



Serving God with our offerings

Does serving God relate in any way to what we do with our money? Why should we offer money for God's work? And what about giving to less fortunate people? Giving offerings is a deeply spiritual issue. It's part of our service to God. How and whether we give offerings, show exactly how we view ourselves and God; it reflects our relationship with Him.

Owners or managers?

Most of us think of ourselves as owners. We have things we like to call our own. We refer to 'my house', 'my job', 'my child', 'my money', 'my time' or 'my life' – almost as if we own them. Yet, the Bible teaches us everything on earth belongs to God. He made it all. Everything, including us, belongs to our Creator.

In Psalm 24:1 we read, *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it"*, and Haggai 2:8, *"The silver is mine and the gold is mine", declares the Lord Almighty.*

God gives some of what He owns to each of us so that we may enjoy it, make a living from it, take care of it, and share it with others. But it remains his property, and never becomes ours. He merely entrusts it to our care. He appoints us as managers of his property. He trusts that we will take good care of it on his behalf, in his service and as his representatives.

In Luke 12:35-48 and 1 Peter 10-11 we read about good managers. Matthew 25:14-30 tells us the difference between good and bad managers. Joseph's life story (Genesis 37-47) is a prime example of being a good manager. However, Jesus Christ was the ultimate manager who sacrificed his life in humble service to God the Father (Philippians 2:3-8).

In Luke 12:13-22, 16:1-13 and 19:11-27 we read about bad and foolish managers. They think everything belongs to them. Forgetting that they are only managers, they behave like owners, thereby depriving God of his property. God is replaced in their lives by money and possessions. They are enslaved by their belongings. The Bible frequently warns against greed (1 Timothy 6:10), and turning money and possessions into some kind of a god, *“You cannot serve both God and Money”* (Matthew 6:24).

Seeing money and possessions with new eyes

When God frees us from this sinful approach, we realise we no longer belong to ourselves, but our lives and all we have belong to God. Then we get a fresh perspective on everything God gives us daily: our lives, our health, family and friends, food and clothing, home, our ability to work, eyes and ears, hands and feet.

Moreover, God gives us the earth we live on and nature that sustains us. With new eyes we view it all as gracious gifts from God. He gives it all to us to enjoy gratefully, but also appoints us to manage it. God wants us to handle it responsibly, and share it with others. We should not keep it only to ourselves. We should serve Him with our talents and abilities, our money and our time, wherever He has called us to work and live.

We should use our money to take care our families. We should handle our money responsibly, and not waste it on useless things. 1 Timothy 5:8 firmly reprimands parents who don't work hard and provide well for their families. We must also use the money and possessions that God has given us to take care of those in need as much as we can (Ephesians 4:28).

With our new eyes we notice when people are needy and learn how to help them in the best possible way. Noticing other's needs and doing something to help them, is a true measure of how genuine our faith is (Matthew 6:1-4, Mark 10:17-30, Matthew 25:31-46, and James 2:14-17). We do all these things joyfully, because we are grateful. Jesus himself said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35).

What the Bible teaches us about offerings

We are called to give some of our money to the work God does in and through his church. The Bible often speaks of tithes or thanks offerings we must give to the church.

The Law in the Old Testament commanded the Israelites to give one tenth of their income to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30-32). It went to the priests and Levites who performed temple duty. In turn, they also had to give a tenth of that tithe as the Lord's offering (Numbers 18:26). The first offspring of all their animals also belonged to the Lord. Furthermore, the Israelites gave special thanks offerings towards building the temple and towards its maintenance in good order. (2 Kings 12:9-14, 1 Chronicles 29). The tithe refers specifically to the “first tenth”, in other words the best of what we have.

During the time of the prophet Malachi, the people complained that the Lord did not bless them sufficiently. They said that He no longer loved them (Malachi 1:1-14). The prophet responded that the problem lay with their offerings. God expects of us to give the very best of our possessions as an offering to Him, but they gave Him their diseased and crippled animals. These offerings actually robbed God of what was rightfully his. Then the prophet

challenged them: bring the full amount of your thank offerings and trust the Lord to bless you. (Malachi 3:6-12). When we give our offerings, it is a clear sign of our gratitude and our trust in God.

When speaking of giving offerings, Jesus referred to the Pharisees who enforced tithing as a strict law, down to the tiniest crumb. Meanwhile, they lost sight of more important matters, including showing mercy, acting fairly and being reliable managers (Matthew 23:23). We should serve God and others with all that we have, not only our tithes. In Mark 12:41-44 Jesus pointed out to his disciples how the poor widow put the last bit of money she had in the temple treasury. Giving offerings is about serving God with our whole life and following Him faithfully.

Our offerings must also not only go towards the work of our own congregations, but also towards struggling congregations. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul writes how generously the Macedonian churches collected money to send to the poor churches in Judea. They all gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. They did this joyfully, because they were grateful for all God had given them. It is important to God that there should be greater equality within churches: while some enjoy abundance, others should not be in need. Therefore we should serve others with our offerings.

Practical guidelines for giving offerings:

Giving offerings is an important part of serving God. In a sense giving offerings is part of our worship service. Therefore, it is a good custom to offer our tithes during Sunday church services. It reminds us that our whole life belongs to God, and that all we have comes from Him.

What should we give? We should all give the best we can, according to our ability. A tenth of our income is always a good guideline. We should offer our money, but also our time and abilities. Some churches have the custom of members having to make a small compulsory contribution, almost like paying a membership fee to belong to some organisation. This pays for certain benefits or buys services in the church. You have to show a “*paid up card*” before you could, for instance, partake in Holy Communion. Usually the offerings are minimal, remaining unchanged for many years. This practice is wrong. Churches relying on this system never achieve independence. Thanks offerings differ vastly from ‘paid membership of a church’, and amount to much more than a small compulsory contribution. Once members start giving true thanks offerings, the congregation starts to thrive.

How should we give? We should give gratefully and generously. Some congregations have the good custom of members themselves bringing their offerings to the front of the church, sometimes even while singing and dancing. This shows how grateful we are to the Lord. However, there is nothing wrong with congregations gathering members’ offerings in other ways, for example by collecting it or organising a fête or fundraising project. But the collection must be done with eager willingness, as a love offering to God (2 Corinthians 8:11).

Why should we give? Because God gives us so much every day (2 Corinthians 8:7). And especially because He sacrificed his Son Jesus Christ for our sins. So we give gratefully. Giving offerings testifies to our trust in God. We also set an example to others, and we help to make the church’s ministry possible. All of this glorifies God.

Is it possible to give offerings with the wrong motives? Yes, for example, it is important not to give for the sake of being seen by others. Then it’s more about us, about our power and influence, than about God. It is also important not to try and earn God’s blessing with our offerings. These days, some ministers preach a so-called “*prosperity faith*”. They allege the more we give to God, the more He will bless us with wealth, health and happiness. This dangerous viewpoint is not Biblically based. Such a belief is all about people’s own needs, about how we can manipulate God in all kinds of ways to make us more prosperous. It is even often a case of church leaders enriching

themselves through the offerings they force out of their congregants in various ways. In fact, offerings should be about gratefulness and service to God, and not primarily about what we stand to gain.

How should the church handle offerings? Being good managers, the leaders of the church should manage the church's funds responsibly. It should be used to maintain the church's property. It must also be used for the church's ministry, within the congregation, but also in reaching out. It is also important that the ministers or full-time employees of the church should earn a living wage (1 Timothy 5:18). God's servants should not have to worry about their income. They should dedicate all their energy to God's work. If, however, it is impossible to pay them full salaries, they should be allowed to do other work to supplement their income. Managing God's money responsibly also entails proper bookkeeping and frequent accountability of income and expenditure. An individual or small group of people should never have the sole responsibility of managing the funds or deciding how to use it. In 2 Corinthians 8:20 it is quite an important principle that people should share responsibility regarding financial affairs. This creates trust and encourages people to keep giving their offerings.

Promises of blessing

Of course there are many promises of blessing if we serve God gladly. One of many in the Bible is, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). But the most important truth is that God blesses us by his grace, and not because we have earned it or tried to bribe Him with our offerings.

God blesses us so that we may be a blessing to others, and so that we may honour Him, also with the money and possessions He entrusted to our care.

