

## Welcome

This is Labor Day weekend. Labor Day originated in the 19th century as labor unions spread across the country. One of the first things that comes to mind when we think of work is our paychecks. After all, the main reason most of us work as much as we do is for the income. (If we're fortunate, we also have a sense of fulfillment from our jobs, but I doubt any of us would work quite as much as we do if we had infinite money.)

As integral as money is to our work, we're strangely reluctant to talk about it. There's an unspoken rule in most jobs not to discuss salaries, and that's certainly not something we discuss over dinner with friends.

We should always pay attention to taboos because that means they're sources of incredible power. Our discomfort discussing money is a signal that money has a lot of power in our culture (no duh, right?).

It shouldn't be a surprise, then, that Jesus has a lot to say about money - he actually talks about it more than just about anything else! And the whole bible has a lot to say about money - it's just about all radically counter to whichever cultures the biblical authors lived in.

All of which is to say that we're going to talk about money today. Because Jesus believed what he had to say about money is good news.

Clock that: not manipulative. Not designed to make us feel guilt or shame. But genuinely good news. Jesus' perspective on money, on generosity, is challenging - particularly in our culture of consumption and competition.

But if we'll hear him, we'll find liberation. So before we dive into giving, let's worship the God who is our source of every good gift!

## Message

For the month of August, we're in a series called How to Get Your Groove Back. The most common experience we've had throughout the pandemic is a loss of rhythms, the structures, patterns and habits that help us navigate our lives. We made jokes about how the whole lockdown felt like a timeless void where everything was the same. Then we'd all laugh nervously and look to the side because of course it wasn't *really* a joke. We lost so many of the routines and structures that we took for granted. We lost the rhythms of life that helped us make sense of our world.

Everything began opening back up right as we entered into summer - which is another one of those times our rhythms become more fluid. Kids are out of school, we take trips. But now we're looking toward the new normal. Schools are returning to session. Summer is coming to an end.

So we want to ask over the next month how we get back into rhythms of faith. What are the practices that order our lives and lead us to life and flourishing?

We began by acknowledging that we were created to live in rhythms - daily, weekly, monthly. Last week, we reclaimed our daily rhythms by ordering our day through prayer.

Today, we're going to explore the one of the biggest stressors of the pandemic - finances. A lot of us have been hit really hard by the pandemic - lost jobs or major income shifts. Our financial rhythms have been disrupted as much as anything else has, and believe it or not, Scripture talks a lot about our financial rhythms.

If you know about that, you probably know it as the tithe - the idea that we're to give 10% of our income to God. The tithe is a concept we find all through the Bible, in verses like [Malachi 3:10](#):

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! -- Malachi 3:10 (NLT)

I know this is a topic people *hate* to talk about at church, for a couple of reasons. First, we all know those churches and pastors who tell us that we have to give money or we don't have faith, or God doesn't love us. Their congregants are barely scraping by and they're wearing alligator leather shoes and flying around in private jets.

Let's be clear: that's evil.

Here at Catalyst, we know that's not how God sees money (and we're going to look at some of the verses those churches use today).

But while some of us object to churches talking about money because of how a lot of churches do that, some of us find this topic uncomfortable because of the state of our own finances. Maybe we don't manage our money well. Or maybe we just don't see the need to give.

I have to be honest with you: those of us who are in this boat are going to find today's message challenging. But I want to invite you to listen. Ask the Holy Spirit right here, before we dive into the Scripture today, to give you ears to hear. Not what I'm saying, but what God might be saying through me and the Scripture. Is there an invitation here? And what might happen if you accept that invitation?

Turn with us to [Genesis 14](#).

I want to look at the first example of a tithe we have in the Bible. It occurs in the story of Abraham, fairly early on. At God's invitation, Abraham - who was still called Abram at this point - left his homeland and travelled to Canaan. He's acquired a decent amount of property, wealth and power, enough so that his nephew Lot - who at this point is his heir, has to separate from him.

Lot settles a valley ruled by a pentapolis whose chief city is Sodom. If you recognize that name, then you know Sodom and its sister cities had no interest in God. They were, in the biblical vernacular, evil and wicked.

Just before this story, the pentapolis was defeated in a war. The king who defeated them took their flocks as spoils and their people as slaves - including Abram's nephew Lot.

Abram was having none of that, so he ambushed the king with a night attack (on an already weary army) and defeated them. This story picks up where he's returned with all the property and people who were captured. You'll notice that he meets two kings. One is the king of Sodom (which we expect). The other is someone named Melchizedek. This is literally the only time he shows up in the Bible. So pay attention to him! And, more importantly, pay attention to what Abram gives to each of them:

After Abram returned from his victory over Kedorlaomer and all his allies, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought Abram some bread and wine.

Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has defeated your enemies for you." Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.

The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give back my people who were captured. But you may keep for yourself all the goods you have recovered." Abram replied to the king of Sodom, "I solemnly swear to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will not take so much as a single thread or sandal thong from what belongs to you. Otherwise you might say, 'I am the one who made Abram rich.' -- Genesis 14:17-23 (NLT)

So here's the surprising thing: Abram actually gives the King of Sodom *more*. He pays a tithe to Melchizedek (more on that in a moment), but when the King of Sodom offers Abram all the property he recovered, Abram refuses. The king was basically offering to pay Abram for recovering his people by letting him keep all the property he'd recovered. But Abram doesn't want to be associated in any way with Sodom. He doesn't want a place so counter to God's will to be associated with him in any way.

He doesn't want anyone to be able to look at what he has and say, "Oh, you know why he has that? Because he did Sodom a favor and they took care of him."

And if that were the end of this exchange, we wouldn't have much else to go on, other than that he really doesn't care for Sodom.

But out of nowhere, this Melchizedek fellow appears. We don't know much about him. We're not even sure his name is Melchizedek, because that means "King of Justice", which could be a name or a title. And he's the king of Salem, which means 'peace'. So that *could* be a reference to Jerusalem. We might be looking at a guy with a sweet name who is an ancient king of Jerusalem. Or we could be dealing with an anonymous travelling priest whose title is "King of Justice and Peace" (which is pretty rad as titles go).

(Fun fact: since we know so little about Melchizedek, ancient interpreters did some really fun and weird stuff with him. He shows up in a Psalm and in the book of Hebrews as a way to justify Jesus' priesthood. And that's the tamest stuff.)

What we *do* know is that Melchizedek blesses Abram in the name of God. He's a foil for the king of Sodom. Whereas Abram gives all the property back to Sodom that belonged to Sodom, he had no prior relationship to Melchizedek. Rather, when Melchizedek blesses him, he recognizes the man as a priest of God, so he gives him a tithe - that 10% of everything he gained from his recent battle.

Why?

The implication is that Abram understands that all he has is from God. By offering a tithe, Abram is acknowledging that. We can see that by how Abram treats the King of Sodom. That's why these two kings are next to each other in this story. So we can see what a faithful use of our resources looks like.

Friends far too often, we imagine that all we have, we've earned by the sweat of our own brow. We imagine ourselves to be kings and queens of our own castles, our paychecks providing us lordship over all we have amassed for ourselves. We prize being the breadwinner.

But Jesus teaches us - as we saw last week - to pray, "Give us today our daily bread." He reminds us, in that daily rhythm of prayer even, to acknowledge that all we have is a gift from God. Other Biblical authors describe Jesus as the source of all we have. Our energy, our strength, our wisdom and ability - all these come from God. Everything we have is the result of God's gracious gifts towards us.

But we forget this. Especially in this culture of consuming and self-sufficiency.

That's why here at Catalyst we emphasize giving as one of our spiritual practices. Giving is how we, like Abram, remember that what we have is from God.

And, more importantly, that God gives to us so we can learn to give like God. Giving is one way we become like God.

**Turn with us to 2 Corinthians 9.**

This is a letter from the Apostle Paul to the churches he founded in the city of Corinth. And one of the big reasons he wrote this letter was to gather financial support for the church in Jerusalem. He's headed to Corinth and wants the church there to take up an offering.

Now, the churches in Corinth were... poor is putting it nicely. They were mostly lower class and slaves. They had very little money. Which Paul knew. So as we read, listen to how he talks about them giving:

**Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives**

cheerfully.” And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say,

“They share freely and give generously to the poor.  
Their good deeds will be remembered forever.”

For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. -- 2 Corinthians 9:6–11 (NLT)

I’m fascinated that Paul doesn’t put a number on them. He doesn’t give them a number or a percent. He doesn’t mention a tithe. What he says is, “You must each decide how much to give. Don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure.”

Paul is explicit because he knows that it’s easy to pressure people. This ‘seed/harvest’ language he uses is one of the verses prosperity preachers use to get people to give them money.

But what matters to Paul is *how* we give, not *how much*. Are we cheerful? Are we giving with a faith-filled heart?

So as we’re moving toward a time of response, I want to share with you how I’ve come to understand giving as a spiritual practice.

On the one hand, I wish it were as easy as giving you a number. “Everyone give \$50 a week,” or “Everyone give 10% of their income.” But while that’s easy, it’s not what we see in Scripture.

Rather, I want to invite you to do as Paul tells the Corinthians: prayerfully consider with God what God is calling you to give. I’ve found in my own life that in order to get to that space where I’m really acknowledging God as my provider and Lord, I have to give a little more than is comfortable. Giving what feels good is safe. When I have to stretch myself - just a little - I press into faith.

Sometimes in my life, that’s been more than 10%. Other times, it’s been a lot less. That’s why I hate putting a number on it. You can’t chart faith on a spreadsheet, unfortunately.

So as we move into this time of reflection, I want to invite you to consider what it means to give, to give cheerfully and to acknowledge God as your provider.

## Communion + Examen

Melchizedek offered Abram bread and wine as a meal of peace. Jesus offers us the same through his own body and blood.

How have I acknowledged God as the source of what I have in this last week?

How have I ignored God as the source of what I have?

How is God inviting me to enter into God's blessed economy of generosity this week?

## Assignment + Blessing

Giving examen