



## The Art of Giving:

Youth Groups regularly go on mission trips beginning in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. College students often spend spring breaks and summers in a variety of locations painting, tutoring, roofing and many other task that help people who struggle to survive. The youth in our culture understand giving of themselves. They serve not only through their religious affiliations, but schools, civic groups, and scholarship requirements or simply because it seems like the right thing. They just get it.

But when it comes to giving money, it seems more complicated. There are lots of reasons for their reluctance. Religious and other institutions have not always been responsible with the money that people entrusted to them. The scandals and abuse have been fodder for news their whole life, making students hesitant to give their money through traditional venues. Their reluctance, however, is not only about the money. They believe that by giving their money, they could possibly be supporting and complicit in the abuse themselves. If they give their money to an organization that is reported as abusing children, are they then somehow responsible for that abuse as well? They take those questions very seriously.

The young amongst us are often seen as slothful and self-absorbed and their reluctance to give from their personal coffers is seen as just another example of those qualities. While I will not deny that what they value is filtered through their worldview, we must take some responsibility for our part in that worldview. If we want them to invest and trust the groups that we value, then we must be part of making those groups trustworthy.

I regularly asked students about their ideology of giving money as a reflection of their faith and they have given a variety of responses. Some reasons are logistical, some are philosophical and some are theological. Even the young adult, who understands the correlation between faith and giving, is often away on weekends and he or she does not have a simple way of giving to their church so they do not give at all. They rarely carry cash or a check, which are most church's means of receiving gifts, and the disconnect between where they are and where we think they should be is another barrier to their giving. While they understand the value of giving, they need a portal for giving that makes sense to them. Most of them know that they need to give not only their time, but also their money; however, they want to know how to do it with integrity.

Several times, students have told me that they began to give out a purely consumer approach to "religious services." At first I was appalled at this line of thinking, but I heard it enough, that I had to quit reacting and begin to process the approach. Seeing giving to the church as a commodity, frees them from being responsible for things they had no control over.

Last fall, after having yet another conversation about monetary giving with a young woman, I asked her to unpack her thoughts about monetary giving. She is someone I know to be a devoted and dedicated Christian, so when she gave me the now familiar "giving to the church as a payment for services" explanation, I listened. I said, "Tell me you did not stop there." She assured me that she had not, but it was a place that she could start to process the relationship between her faith and monetary giving, I asked her to write an article about her giving journey. The following article is her response to my request.

## Free

FREE... Eyes open, curiosity peaks, consumers ready themselves for the deal. Free food, free parking, free gas (Okay I'll not go that far). Most like the chance to behold the beauty of "free." But what is really free?

The majority of life offers itself at a cost — supplies, rent, entertainment, etc. What about church? The Bible does say to tithe, but is it required? The Bible also says to give with a willing heart.

When in high school, I had a weekend job. I made about \$400 a month. It was so hard for me to willingly write the check for \$40. Although I knew it was an obedient act of my worship. I still wanted to only do it sometimes.

I began a rationale for regular giving. I thought about all the services I paid for. At the time, it was gas and entertainment. So I started comparing Sunday mornings to a two-hour movie. I would pay \$10 a show, so why not pay \$10 a morning for something that would be more everlasting?

If my services were being used for something, I would want to be paid for my work. So why would I expect to use someone else's services without paying? As beautiful as "free" is, I would not work for free. Then why expect the church to continue to pour out its resources to me without replenishing the source?

This comparison was the beginning of my giving. It helped me be consistent and willing to start sharing my blessings with the church and Kingdom. The longer I tithe, the more transformed my view and heart become.

I no longer want to withhold good things from the Kingdom and its people who need it. Does God need my money? Well, God's not walking around with a roll of 20s, but He knows what has my money has my heart.

I have come to recognize tithing as more than payment, but a laying down of something that competes with the Father for lordship of my life.

My tendency to cherish money over God remains even as I regularly tithe. Not sure if I will ever break myself of this, but I willingly continue to give to the Lord as an act of submitting this part of my life to Him. I want Him to know He has my heart.

EXTRA:

I am reminded nothing is truthfully MINE. It all comes from God.

Someone once told me a story. A dad and his daughter went to McDonald's to get some food. He ordered his daughter a kid's meal, while he just got a Coke. As his daughter ate the fries in the meal, he reached over to snag one. She popped his hand and said "MINE." He looked at her and thought, "Daughter, don't forget who provided you with those fries."

Although slightly more comical, this story is applicable. God is the creator and giver of the fries, but we are often quick to forget our "fry gifts."