Why Give?

When the Apostle Paul wanted to talk about giving and generosity to the church in Corinth, he wrote this…

“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”
2 Corinthians 8:9

Throughout scripture, throughout our church services, we are reminded of God’s abundant generosity.

This means the starting point for any discussion on Christian Giving is not *our* generosity but God's - God's generosity to us.

The good news of the gospel is that God is generous; extraordinarily, extravagantly and sacrificially generous.

And perhaps the most amazing thing of all is that we are on the receiving end of the total generosity of God’s love and goodness. All that we have comes from God.

**A word about need**

There are a lot of needs in the church. General expenses such as utility bills, maintenance, and parish share all need to be dealt with in God-honouring fashion. The physical needs of the people can also present a great need. We are not a rich Diocese: “a third of our parishes are in the 10% most deprived communities nationally and face significant inequality of income, employment, health, wellbeing and opportunity.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

However, when we talk about need and giving, we need to remember that Christians don’t just give to a need - we need to give. Why? Because our giving is the overflow of God’s gift to us in Jesus. Paul is so sure about this that in two chapters about making a financial gift not once does he use the normal Greek word for ‘money’ but combinations of 15 other words, the most frequent of which is *charis,* grace. Paul doesn’t tell us about how much money the church in Macedonia gave to Jerusalem but about the grace that was given to them.

*And that is the heart of giving for Christians.*

So, here’s the thing. If we see ‘stewardship’ as simply getting in the money, maybe stockpiling it ‘just in case,’ then it simply becomes part of the PCCs job to work out ways of parting reluctant givers from their hard-earned cash. But rather, we are to be mindful that this is God’s church – we are the body of Christ in this beautiful part of his creation. Our giving is not a tip we offer to God for spiritual services rendered. It’s not a tax on church life: pay as you pray. To give generously is to be caught up in the overflow of God’s grace because, when we give, we reflect the nature of God himself.

**The challenge**

So, if we believe generosity is at the heart of our faith; if we believe in a generous God; then our own generosity is a testament and hallmark of our faith in action.

This means the question for us as Christians is not why give, but how do I give. How do I respond to God’s generosity. How should we be using our time, energy, skills, money and possessions? God has given us *everything –* and once we accept that, then it’s only logical that everything we have should be offered back to God to be used in his service - devoted to the work of his kingdom, and to living and sharing the gospel.

*And ‘everything’ includes our money.*

God has given us, his disciples, his church, all that we need to live a life befitting a follower of Christ. Maybe not all that we want – there is a difference – but he responds to us as we call for him to “give us this day our daily bread.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

That’s why this is a discipleship issue. Because possibly the hardest discipleship challenge we face as we try to live generous lives is the move from asking ourselves *“how much of what is mine do I choose to give away?”* to *“how much of what God has given me do I choose to keep?”*

**The current climate**

Of course, under normal circumstances living a generous life can feel challenging – after all, as with much of Jesus teaching, it is a counter-cultural way of approaching life. However, given the current cost of living crisis in the UK it can feel an even harder thing to aspire to. How can we, as churches and individuals, approach this?

Firstly, it is important to note that while we are all in the same storm, we are not all in the same boat.[[3]](#footnote-3) The majority of Christians are feeling the pinch of increased living costs, and the nature of our Diocese, as we mentioned above, means many of our brothers and sisters, if not ourselves, will be really struggling. But for some individuals and indeed churches, it will be less debilitating than for others. This makes now the perfect time for every Christian to seriously ask ourselves what changes can we make as part of our service to the Lord and our commitment to the ministry and mission of our parish?

And yes, for some that means this will be a moment to reduce our monthly giving because, even after sacrificing the non-essentials, the household budget just doesn’t work. But for others, this is the moment to step out in faith and step up to the challenge of supporting your parish financially with the gifts God has blessed you with.

“Let’s get practical: is your heart more prone towards loving your Christian family or ordering a Friday evening takeaway? Perhaps now is a moment of choice? For some of your Christian neighbours the takeaway will no longer be an option because money is too tight, and their giving has also been trimmed. Although increasing your giving to cover others’ reduction may mean that you too need to go without your Chicken Tikka Masala, sacrificial giving is part of our worship of the Lord, shows grace and love to others in our church family, and is itself a wonderful blessing.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Giving people the opportunity to review their giving can be liberating. We don’t seem to be comfortable speaking about money at the best of times, so to be given not only the tools and teaching to reflect theologically on our giving but also the permission to do so can be a huge relief to some – both those who cannot continue to give as they currently do, but also for those who would love to give more but are not sure where to start.

Each of us are encouraged, in the light and love of Jesus Christ, to look at ourselves in the mirror and ask, “am I being a good steward of my money?” Do we give more to our local pub or coffee shop, or our favourite football team, or even to the publisher of our daily newspaper, than we do to our church? And if so, what does that say about where we place our priorities? “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

**What does this look like?**

If we have not discussed or explored generous giving before, the task of trying to work out just what generosity looks like can seem daunting in itself. Thankfully throughout Scripture we find some clear guidance about what generous Christian giving looks like. Jesus talked about it frequently, and over one-third of his parables relates to these topics. This material suggests generous giving should be:

Proportionate

Paul’s instructions to the church in Corinth - that each one should “set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income,”[[6]](#footnote-6) - is a call to proportional giving. It might be paraphrased, “If you have more give more; if you have less give less.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

The key thing for us to understand here is that Paul is writing in terms of percentages, not fixed currency amounts. This of course, brings up the old question about tithing. “Must I give a literal 10 percent?” “Isn’t that an Old Testament requirement?”

We can break down the answer to this question in four steps.

1. Tithing is an Old Testament principal of proportional giving.[[8]](#footnote-8)

2. Tithing is not explicitly commanded in the New Testament.

3. Tithing is not cancelled in the New Testament, either.

4. Jesus suggested that tithing is a basic Christian practice.[[9]](#footnote-9)

So if we’re ever looking for a straightforward answer to “what should I give,” it seems the New Testament tells us that Christians ought to be giving at least 10 percent of what we have been blessed with to the Lord’s work. Of course, we are also told that we should give only what we have decided to give in our own hearts[[10]](#footnote-10) - for some people to leap up to 10 percent may feel an impossible thing - but both Paul and Jesus seem to suggest that this decision-making process should *begin* at 10 percent. This is why the Church of England’s guidance, through our General Synod, is that members of the Church of England should be encouraged to aim to give away a tenth of their income - 5% to and through their Church, and a 5% to other good causes. This is a good starting point for thinking about generous giving.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Planned and regular

Paul teaches us that not only is it good to be consistent in our giving, but that we should have thought about it ahead of time. This doesn’t rule out spontaneous acts of generosity – it’s planned, not prescriptive – but it does mean our giving is not to be merely a guilty response to the appearance of the plate at our pew! It is intended to be a considered, prayerful response to God’s great love and mercy.

Priority

Our giving should be worked out in relation to all of our income, and not simply the spare change after all other wants and desires have been satisfied.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Sacrificial

This means there is a cost to our generous giving. As a result, we will have less to spend on ourselves, and our lifestyles will reflect this. Those who have more to give will give more[[13]](#footnote-13), because our giving should be a real response to the God who gives and loves to give. Are we giving our first fruits, or are we scraping the bottom of the barrel and handing over the dregs? Do we aim to give what is right, or simply from what is left?

Given in community

Our generosity is given both *for* the needs of others, and given *with* others for a common purpose.[[14]](#footnote-14) The act of giving shifts our focus from individual wants to a communal need, demonstrating solidarity with the poor and a commitment to working together in mission. Our Parish Share is a prime example of how to do this not just in our own parish, but across our Diocese.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Cheerful

“God loves a cheerful giver.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Do we give simply, openly and willingly. Do we delight in being able to support the Mission and Ministry of the church not just in our parish but across our Diocese?

Prayerful

If we acknowledge that our giving is a reflection of all God has given to us, it follows that we must consciously treat it is an act of worship and thanksgiving.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**So, what next?**

**Pray.** Ask that you may be blessed with the spiritual gift of generosity[[18]](#footnote-18), that in all things you will seek God’s way ahead of your own.

**Think seriously about your giving.** Be honest about how much you can give and stick to it.

**Sign up for the Parish Giving Scheme**[[19]](#footnote-19) (if your church is registered) so you know you will be giving regularly. If it isn’t, ask them to register – it won’t just help you, but others in the congregation and the PCC Treasurer!

**Summary**

As we’ve said, Christians want to give. They have a *need* to give. The Christians Paul was writing to in Corinth were average folks. They weren’t giving out of great personal wealth. These people gave willingly; they gave more than was comfortable. And today’s Christian also wants to give — when he or she has been instructed regarding giving in all its richness.

We know this because, in the recent Anglican Giving Survey,[[20]](#footnote-20) 49% of Anglicans asked said they would be motivated to give more if they understood the impact of their giving.[[21]](#footnote-21)

As Paul reminds us,

“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”

2 Corinthians 9:12-18

This piece draws on work by Kurt Lovelace [A Brief Theology of Giving (chalcedon.edu)](https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/a-brief-theology-of-giving) and Giving in Grace [Theology.pdf (givingingrace.org)](http://www.givingingrace.org/userfiles/files/principles/Theology.pdf). Please click the links to find more information.

1. From the details of our [Challenging Poverty Diocesan Priority](https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/61d750a40a35a/content/pages/documents/diocesan-priority-challenging-poverty.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Luke 11:2-4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+11%3A2-4&version=NRSVA) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "WE ARE NOT ALL IN THE SAME BOAT. WE ARE ALL IN THE SAME STORM. SOME ARE ON SUPER-YACHTS. SOME HAVE JUST THE ONE OAR." Damian Barr, Scottish writer and broadcaster [Same Storm — Damian Barr](https://www.damianbarr.com/same-storm) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paul Houghton, CEO of Kingdom Bank. Read his full article [here](https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/your-church-is-being-hit-by-the-cost-of-living-crisis-it-might-be-time-to-look-again-at-your-giving/12859.article) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Matthew 6:21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6&version=NRSVA) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [1 Corinthians 16:2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+16%3A2&version=NIV) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [2 Corinthians 8:11-13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+8%3A11-13&version=NIV) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For example, see [Leviticus 27:30-33,34](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Leviticus+27%3A30-34&version=NIV); [Deuteronomy 14:22-29, 26:12-15](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+14%3A22-29%2C+26%3A12-15&version=NIV); [Nehemiah 13:5, 12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah+13%3A5%2C+12&version=NIV). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [Luke 11:42](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+11%3A42&version=NIV) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [2 Corinthians 9:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+9%3A7&version=NIV) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. To find out more about the principles of tithing read this [Give10](https://www.parishresources.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Give10.pdf) resource. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For example, see [Deuteronomy 26:2-3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+26%3A2-3&version=NIV), [1 Corinthians 16:2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+cor+16%3A2&version=NIV) and [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+8%3A5&version=NIV) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See, for example, [Luke 21.1–4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+21.1%E2%80%934&version=NIV) and [2 Corinthians 8.2–4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Cor+8.2%E2%80%934&version=NIV) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For examples see [Acts 2.42–47](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2.42%E2%80%9347&version=NIV) and [2 Corinthians 8.13,14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Cor+8.13-14&version=NIV) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For more information on Parish Share see [Parish share - Diocese of Durham (durhamdiocese.org)](https://durhamdiocese.org/tag/parish-share/) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. [2 Corinthians 9:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Corinthians%209%3A7&version=NIV) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For example [1 Chronicles 29.10–14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Chron+29.10%E2%80%9314&version=NIV) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. [Galatians 5:22-23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=galatians+5%3A22-23&version=NRSVA) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. **<PLEASE PUT A LINK TO PGS PAGE HERE>** [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 2,000 Anglicans were surveyed between July and September 2020 on their attitudes to and practice of charitable giving. To see the full report [click here](https://www.leeds.anglican.org/sites/default/files/files/Anglican%20Giving%20Survey%20Report%20October%202021%281%29.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See page 8 of the Anglican Giving Survey above. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)