

# God's Giving Promises

## Part 5 – Biblical Financial Stewardship

Sid Litke

### **Rewards**

Everyone knows that rewards work. If you are going to train a dog to do tricks, you better have some doggie biscuits in your pocket. If you are trying to potty train a toddler, rewards are pretty handy also. The credit card industry has also gotten the hint and they compete for our credit business by offering rewards to use for free flights, discounts, cash back or some other form of return. And we as consumers figure that since we have to buy stuff anyhow, we might as well get something back. It's our human nature to look for rewards or return.

As we have studied financial giving in God's word, we hopefully felt the need to evaluate our giving. And we probably have wondered what would happen if we did begin to give what we think God wants us to give. Would anything change for me? Would I be better off financially? Would I simply be better off spiritually? What would happen?

Hebrews 11:6 says that God "rewards those who earnestly seek him." God rewards. It's just the way God is. God is not in anyone's debt.

The rewards we discuss in this study are not a deal we can make with God. He is sovereign and we can't make Him do anything. Our motive must remain rooted in simple thankfulness for His grace. But we can know that when the books of earth are closed someday in eternity, no one will ever say that they give more to God than He gave to them.

### **A Generous Woman (2 Kings 4:8-37; 8:1-6)**

Around 850 BC, a wealthy woman in Shunem, about 5 miles south of Nazareth, one day asked Elisha the traveling prophet to eat at her home (2 Kings 4:8-10). He did so and her house soon became a regular stop whenever Elisha came through the area.

Helping Elisha must have somehow been rewarding to the woman, because she began to think of ways that she might be able to bless him even more. She told her husband that she wanted to build a small addition onto the home to give Elisha his own furnished room when he came. Then he would be able to come and relax there. What a blessing! And that's exactly what they did.

This Shunamite woman was much like several families I have known in our church and elsewhere who have space in their homes that they developed largely to offer it to house missionaries while they are at home in the United States. They have generously spent their money and give their hospitality in the spirit of this Shunamite woman.

Now this woman didn't do this to "get" anything. She didn't make a deal with God that if she built this room for Elisha, she expected certain things back from God. She seemingly just gave as God led her. But what happened? Elisha wondered aloud if there was a way that He could bless her and his servant Gehazi mentioned that she didn't have a son (2 Kings 4:11-13). Evidently it was a real desire of her heart that so far had not been fulfilled. So Elisha the prophet promised her a son. And God came through as Elisha promised! This woman who had been childless had a bouncing baby boy! God is certainly a rewarder! The blessing of a child was a far greater blessing to her than she had even been to Elisha.

## **A Generous God**

Now the story doesn't end here. This child grew and as a boy one day working with his dad in the fields, he suddenly died. Of course the woman was heart broken – and even angry at God and Elisha. She laid the body of her only son on Elisha's bed in his room and went to find Elisha. In her bitter grief she said, "Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'" (2 Kings 4:28)?

So Elisha went to her house, prayed and laid himself over the body of the boy and God gave her son life again. God gave her a son to begin with and the God raised him from the dead, giving him to her again.

God is a giver. But we learn that when we give to God, there is no guarantee that life will suddenly be wonderful and without pain. When we give, we will still be tested.

There was yet another time when this Shunamite woman was tested – this time financially (2 Kings 8:1-6). Elisha told this woman to leave the land of Israel because God had revealed to him that a seven year famine was coming.

Evidently the Shunamite woman's husband who was older had died by then because now she was a widow. So she left the country of Israel to avoid the famine. But what evidently happened in those days is that if you left the country for an extended time, your abandoned land would become either the property of the king or perhaps of a relative. But whoever had it, evidently it was no sure thing that you would get it back.

So when the Shunamite woman came back to the land, she went before the king to beg to get her land back. This is where God's rewarding character is again obvious. When this woman comes to King Joram, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, just happened to be talking to the king. Imagine that! And the king has just at that moment had asked Gehazi to tell him about his master Elisha's miracles.

(2 Kings 8:5-6) *"Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came to beg the king for her house and land. Gehazi said, "This is the woman, my lord the king, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life." {6} The king asked the woman about it, and she told him. Then he assigned an official to her case and said to him, "Give back everything that belonged to her, including all the income from her land from the day she left the country until now."*

So how did this woman's generosity work out in the long run? Her gifts to God were initially just meals for Elijah and then she built and furnished a small room for him. God's gifts to her included the birth of a son, the resurrection of her son, advance warning of a 7-year famine and then God made sure she received her land back – plus seven years income!

God is an incredible rewarder to those who give to Him out of a grateful heart. But along with the principle we find in Old Testament scriptures the principle that those who refuse to give miss out on God's blessings.

## **Robbing God of Tithes under the Old Covenant**

In the time of Malachi the prophet (about 400 BC), there were serious spiritual problems in Israel. The book of Malachi addresses several of them. The Israelites were bringing God sacrifices consisting of their maimed animals (1:7-8). The priests had stopped teaching the word of God accurately (2:1-9). Furthermore, the Israelites had married unbelievers (2:11-16) and were divorcing their wives (2:13-16). They were even saying that evil people were good (2:17). Included in God's rebuke through the prophet

Malachi was proof that they had turned from God as shown by the fact that they stopped giving their tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:7-9).

At first they denied that they had turned from God (Malachi 3:7). They seem to have protested that they had done nothing wrong, *What do you mean, return to God? I'm doing fine with God. I don't need to change anything.*

And then interestingly Malachi uses as their failure to give financially as evidence of their spiritual state. He tells them, *You've robbed God.* Now they are really sputtering. *How do we rob God?*

(Malachi 3:8-9) *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. {9} You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me."* The failure to bring their tithes and offerings is called robbing God.

Tithes are a largely misunderstood part of Bible teaching about giving. "Tithe" is a Bible term that means 1/10th. Tithing was an obligation under the covenant of the Old Testament law. The first 10% of their crops went to God. The following chart describes the basic tithing requirements under the Law.

### Giving Forms in the Old Testament

1. **Regular Tithes = 10% of crops (income)** given each year to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30) OBLIGATION
  - a. Provided regular income for Levites and Priests serving at the temple in Jerusalem (Numbers 18:21-26)
  - b. Provided means for having three special feasts in Jerusalem each year (or if they lived too far away, they could bring money – Deuteronomy 14:22-26)
2. **2nd Tithe every 3rd year = 3.33%** OBLIGATION
  - c. Used to support the local Levites and the needy (Deut. 14:27-29)
3. **Personal Offerings – Any other gifts** (2 Kings 12:4; Mark 12:41 – voluntary vows, gifts). VOLUNTARY

There is some scholarly discussion and disagreement on the details of the tithing laws. It is possible that the *feasting tithe* (1/a above) was actually a 2<sup>nd</sup> separate tithe and thus it would mean an additional 10% tithe was required. This would actually make the annual "tithe" a total of 23.3% of one's yearly income. But we'll assume for now that it was part of the 1st tithe. Even then, the basic Israelite farmer would be giving an average of 13.3% per year as an obligation. Then they could and should give offerings above the tithe as thanks or praise.

These additional personal offerings were personal worship decisions. An example of this would be the widow at temple we studied who gave her two small copper coins while the wealthy threw in large amounts (Mark 12:41). These gifts were over and above tithing. When Josiah collected money to restore the temple, that was all above the tithes (2 Kings 12:4). And these financial offerings still did not account for many of the sin offerings and other offerings that involved animals or produce of the field.

So under the giving system of the Law, an obedient Israelite would be giving 13% (or maybe 23%) that was their obligation, plus whatever God led them to give above that in personal offerings.

Malachi rebuked the Israelites of his day who for the most part were not giving their tithes and offerings. He said that they had thus robbed God. As it turns out, they

were actually robbing themselves of God's blessings. Notice the promise of God to the Israelites if they were to repent of their failure to give.

### **Blessings for Giving in the Old Testament**

(Malachi 3:10-12) *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. {11} I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. {12} "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty."*

God is promising Israel financial success as a reward for tithing. Now before we start planning on building a new home and buying that yacht because we are going to give, we need to remember several things. 1) God's purpose in rewarding us is not so that we can become selfishly wealthy. 2) We do not have the promise about tithing repeated today in the New Testament. We live under the new covenant and we actually don't have a tithing law in the New Testament. No one can tell you that you must give 10% or 13% plus other voluntary offerings. That was the Old Covenant.

But it would seem a bit strange that we would make it our goal in this age of grace to do less than what was required under the law. In His teaching Jesus often challenged people to live by a higher standard now under grace than what Moses had required under the law (e.g. Matthew 5:27, 28).

So although the law of tithing and the financial promises of tithing are not in force today, we find from the words of Jesus and from the epistles of the New Testament that the general principle of God's promises to givers are still true.

### **Blessings for Givers according to Jesus**

Jesus taught the basic principle that God rewards those who are generous not only financially, but generous in spirit. Listen to the words of Christ.

*"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. What kind of reward? It doesn't say – perhaps here, perhaps heaven. {36} Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. {37} "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."* (Luke 6:35-37)

People who do good to others generally find themselves blessed with the same kind of graciousness with which they treat others. God makes sure that happens somehow. Jesus says next that God gives back even more than a generous merchant.

*"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* (Luke 6:38)"

A "good measure" meant that when you bought grain in the market, the merchant didn't do to you what the potato chip people do to us. When we open the potato chip bag we often find it half empty when we think it's going to be full. But a generous merchant would fill his measure to the brim and then press it down and shake it so it settles so he could get a little more in before giving it to you as the customer.

Jesus says God is like that generous merchant – only more so! God will reward us in such abundance of blessings that they will be overflowing our basket and filling the robe in our lap. God is just that way! He will not be out-given.

What kind of giving is Jesus talking about? He could mean money, but He could also be referring to anything of ours that we give away – time, concern for others, encouragement, money or other material things. And what kind of return or blessing is Jesus promising? God may give back to us in many ways. In His miraculous way He can choose to bless us financially through finding us good deals, preventing high expenses or by providing raises or more hours and overtime. But it could be also be that God bless our “giving” by rewarding us with unexpected time to relax even though we had given away time to serve others. It could be that God miraculously bless our marriage, restores relationships or health or any number of good things.

At our church we need to replace our entire roof one fall. We hired a contractor who was willing to work with our volunteers. Many guys gave up their time in the evenings and Saturday to help on the project and the total cost was far below the estimate of having a contractor do it all. How did God reward those who volunteered to help? I don't know all the ways, but I am confident that they were rewarded with joy, fellowship and even God's provision of time that they needed for their own family and personal projects.

Those who give time regularly to serving others in their church, family and community are not shortchanged in the long run. Providentially, God takes care of the time needs of those who gave time, the financial needs of those who give financially and the encouragement needs of those who give encouragement.

From what we've seen from the Shunemmite woman and from the tithing promises of Malachi and Jesus' words to us here, we can be sure that God will reward our financial giving. We may not get wealthy, but no one will get to heaven and think, *Boy, I got the raw end of that giving stuff.*

### **Blessings for givers in the church age**

In the New Testament God's promises to givers include a great variety of both spiritual and financial blessings. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul urges the church at Corinth to give to an offering he is collecting for famine relief for believers in Jerusalem. At the end of his exhortation he lists some of the blessings they will experience if they do.

If God is working in our heart to produce a new attitude of giving based on stewardship, contentment, trust and worship, then what God wants us to know very clearly from the following passages is that we will never regret it.

The general principle is exactly what Jesus taught: God blesses givers; *“Whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”* (2 Corinthians 9:6-14). Here are other blessings Paul describes that will come just from participating in this offering for needy believers in Jerusalem.

1. We will have enough to live on (8). *“...having all that you need.”*
2. Our ministry will multiply (8,11). *“You will abound in every good work... [God] will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.”*
3. We will have enough to give more (10-11). *“[God] will also supply and increase your store of seed ... {11} You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion”*
4. People will thank for supplying their needs (12) *“... your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God ... supplying the needs of God's people...”*
5. People will praise God for your obedience to God and generosity (13)... *“Men will praise God for the obedience ... and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.”*

6. People will pray for you (14) *“And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”*

If we are privileged to live the kind of life described above, our life will be richly blessed indeed! As I look over this list of God’s rewards, I find that all six of these blessings describe God’s reward on the lives of my wife and I. It certainly does not mean that there are not many other struggles or trials in our lives, but as we have given to God financially as He has directed us concerning our local church and other ministries, He really has given us these rewards.

To appreciate God’s rewards, we have to adjust our expectations. Those who teach that it’s God’s will that Christians should be wealthy appeal to the selfishness of our hearts. They suppose that “godliness is a means to financial gain” (1 Timothy 6:5). The problem with that thinking is first of all that God never promises that in the New Testament and secondly, that if we give in order to live selfishly, we forfeit the real rewards God promised here.

If we struggle with a constant desire to be better off financially, we must note in the passage above what Paul promised the Corinthians. The reason why God will bless them financially is not so that they can spend it on upgrading their lifestyle, but so that they could give more. *“[God] will also supply and increase your store of seed ... {11} You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion”* (2 Corinthians 9:10-11).

The principle is not that we should “Give to Get.” God’s word is saying that we should “Give to Get, to Give more.” God rewards that kind of an unselfish heart.

### **More Rewards from God for Givers**

Paul’s letter to the Philippians reveals his own financial struggle and how he learned to be content through Christ even when he was hungry (Philippians 4:11-13). But in this section Paul stresses that he really did appreciate the financial gift that the church in Philippi sent him. Paul had received a gift from them for his support, just as a church budget pays salaries for pastors and missionaries.

Philippi is one of those Macedonian churches we studied previously who gave to the offering for Jerusalem out of their poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Since this letter to the Philippians was written about seven years later, we realize that they didn’t quit giving with that single offering. Philippians 4:10-20 is really Paul’s thank you note for that gift. And in his note, Paul includes additional promises of rewards from God for giving.

1. Eternal Rewards are placed on our account (Philippians 4:17-19) *“Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. Where are these rewards? These are rewards awaiting us in heaven!*
2. We have the Privilege of Pleasing God (4:19) *“I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”*
3. All our needs including money will be supplied by God {19} *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*

All means all. God is promising not only material blessings. This is a much better promise than even the Old Testament promise of material blessings. This is a promise of incredible blessing throughout our life.

Will life still be hard at time for givers? Yes. Will it actually be hard to give at times? Yes? Will there be doubts and fears about giving? Yes. But God will bless. We can just leave that part up to God.

Should we give to get? No. We should give out of gratitude for what God did for us through Christ. But God wanted us to know that He will not ignore our gift or be out-given. God rewards those who give.

### **Forming a Giving Plan**

Now, if giving is new to us, or if God is working in our heart in some new way, we need to make some practical decisions about where to give and how much.

The New Testament describes three crucial parts of a giving plan.

#### **1. Give Proportionately**

Two key passages from Paul to the Corinthians make the point that God expects our giving to reflect our income in some proportionate sense. Our giving should be a reflection of the income God has given to us. Paul called it giving “*according to your means.*” (2 Corinthians 8:11).

Even clearer are his instructions when the offering for the Jerusalem church was first announced. (1 Corinthians 16:2) “*On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*”

A George Barna poll in 1999 revealed that, “Evangelicals are the most generous givers, but fewer than 10% of born again Christians gave 10% or more to their church.” (George Barna. News release by Barna Research Group, April 5, 2000.) Also according to Barna, in 2000 14% of evangelicals said that they tithed. In 2001, 12% claimed to tithe. After 9/11, in 2002, the polls showed that it fell to 6%. However accurate the polls may be, it’s nonetheless obvious that only a small number of those who claim to be believers and to acknowledge the Bible as God’s word are giving even at the most minimal Old Testament standard.

Paul would not say that we must tithe, but tithing can serve us as a basic principle for proportionate giving. For some who are beginning, it might be a target to plan toward. For some it might just be a starting point.

We as believers today give with a full understanding of God’s grace and of God’s promises. So while the tithe should not *obligate* us, it also should not *limit* us!

What Paul seems to say in 1 Corinthians 16:2 is that we should simply decide on a percentage of our income to give regularly. Then it’s just a simple pre-spending decision that that comes off the top of every paycheck or other source of income. In one sense it is as simple as taxes – just a lot more fun. Beyond what we decide to give proportionately, there may be many other occasions when God shows us a need to which He prompts us to give.

If we make financial decisions alone, we can simply pray and decide what percent we should begin with or move toward. If we are married we should pray for and with our spouse that we to be able to come to an agreement of what to give jointly. It’s a spiritual exercise that can affect not only our finances but our marriage. If the discussion of what to give becomes an argument about spending and whose fault the money problems are, then a couple knows that they need to explore the whole concept of being God’s stewards. The need to give is part of the whole issue of living as stewards.

Some of us might think that we can’t afford to give up to 10% when we can’t seem to afford to live on what we have now. Indeed it can seem impossibly out of reach, but as we think like stewards and worshippers, God begins to make it possible. That’s where trust begins and God’s promises kick in.

In coming chapters as we learn what God says about practical areas like spending and debt, we will realize that God wants to free and enable us financially so that we can give. Generous proportional giving can be a reality for every one who follows Christ.

So tithing is not a rule, but proportionate giving is God's plan. The second principle we find in Paul's instructions to the Corinthians is that proportionate giving needs to be regular.

## 2. Give Consistently according to a plan

Paul taught the Corinthians to give regularly. (1 Corinthians 16:2) "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money...."

Paul was telling them to get ready for the offering by setting aside a regular amount each week when they came together to worship. This does not establish a rule that everyone must give every week, but it does establish the principle that regularity is key to proportionate giving. Just giving when we feel like it will probably lead to less and less commitment.

Consistent giving is possible even though we may get paid at very different intervals. Those in business or who receive commissions obviously have a bigger challenge at giving consistently. One suggestion for Christians who work on commissions is that they should establish a consistent budget of both spending and giving that is based on a conservative estimate of their income. Not only does that avoid the volatility of a feast and famine approach to expenses, it also enables giving to be consistent.

It's pretty easy for me to give consistently because I have a regular salary. My dad, however, was a farmer and had two main harvests a year. One crop was harvested in early summer and one in the fall. This meant that Dad had just two main paychecks each year. But my memory is that he wrote a check every week to the church. He somehow had averaged out what he intended to give. But I also remember that at harvest time he and mom would also write out a lot of extra checks to different ministries – because that's when the income was finally determined and more money was available to give.

We have complete freedom in how much we give and how often, but as in all areas of life, we need a plan that has some consistency. Regularity holds us accountable and it also enables the ministries that we support to be able to count on the gifts they need.

## 3. Give personally, willingly and cheerfully

As God moves in our hearts to be faithful givers as His stewards, probably the most important decision we make is about our attitude.

Paul states it directly, "*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*" (2 Corinthians 9:7)

We should give personally. No other person can tell you how much exactly to give. But as we seek God in prayer, God will direct us. If we have a sincere desire to be a steward, and if we are giving out of worship, gratitude and trust, we need to simply decide on a percentage to begin at for now.

If giving is an issue between me and God, then it is also crucial that we give willingly. At times we will need to pray for a willing and eager spirit, just as we need to do about any ministry or area of commitment in our life.



Part of giving willingly as worship to God is that fact that God is some very personal sense *loves a cheerful giver*. Give cheerfully to God.

There's an old story about a father who gave his son a dime and a quarter. He told his son that he should give one of them in the Sunday School offering and then he could keep the other coin. But the father reminded him, *Remember, God loves a cheerful giver*. Later, the dad asked which coin the child had given. He replied, *Well, Dad, you said that God loves a cheerful giver, and I decided that I'd be more cheerful if I kept the quarter*.

We naturally think we would indeed be more cheerful keeping or spending as much as possible on ourselves. But if we have already lived that way – keeping and spending and hoarding – how cheerful has it really made us?

Paul's word *cheerful* here is the Greek word *hilaros* which is where we get our English word *hilarious*. The Greek term does not quite have the connotation of hilarity, but the general idea is that when we give in gratitude for God's grace to us, it should be a happy occasion.

And why shouldn't it be? Giving is really somewhat of a legal form of insider trading. We have just seen the list of what God does when we give motivated by His grace. God's blessings to givers are abundant. We as believers have an insider's knowledge of all God's dividends for givers. Giving should be joyful when we are guaranteed such returns.

### **Deciding Where to Give**

We have seen that the Old Testament tithe went to support the worship and ministry of Israel at the temple. It was essentially the Old Testament equivalent of the local church. The local church would seem to be the biblical place to start giving proportionately. The epistles of the New Testament describe the need to support elders/pastors who teach the word (1 Timothy 5:17-18; Galatians 6:6). The point was that when we receive our regular spiritual "food" and encouragement from those who teach and lead us in the local church, they should be supported financially.

Along with such teachers are the financial support needs of others who preach the gospel such as Paul – who was financially supported much like missionaries today (1 Corinthians 9:4-14). Most missionary support today goes through the local church as well today. Finally, benevolence gifts are frequently channeled through local churches as well.

So the local church would seem to be the primary place to give financially based on the worship precedent of the Old Testament as well as the support principles of the New Testament. The necessity to have places to meet and to provide other ministry materials in our modern culture also points to the church as being the primary focus of biblical giving today.

In addition there are of course many other worthy ministries who support and supplement the ministry of the local church. One of the most exciting means of giving is to personally connect to missionary families and other ministry needs through regular giving. Our children learned the joy of giving their "tithe money" to missionary families that knew personally.

If we ask God to lead us to personal needs and ministries, He will be very creative in matching our hearts with His purposes.

### **Other Forms of Giving**

Cash will probably be the normal currency of giving for most today, but giving has always taken various forms. In Bible times all the way to early America, support for

pastors often came through providing food. Later it became norm to provide a parsonage as a home.

Going back to Old Testament times, people gave material, valuables and other items needed to build, assemble and furnish the tabernacle (Exodus 35:22-29). Today a person might give items that they know a missionary or someone else needs. IRS laws in the US allow tax deductions for “gifts in kind” just as it does for direct cash gifts.

When the church started in Jerusalem people sold items of value and gave it to support people in the church (Acts 2:44-45). Acts 4 tells about people who sold some of their assets of land to make significant gifts to the new church at Jerusalem and gave it to the apostles to distribute to those in need (Acts 4:34-37).

Christians today can give creatively and substantially to ministry needs to which God directs them by selling items of value, donating stocks, or including a church or ministry in their estate plan.

God prompts and provides ways for us to give that uniquely part of his plan and fit us perfectly. Then God rewards and blesses our giving in many ways.

### **Manuel’s Story**

Dr. Gene Getz (Real Prosperity, Moody Press. 1990 pp.47-48) reports a story from Lyle Eggleston, a missionary church planter in Chile in the late 80’s. Lyle desired to continue to plant churches, but it was crucial for the church where he was working to first of all become self-supporting. Unfortunately, the offerings at the church were averaging only about six dollars a week and the idea of Lyle leaving to start another church was not promising.

Then God began to work in this church through one rather poor couple who asked Lyle to teach them about financial giving. They had been reading on their own about tithing and ask Lyle to teach them more about it. Manuel was an out-of-work carpenter and their only income was selling the eggs from 20 Rhode Island Red hens. Lyle almost reluctantly began to teach them about regular and systematic giving from 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8 & 9.

The next Sunday Manuel handed Lyle an envelope containing his “tithe.” Inside were bills that amounted to 19 cents.

Later that week Lyle was bicycling past their house when Manuel flagged him down. He told Lyle that on Tuesday, after they had set aside their tithe for the next week, they were out of food. They thought at first it would be OK to use their tithe money for food, but then decided they shouldn’t do it.

When they went out to the chicken shed that day, they noticed that there were a lot of eggs already at 6:30 in the morning when normally there wasn’t much to gather until noon. So they had some to eat and sold the rest for bread for the day.

Later that day, a man came by in a push cart and asked them if they had any manure to sell. They hadn’t cleaned their chicken shed for a while and so they sold 20 sackfuls of manure and had enough for groceries and feed for the hens and some money left over.

Manuel’s wife needed shoes so she went to the neighboring town to buy some. There she ran into her nephew who she hadn’t seen for 5 years and he told her that he had a shoe store. She picked some out that she could afford, but her nephew insisted on giving them to her as a gift. So she went back home with new shoes and the money she had brought.

The next week Manuel found work on a project that would last two years. Their income increased and they continued to tithe and soon this couple was providing about half of the church's income. Others began to hear about their "tithing experiment" and wanted to be involved as well. So they began to tithe also.

The congregation grew and the income grew. A surplus was available every month. Lyle suggested supporting one of the mission's national pastors who was working among nearby Indians. So they began to support him at \$20 a month. Before long they were ready to hire a pastor themselves. They hired the national pastor they had been supporting. They also bought the building the missionary had been renting for them and the land around it, remodeled it and built Sunday School rooms and an auditorium seating 200 people.

Lyle and his wife were therefore able to move on to plant another church. No one got rich, but God's blessing was obvious upon the first tithing gift of 19 cents and the faith it represented.

God rewards giving and builds His church through the faithful financial worship of His people.