

Frequently Asked Questions About Giving

RiverTree Christian Church

1. Where should my kingdom giving be directed?

This is a very common question in the Christian community. There are so many worthwhile charities and organizations that could benefit from financial gifts. However, the giving commanded and illustrated in Scripture is giving that supports the Christian community and advances the gospel of Jesus Christ on this earth.

Your giving to God's kingdom, then, must be directed toward the building up of God's kingdom. God has established his church and then the local churches planted in communities as the primary avenue of his work on this earth.

Every Christian, as part of the body, is expected to be involved in a local body of believers that is growing together and carrying out the work of Christ. While "The Church" is made of all the Christians around the world, a Christian is to be connected to a local body as the place where believers live out their obedience and connectedness to other Christians. These local churches, by God's design, are the hope of the world.

With that in mind, kingdom giving should first and foremost be directed to the local church where a Christian is serving and working. This giving is part of an overall life lived out with other Christians. In I Corinthians 9, reminds us that kingdom workers deserve to be supported by the rest of the body. You should know, too, that when you give to RiverTree specifically (as is true with many other churches), your money not only goes to support the work of this church in Northeast Ohio, but is distributed to several other godly ministries around the country and around the world.

It should be said, though, that a faithful church is a church that is taking the Great Commission of Jesus seriously by focusing its efforts toward spreading the gospel and making disciples locally and around the world. In a godly church, there will also be an effort to help those on the margin of society. If that is not the case, the wise believer will look for a faithful group of believers to give to and grow with.

In addition to giving specifically to Kingdom work, God is very clear about the people of God, both individually and corporately, being generous with those who are poor and hurting and hungry. A committed believer will be continuously looking for ways to be generous with the poor because that is the character of Christ.

Please read these Scriptures below as you seek God's direction for this area of your finances:

Matthew 16:18, Romans 12:5, 1 Cor. 1:2, I Cor. 9:7-14, 2 Cor. 9:9-11

2. How do I decide how much to give?

Tithing (giving 10% of income) is often correctly cited as the standard of Old Testament giving for the Jew. There is much discussion, however, over whether or not the command to tithe is applicable to the New Testament Christian. There are godly people on both sides of the discussion.

Many Bible commentators think it is worth noting that Jesus, though he talks extensively about the handling of money and possessions, never commands his disciples to tithe and that tithing is never part of the instructions given to the early church. These commentators and teachers conclude then that there must be other overriding principles for giving in the New Testament.

While we do not believe that tithing itself is a legalistic command for the Christian, it can be a good reference point on the way to God-honoring finances. II Corinthians 8-9 seems to be a great text for helping a person decide giving amounts as a Christian. Jesus, of course, has much to say on the handling of money and possessions and about giving in particular which will serve to draw out an overall financial giving plan for the wise believer.

Among the central principles found in these texts are:

- ❑ **God owns everything you have.** Therefore, the question is not, “how much of my money should I give to God?” but “How much of God’s money should I keep for myself?”
- ❑ **Decide to give according to the amount you have been given.** Every Christian in America must remember that they live in the wealthiest nation in the world and their kingdom giving should reflect the generosity that God has shown them.

2 Cor. 9:8-11

And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. [9] As the Scriptures say, “Godly people give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will never be forgotten.”

[10] For God is the one who gives seed to the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will give you many opportunities to do good, and he will produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

[11] Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out in thanksgiving to God. [NLT]

This is part of the reason that 10% can still be a good starting point for a Christian. Bob Russell makes a helpful observation here:

“In the Old Testament, God commanded his people to tithe-10 percent of their crops and flocks were returned to God. In our era he has given us Jesus Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the fellowship of the church, the privilege of living in the most affluent nation in the world, plus so many personal blessings. Yet when we ask how much we should give, he just says, “Give as you have been prospered.” You decide whether that should be more or less than a tithe.”

- ❑ **The person who invests generously in God’s work will be generously rewarded.** While Scripture never promises that those who give will become rich, it does promise that God will intervene in the lives of those who give. Many Christians will tell you that while they couldn’t imagine how this worked before, they know now that this principle is true. As you keep giving and increase your generosity, God’s involvement in your life increases because you are trusting him more and more.

Matthew 25:29, 2 Cor. 9:6

- ❑ **Giving to God’s kingdom is an investment in the future.** As your deciding how much to give to the kingdom, remember that Jesus asks us to think not about what our money will be doing in a year or ten years, but in 1000 or 10,000 years. God’s promise is that money entrusted to him will impact the Kingdom now and *your own* future in heaven.

Luke 12:31-33, Luke 18:29-30

So, with these principles in mind, decide on an appropriate starting point to honor God with your finances. Remember that God owns everything you have. Reflect on where you live and how much you have been given. Count on God’s promises of generosity and know that the money you give back to him will be used to impact lives now and to store up your own treasures in heaven. Then decide, that as your transformation continues, you will look for ways to live and give even more generously to the things that will matter forever.

3. If I am unable to pay my bills, should I still be giving to God?

As a Christian, you are to be “salt” and “light” in this world. In other words, your life is to be lived in such a way that you flavor the community and show it how to live. A Christian who is not paying his bills is damaging his impact in the community and really harming God’s work. You can honor God first by paying the bills you owe.

With this in mind, if your situation is really that desperate, we would recommend doing whatever it takes to pay your bills. There are many other questions that must be answered, however. What kinds of bills are you talking about? Are these bills for things that you need to exist or bills from poor spending habits?

If, for example, you are choosing to make your boat payment over your giving to God, then you are not honoring God with your finances. Giving is part of your transformation as a Christian to help you grow in your love for and trust in God. He does not need your money, but you need to give, and he will use what you give. It is part of your obedience and part of your transformation into someone who genuinely puts the Kingdom first.

On the other hand, even if your situation is desperate, we would still recommend giving to God some portion of your income, even if it is small for now. The promise of Scripture is that this gift to his Kingdom will be multiplied back into your life somehow. And this small act of giving will start your life down a path of trusting God. Look especially at Jesus' comments about the widow in Mark 12.

Please read these Scriptures and consider them as you answer this question:

Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 6:33, Mark 12:42, 2 Cor. 9:6

4. If I am unable to save, should I still be giving to God?

This is a slightly different question than the previous one. Since you are not harming God's reputation in the community, the answer is different.

Saving is a good thing, actually recommended in Scripture. The central issue, though, is whether or not you will trust God with one of the most treasured areas of life – your money. You must decide if he is the source of your security.

Again, the promise of Scripture, is that God will honor your financial gifts as you honor him. With that in mind, we would suggest an overall financial plan that makes saving possible, but, if you must decide between giving to yourself (saving) and giving to God, give to God and trust him to supply what you need.

Matthew 6:31-33

5. Should I give if my spouse does not support it?

If you have income of your own that is truly at your disposal, then you can make giving to God a priority in *your* finances. Otherwise, according the general principles in I Corinthians 7, a husband or wife should have great concern for the spiritual condition of his or her spouse, especially if he or she is an unbeliever. In this case, do whatever you can to live at peace and demonstrate the character of Christ. Forcing them to give their money a way will typically only create further hostility and misunderstanding that will be a barrier to their ever coming to know Christ or grow in Him. Give what you can to honor God while not creating any unnecessary barriers for your spouse.

6. If I help someone in need financially (someone in need, my aging parents, etc.), should I deduct that from my normal giving?

Giving to help those in need, especially family members, is strongly encouraged in Scripture as part of an overall godly life. As we said earlier, though, one of the key features of Christian giving is using your finances in a way that advances God's purposes here on earth. This should always be a key part of your financial stewardship as a Christian. While there may be isolated times that you will need to give less to God's work through the church because of the great need around you, the long-term plan for your life should include you regularly setting aside an amount that is given specifically to the work of Christ's church. As you continue to honor God with your finances, consider setting a regular portion aside, above your kingdom giving, to have ready for the times when God brings a clear need to you. Then you will be able to meet the need and continue to give directly to God's work through the church.