins. This was a miniscule amount compared to what the big donors contributed. But Jesus said of her: “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on” (Mark 12:41-44).

The widow certainly demonstrated all of the attitudes of giving God I mentioned earlier. Her gift was generous, it was given cheerfully and freely, and it was intentional.

But the main point of the story is that the size of the gift does not matter; it’s giving from the heart that matters because God gave from God’s heart when he gave Jesus to the world.

However, proportional giving is not the end of the story.

**The tithe**—10 percent of our income—remains the mark on the wall we should aim for in our giving. It is a goal we can strive for at the right time in our lives because it demonstrates our commitment to living according to
God’s priorities. It helps us avoid living by other priorities that serve the lesser gods.

There’s a story about an ambitious young man who told his pastor he had promised God a tithe of his income. Together, they prayed for God to bless his career. At that time he was making $40.00 per week and tithing $4.00. In a few years his income increased and he was tithing $500.00 per week. He called on the pastor to see if he could be released from his tithing promise because he thought it had become too costly. The pastor replied, "I don't see how you can be released from your promise, but we can ask God to reduce your income back to $40.00 a week; that way, you would have no problem tithing $4.00."\(^3\)

Very quickly, here are three reasons to tithe:

- Tithing is our proclamation that God is abundant and his grace meets our needs. It is a way for us to say we have enough, despite the consumer-driven culture around us that tells us constantly we need more.
- Tithing is a spiritual discipline that transforms us. God gave abundantly to us out of God’s many blessings. These blessings enable us to be a blessing to other people. By so doing, we continue to grow into the likeness of Christ.
- Tithing enables us to take part in God’s work in the world by giving sacrificially from our own means. By tithing, we claim our part in God’s redemptive work in the world by helping to provide for the least, the last and the lost at a level of giving that is both challenging and biblically-based.

Personal story: This model of proportional giving growing into tithing is one my wife and I followed some years ago:

20 years ago, Joyce and I used to give a small amount to the church, maybe 20 or 30 dollars a week. At the time, we thought that was about right. But then we started to take our faith and the Bible more seriously. We read about the biblical injunction to tithe our income.

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\(^3\) Sermon Illustrations.com, article on internet, [http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/giving.htm](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/giving.htm), accessed 14 November 2013.
We also heard some sermons about proportional giving and growing into tithing, including first-hand testimonies from people who became tithers in response to God’s blessings in their lives. So Joyce and I determined to become tithers too. We started out slowly but increased our proportion of giving by one percent each year for several years until we made it to 10 percent. We’ve kept it there every year since. And we have never wanted for anything. God continues to bless us with enough to meet our needs.

**An invitation to grow in giving.**

Giving is an important part of our Christian discipleship. It is one of the ways in which we grow in the grace and love and knowledge of God. Today, I want to invite you to think of your giving to God as part of your discipleship and consider whether God is calling you to take a step up in giving. For some of us who are already tithing the answer may be that we are right where God wants us to be in our giving. And that is good. Some of us may be giving proportionally and we aren’t sure how we can take the next step up toward the tithe. Still others of us may not be able to take another step in giving right now due to our financial situation. Wherever you are in your giving to God, I want to provide you a tool you can use to take the next step in giving to God.

Please take out of your bulletins the insert with the pie chart on one side and the table on the other. The pie chart and accompanying information gives you an idea of how much most Americans give to charitable organizations. This includes both religious and non-religious causes. The most important thing to see here is the vital role individuals play in giving: 72% of charitable gifts come from individuals, not big corporations. The message is: your gift matters. No matter the size, your giving matters to God.
The table on the other side of the paper provides a path you can follow toward tithing.
- Find your approximate monthly income on the chart.
- Determine your current proportional giving.
- Look at the next percentage up from where you are now.
- Determine to give one percent more next year than this year.
- Repeat this again in a year to take another step up toward tithing.

Whether we are tithers or proportional givers, God is pleased when we give from the heart. Because that’s where giving started—from God’s heart, with the gift of God’s son Jesus.

We honor God when we give cheerfully, freely, generously and intentionally.

We also honor God when we grow in our giving because this is part of the change Christ works in us as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Amen.