

MONEY MATTERS

Why do we need to talk about something so personal as money in church?

On the one hand our financial decisions are personal and private, as are all of our faith commitments. Yet, every arena of life is an expression of our Christian faith and thus open to guidance by the values and teachings of Christ. Our culture talks forthrightly about money 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week in hopes of shaping our primary identity into that of **consumer**. By our culture's standard, the one with the biggest, the best and the most wins. The Scriptures seek to form our primary identity as **steward**. By God's standard, rather than accumulation and consumption, our mission is the work of caring and compassion, of loving God and neighbor. Our spiritual work is to wrestle carefully with which standard we will live by - the world's or the gospel's? Particularly in America, the conversion of our wallets is probably for most, the last great soul conversion. Thus, as people of faith, we talk regularly and often about money and its meaning in our lives. Jesus talked about it more than anything else, perhaps because he knew the hold it has on us.

Why do we give?

Giving is one of the great privileges of the Christian life. We don't "have to" give, we "get to" give. It is true that God expects us to give; and so at the most basic level we give because God asks. But as we grow in Christ, we also grow into the kind of "cheerful giver" the Scriptures speak of. We strive to give both as an expression of our gratitude for God's generosity and because we are committed to the mission of the church. By God's design and commission, we in the church are privileged to give to the most important work of all – extending the love and grace of Christ to a hurting world.

Having trouble deciding how much to give?

At its heart, the decision about our financial commitment to the church is a spiritual matter, not a pragmatic one. Our starting point for this important decision ought not to be, "What is everyone else giving?" or, "Just raise my last year's figure by \$100" or even, "What does the church budget need?" The starting point for faithful stewards is a prayerful, "What is God asking me to give?" Every WPC member and friend is asked to commit to two things: growing a generous spirit and percentage giving. The first commitment is the most important - "Is generosity my goal?" Our giving ought to reflect our desire to step forward in our faith as well as our intention to stand with our church in fulfilling our God-given mission.

What is percentage giving?

Percentage giving (as differentiated from the strict tithe [10%], which is too ambitious for some and not ambitious enough for others) is a biblically faithful interpretation of God's expectations of our generosity. It entails deliberately choosing a specific percentage of our income to commit to God's work in and through our church. While the Scriptures indicate that proportionate giving is the norm, the actual percentage expectation ranged from 10 to 23.3% of personal income. For those just getting started on their giving journey," 10% is both a huge

leap and a sure set-up for failure. Thus, start somewhere: 3%, 5%, 7%, or 14%, and commit to a lifetime of growing a generous heart. An annual 1% increase is then a great way to gradually move toward our giving goals.

Why is percentage giving so important?

As a matter of faithfulness, Scripture advocates deliberate, planned giving in proportion to what we have. The Apostle Paul says, “It doesn’t matter how much you have. What matters is how much you are willing to give from what you have.” As a matter of pragmatics, percentage giving removes any sense of failure should our income decrease – the percentage stays the same while the dollar amount decreases. Likewise, it allows us to increase our giving in celebration of God’s abundance when our income increases.

Why is making a financial pledge to the church so important?

First, making a commitment helps the giver. We become generous only as we commit to living generous lives. Setting a specific percentage amount helps us achieve that goal, and returning our pledge card makes our commitment tangible. Rarely will “what’s left at the end of the month,” or “what’s in the wallet today” giving produce true generosity – it is just too limiting. A pledge isn’t a legal contract; it is a statement of intent. If we don’t make our goals, we have the opportunity to prayerfully examine our lifestyle and make adjustments, when possible, to meet our goals the next time. Making a commitment also helps us with personal financial planning. Knowing what goes to God, the mortgage, the grocery store, etc. helps us create a workable financial plan for the coming year. Second, making a financial commitment helps the church in its planning. Based on the commitments received, the Session then decides how much of what we believe to be God’s vision can be achieved.

What about just volunteering some time?

All we have - time, talent and treasure - is a gift from God and we are simply stewards of that gift. We have to give some part of that “all” back to God. We are not like a country club where you write a check to receive services... we are the people of God using time and talent to achieve our vision. Rolling up our sleeves, showing up and ministering to others is important, but our treasure is also essential. As caretakers of what belongs to God, we don’t get to pick and choose which parts of God’s gift are exempt from our stewardship. We cannot accomplish all that God is asking without dollars.



Matthew 6:21

Where does the money go?

Simply, everything we do within and beyond the walls of our church is made possible because of the generous and sacrificial gifts of WPC members and friends. Our children and youth are raised in faith, the hungry are fed, God is glorified in worship, the hurting are cared for, our spiritual lives are nourished... the list goes on and on. God is up to great things here, and our financial commitments are an important factor in writing the next chapter of WPC’s remarkable story. We are a church of deep privilege, therefore God’s expectations are high. In saying “yes” to God’s vision, we also recognize that what God asks us to accomplish will be costly – as most good things are. It will take time, talent AND our checkbooks. Do we really believe that God can use WPC to make Los Angeles and our world better places? Let our answer be a resounding “YES!”

What if my financial picture changes sometime during the year?

A quick note or phone call to our Contributions Manager, Marianne Truitt [310.474.4535 ext 106], informing her of the adjustment in your financial commitment is all that is necessary.