

# How to give like God!

## *Living the New Life:*

1 Corinthians 16:1-3

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**Bethany Church**

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How do you know what God wants you to give? How do you know that you are pleasing God when you make a pledge or offer a gift? How do you know that the Spirit of God is leading you when you spend, save or give away money?

For over a month, we've been looking at how to live a new life that is energized, empowered by God. When God moves in our hearts, he does not lead us with bit and bridle as if we are mules. Instead, he teaches us the path we are to walk and waits for our choices. Through Christ's death we do not become righteous robots, but we can become God's reconciled children. We are reconciled the only way any children reconcile with their parents. You have to deal with the issues that divide child and parent. In our case with God, we incur a debt we can't pay with our sins. Now God paid our debt with Christ, but we still incur debt when we sin. Unless we face the issue of our sins and unbelief, there is no possibility of reconciliation with God, and no new life. Only a repentant life, where we admit our sins, recognize Christ's payment, request a new relationship and live with the gift and counsel of God's Spirit, do we learn to bust addictions, grow new attitudes, build new abilities, heal others like Jesus, and give like God. This Sunday, we consider what it means to give like God. Obviously, it is difficult to do that if we are up to our eyeballs in debt. This coming January we'll share some tools and principles of financial wholeness. However, today we look at the practice of giving like God. If we are led by God's Spirit, people will see God in the way we give.

There is a well-known joke about three pastors who were discussing the way they give. One pastor said, “After payday, I cash my check, walk into the garage where I painted a circle. I throw all my money up in the air. All the cash that lands in that circle goes to the church. Everything else I do whatever I want with it.” The second pastor said, “I can see you are growing in your faith. I use to do the same thing; but my faith has grown. Now when I throw my money up in the air, I give the church whatever lands outside the circle.” The third pastor said, “I commend you. You are growing. However, I’ve moved on to a new level of faith. About a year ago, I painted over the circle in my garage. Now, I walk in, throw the cash up into the air; and God keeps whatever he chooses.”

Although there is no circle in my garage, I think we all can trick ourselves into a self-serving faith. Our capacity to rationalize is amazing. If someone ever produced a computer printout of all the things I ever purchased and did not use as I intended, along with the sum total of its cost, I would be upset. I think my wife would be upset. If to that, I added the things (and their cost) that proved unhealthy, I’d be even more upset. We can trick ourselves.

The new life we live through the Spirit of Christ is defined by the love of God and the love of people. The love of things doesn’t even compare. The Holy Spirit counsels us on our giving and spending, and the Holy Spirit has spoken many things to believers over the years about giving. If the Spirit of God is teaching us and if the Spirit of God is working in our desires, then our giving will become God-like and godly. In fact, some people will see what we give and come to know God as a result.

One picture of Spirit-led, godly giving is captured in Paul’s writing to believers in Corinth. A severe famine, much like the depression, that hit the United States in the 1930s, created extraordinary suffering in Jerusalem. Church leaders in Jerusalem already had a

significant food ministry to needy widows. Collections to support the Jerusalem's church's ministry had been taken by various churches to assist widows, orphans and other poor since a believer named Agabus prophesied about the famine many years earlier. Paul was now collecting offerings from churches to help the many poor in Jerusalem that still suffered the famine's effects. It was like a post-hurricane Katrina or post-tsunami offering for those still suffering a year or two later. Church leaders in Corinth had agreed that such an offering would be taken, but Paul was concerned that the need would significantly outstrip the ability of these believers to give at a particular moment. The kind of generosity Paul contemplated required more than giving from the heart. It required the head to accompany the heart. It required compassion and wisdom. It required planning. The Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians:

***Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 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.*** (1 Corinthians 16:1-2, NIV)

The Apostle Paul called the Corinthians to plan their giving, to set aside their money as they earned it, so that they would be able to give what their heart desired. They needed to plan and then act to accomplish anything of substance. Do you know God did exactly that with us? In Ephesians 2:10 the Bible teaches us that God planned for our lives and for works that we are to do today. Our relationships and skills are not accidents. They are the unfolding plan of God. Did you also know that God planned for the pain and penalty of our sin before he created us? In Revelation 13:8 the Bible calls Jesus "***the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.***" God planned for the predicament of our sin before he ever made us. In the same way, God's Spirit moves and teaches us to plan.

About a year ago, Bethany hosted a seminar for church leaders. We wanted to learn the difference between church families or congregations that give generously reflecting God and

those that don't. Do you know what we discovered? To be generous like God, the head must partner with the heart. You need to plan your giving. Do you know why we know God's heart is great? God's head implemented the desires of his heart. We know God's heart by the way he acts. That works with us. We learned that people who pledge give twice as much on average as those who don't. We learned that people who pledge a percentage of their income, as Paul instructed in 1 Corinthians 16, give three times more than those who give but don't pledge.

If love is in your heart because of God's Spirit, it also must be in your head with God's teaching. Does your love help you plan care for your family? Does your love for God help you plan your giving and ministry through the body of Christ? Do you love Jesus? Do you love Jesus and love his followers that are to grow and serve with you as disciples? Do you love Jesus and the children and youth who are open to our ministry? Do you love Jesus and do you love the lost sheep he was sent to save? Do you love your neighbors who are searching for fulfillment and meaning but are hindered by the schemes of the evil one and face an unspeakably tragic eternity? Do you love Jesus with your heart and with your head?

Today, you possess an insert that helps you track your income and giving? The tithe, the figure of 10%, was on Abraham and Jacob's heart when they recognized that they were blessed by God. The tithe, the figure of 10%, was on God's heart when he instructed Moses and the people of Israel to live as God's family. What's on your heart to give? What must you do to make it happen? Do you put a portion of money aside as soon as you receive it, so that it will express your heart of love for Christ? Do those around you know your love? Do they know you love Jesus? Can they see that you love what he loves? This morning God is calling you to use your head to express and grow your heart!