

Biblical Advice for Cheerful Givers

We've been told this since our days in Sunday school: We want to give and we need to give gladly. A spirit of generosity isn't enough to guide us in our decisions. What else does Scripture have to say on the subject?

Three kinds of financial giving are mentioned in the Bible: offerings, tithes and alms. Understanding what they mean helps us achieve a thoughtful, balanced plan for our cheerful giving.

Offerings and Tithing

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).

The faith practice of making a regular financial offering to your congregation is grounded in a “first fruits” philosophy.

We might think of this giving as “business as usual.” You pay the rent, you buy groceries and you contribute regularly to help carry out God’s mission in the world. Your generosity isn’t an afterthought; it’s part of your day-in-and-day-out joyful response as a child of God.

These offerings first help to support local ministries, outreach and more. Your congregation then shares a portion of your offering—mission support—with your synod and the churchwide expression. *Stories of Faith in Action* is filled with examples of how mission support enables us to do God’s work with our hands.

Many Christians talk about their regular contribution as a tithe. This helps them to differentiate between their financial commitment to their congregation and the special offerings they designate to specific causes. Such causes may include ELCA World Hunger, a program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, your congregation’s building fund or a pan-Lutheran organization such as Lutheran World Relief.

We encourage your designated support of these worthy causes. But we also recommend that these offerings are given above and beyond, and never in place of, your commitment to your regular congregational offering.

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, for God loves a cheerful giver.

(2 Corinthians 9:7)

Alms

Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys (Luke 12:33).

Alms are our compassionate, heartfelt response to the people Jesus mentioned in Matthew 25: those “least” of our sisters and brothers who are “less” than we in circumstance only and always our equal in their humanity.

This is our most personal and spontaneous kind of giving in response to people in need. Think about the homeless man you see everyday by the bus stop or the family in your congregation whose home was lost during a fire. Your outreach makes God’s love for them feel very real and very immediate; your kindness reveals Christ’s presence within them as well.

Time and Talent

It’s also important to remember that when we focus exclusively on giving in terms of money alone, we lose sight of the bigger picture. God calls us to be generous in all areas our lives and invites us to explore the many opportunities to share ourselves through our time and talent.

When we ground our giving in a biblical context, our financial generosity becomes an expression of our love for God, for our neighbor and for ourselves. We are new people in Christ: compassionate and eager to share.

We give cheerfully because God has given us so much.