

## INTRODUCTION

This month I've been sharing "iFocus Apps to Win in 2010. "If you want to have the best year of your life, then download and apply God's word to four areas of your life. We started with faith, the kind of faith expressed in Philippians 4:13. "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." I've also challenged you to focus on opportunities to bring your friends to Jesus as we move closer to Freedom Celebration over the Fourth of July. Last week I challenged you to focus on worship, and I announced that we're launching Crosswalk Worship in the Crosswalk Conference Center in August.

In this final message of the iFocus series, I want to challenge you to focus on giving! I usually only devote one entire message a year on giving. So if you're new today and only attend this one time, then you can truly leave and say, "All that preacher ever talks about is money." But if you come every Sunday you know that I only talk about it once a year!

Our congregation has a national reputation for being one of the most generous churches in America. When I travel to pastors' conferences the two things other pastors want to ask me about are: (1) How we do Missions? And (2) How I motivate our folks to give so much money to God's Work? I surprise most of them by saying that I seldom preach about giving. I tell them that I usually preach one message a year on giving, but that on the other 51 Sundays I preach on falling in love with Jesus. We believe when someone truly falls in love with Jesus, then they become generous in their giving.

Did you hear about the one dollar bill who met a twenty dollar bill in a cash drawer? The one asked the twenty, "Where have you been lately?" The twenty said, "Oh, I've been making the rounds of the casinos, then I went on a cruise. I also attended a couple of football games, and spent some time at the mall. What about you?" The one dollar bill said, "Same old thing—church, church, church."

We have faithful folks who come in on Monday mornings and count the cash offerings. One of them asked me once why we have so many one dollar bills in the offering. I said, "Because there isn't a bill smaller than a one!"

In our text today, Jesus shares four universal spiritual laws. We all know that there are physical laws that can be observed in our physical world. There are three laws of thermodynamics, and Isaac Newton gave us the three laws of motion. Just as there are irrefutable laws of nature, there are irrefutable spiritual laws. Jesus gives us four such spiritual laws in quick succession. He doesn't explain the first three—He just states the law. But on the fourth, He elaborates.

Luke 6:37-38: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. [That's spiritual law #1] Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. [There's #2] Forgive, and you will be forgiven. [That's law #3, and now here is law #4] 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."

Of those four spiritual laws the first two are stated in the negative, "Don't judge; don't condemn." Do you know why Jesus had to command us not to judge or condemn? It is part of our fallen human nature to judge and condemn, that's our default reaction to other people. And the reason Jesus had to give the positive command to forgive is because it goes against our sinful human nature to forgive someone who has hurt us. Bitterness, resentment, and revenge come easier than forgiveness. And the reason Jesus had to command us to give is because it goes against our human nature as well. In this message I want to compare and contrast our human nature with God's Economy. The term "God's Economy" may be new to you. I'm using that to make a distinction between the world's economy of materialism and God's economic system of generosity.

### **HUMAN NATURE: GET ALL I CAN! GOD'S ECONOMY: GIVE ALL I CAN!**

First, Jesus said, "Give..." Human nature says, "Get all I can!" But in God's Economy I am taught to give all I can! The philosophy of materialism says, "Get all you can, can all you get, sit on the can, and spoil the rest!" Materialism is what drives us to buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't even like. We work hard to keep up with the Joneses down the street, only to learn that the Joneses just refinanced again, so we're still in the hole. Materialism inspired the t-shirt that says, "The one who dies with the most toys wins."

But you are never more like God than when you give. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world He GAVE..." You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.

There are seven beatitudes Jesus gave in Matthew 5, but there's another "blessed" Jesus spoke that isn't recorded in the four gospel accounts. The only way we know Jesus said it was because Paul quoted Jesus when he said, "Remember the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35)

Giving is a part of God's character. When He created the world, it was to give. The sun gives us heat and light. The flowers give us beauty; the plants and animals give us food. God created Adam and Eve and placed them in this perfectly unselfish environment. His first command to them was to give—give themselves to each other—then they were to give names to all the animals. He commanded them to give watch, care and dominion over the animals. It was give, give, give. But then the old serpent slithered up to Eve and whispered in her ear, "Hey Eve, you're not getting all you can. There's more. God is holding out on you. Don't you want it ALL? Don't you want to be like God?" The sin Adam and Eve committed was disobeying God so they could get all they could!

And since we all inherited Adam's sin propensity, we are, by nature, selfish people. Go to the nursery where preschoolers are on the floor playing with toys right now; you aren't going to see many of them sharing. Instead if a kid tries to take their toy, you're going to hear a loud objection that says, "MINE!" So, we're born with this nature to get, get, get.

While the world is desperately telling you to grab for more, more, more, Jesus steps up and says, "No. I want you to give."

There are many ways to give, but in the context of this message, I'm talking about giving money to support God's work through Green Acres. Here are some practical tips on how you can give. Let me start with this offering envelope. The first line is for giving to our budget. That's the first and most important place to give your money. We ask that members give their tithe (10%) toward the church budget. This pays for all the ministries and facilities that go on 365 days a year. Plus, 15% of what you give to the budget is sent off as Missions support through the Cooperative Program. After you tithe to the budget, feel free to designate an offering to another fund. This may be the building fund, Missions, or any other ministry God puts on your heart. But please understand we depend on your regular budget gifts to carry on the basic ministry of the church. We're also grateful for your continued gifts to the Building Fund to reduce the amount of interest we may be paying at the end of the project. That's what my family does. We give our tithe undesignated to the budget and then we give above the tithe to the Building Program and other ministries.

We make it easy to give. You can bring cash or write a check. You can give during your check-in for your SMBS class, or place your offering in the receptacles in the foyers. Personally, I use online banking, so I have Green Acres as one of my payees and I give directly from my bank account several times a month. Many of you give by credit or debit card on our website. Last year we had over \$2.5 million given to our church using credit or debit cards. Because fewer people are carrying cash or writing checks, in the future we're going to make it easier to give. Before the end of this year we will have offering altars in the lobbies. These will be places where you can swipe your card and make an offering, like a reverse ATM! But I always tell people that if you are under a huge credit card debt, don't use your credit card for an offering until you pay off your debt.

The beginning of each year is a good time to evaluate your level of support for the Lord's work. Each year about this time we mail out a letter with a record of your contributions for the previous year. Nobody sees this except the accountants in our finance office. I don't want to know how much anyone gives. That's between you and God. But when you get your contribution record, why don't you ask yourself, "If my income was 10 times what I gave to the Lord's work last year, would I have enough to survive?"

**HUMAN NATURE: I RECEIVE BY GATHERING IN!  
GOD'S ECONOMY: I RECEIVE BY GIVING AWAY!**

But Jesus didn't just say, "Give." He declared the result of giving. "Give...and it will be give to you." So Second, human nature says, "I receive by gathering in!" But in God's economy, I receive by giving away! The world says the way to get more is to grab more. But God says the way to get more is to give more. In 1 Kings 17 we read a story about the prophet Elijah who needed food and water to continue God's work. God directed him to a widow in a town called Zarephath. When he found her she was gathering firewood. He asked her for a jar of water and a little bread and oil to eat. She said, "I can give you the water, but I only have a handful of flour and a drop of oil left in my house. In fact, I'm gathering this wood to make a fire to make the bread for my son and me, and then we'll starve to death." Elijah said, "Don't be afraid. Go ahead and make that cake of bread and bring it and oil to me, and God will make sure you have enough

flour and oil to survive." That widow was faced with a decision that people today face. "Will I use what I have for myself, or will I give it to God's work? I know God has said that He will take care of me, but I don't want to give away my last dollar." Fortunately, the widow believed God's word and she gave Elijah a cake of bread from the last of her flour and oil. But when she went back to the cupboard, it wasn't bare. There was more flour and more oil. God continued to provide for her and her child just as He promised, and today her faith still inspires us.

One of the great promises of God is "Those who honor me, I will honor." (1 Samuel 2:30) You don't have to wonder how you can honor God, because one of the clearest ways to honor God is found in Proverbs 3:9-10: "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing."

The problem with some people is they are giving God their leftovers not their firstfruits. They pay the light bill, the water bill, the car payment, the rent, and the insurance payment and then if they have anything left, they may give God something. That's not honoring God. But you can honor God by giving to Him first.

You may be thinking, "It's MY money. I earned it! I can do with it what I please." "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth." (Deuteronomy 8:17-18)

If you honor God with your first fruits, He promises that your barns will be filled. I've got a great investment tip for you in 2010. It's an insider tip, because the Holy Spirit lives inside me. The very best investment you can make is to give to God. Sir John Templeton, the founder of the Templeton family of Mutual Funds was once asked what the best investment he had ever made was. Templeton, a committed Christian, responded by saying when he started giving 10 percent of his income to the Lord, that was the best investment.

How are your other investments doing? Are you satisfied with your return? Most investment firms send out an annual report about now reporting on their investments over the past twelve months. Over the past two years, most of these reports have had so much "spin" added to them that you can get vertigo from reading them!

As you consider the best place to invest the money God has given you, let me read you the last annual report from Heaven: "It was another outstanding year for shareholders in God's Economy. Despite adverse economic conditions on Earth, Kingdom investors recorded continued strong gains. Insured Kingdom accounts were steadily compounding, while worldly assets like equities, real estate and commodities proved uncertain. Under the same Investment Manager for over 2000 years, He reports that the investment strategy remains intact: 'securing treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'" (Matthew 6:20)

**HUMAN NATURE: THE MORE I HOLD ONTO THE MORE I HAVE!  
GOD'S ECONOMY: THE MORE I SHARE THE MORE I HAVE TO SHARE!**

Finally, Jesus said, "give and it will be given to you...good measure...running over will be poured into your lap." Human nature says, "The more I hold onto the more I have!" But in God's economy, the more I share the more I have to share! God wants to use you as a channel of blessing to others. When you give, He gives back to you, so you can give more, so He can give you more to give more away. It's a beautiful cycle. But if you ever stop the cycle and start hoarding those blessings, the cycle stops.

As human creatures, we love to accumulate stuff. You know what stuff is. I've got my stuff and you've got your stuff. Don't mess with my stuff. People have accumulated so much stuff that they have to rent storage units to store all their stuff. But Jesus taught that we shouldn't hoard our blessings, we should give them away.

I believe in tithing, giving a minimum of 10% to the Lord. Some people say that this is part of the Old Testament law and we aren't under it any longer. But tithing is older than the Old Testament Law. Abraham started tithing many generations before God gave the Law to the Israelites on Sinai. One of God's greatest promises is found in Malachi 3:10 where He says, "'Bring the whole tithe [10%] 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. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops...'" (Malachi 3:10-11)

This is the only time in the Bible where God invites us to test Him. He tests us in many ways, but there is only one way that He gives us permission to test Him. It's in the area of tithing. So, once again, it's time for me to issue my annual tithing challenge. If you aren't yet tithing, start tithing right now and try it for six months. Give God the first ten percent of your income by giving it to His storehouse, the church. And at the end of six months, if you aren't more blessed than you are now, then come see me and tell me about it. If God has failed to bless you more in this six months time, then here's what I'll do. I'll walk of the pulpit, lay this Bible down and never preach again. Why? Because if Malachi 3:10 is a lie, then John 3:16 must be a lie, too, and I've been deceived and I've been deceiving people for the past 40 years that I've been preaching. You may think, "Wow, Pastor, that's a risky challenge for you." I don't really think so, because I happen to believe with all my heart that God is telling the truth in John 3:16 and in Malachi 3:10. And over the years that I have issued this challenge I've never had one person come to me and say they genuinely tried tithing for six months, and God didn't bless them. But what I have had happen is hundreds of people who have written me or emailed me and said, "We decided to accept your challenge. We couldn't afford to tithe, but we started tithing, and it is amazing how God has blessed us. Pastor, you were right." No, I wasn't right. God's Word is true, and I'm just the messenger boy.

If you feel guilty because you aren't tithing, then I've failed in this message. Rather than lay a guilt trip on you, I want to give you a glimpse of how blessed you can be when you honor God with your income. I've told you what to do, now let me tell you how you can do it. Start living by what I call the 10-10-80 plan. It's really simple. You give God the first 10% of your income, and then you save the next 10%, and then you discipline your spending so you can live on 80% of your income.

Remember these apples? In 2008 I taught a series called "A Matter of Life or Debt." These ten apples represent all the resources God gives you. God is the source of every resource. He owns it all. Answer quickly: of these ten apples how many of them belong to God? If you said "one" that's wrong. They ALL belong to God! But of these ten apples God asks us to give one of them back to Him to acknowledge His ownership of everything we have. Are you eating God's apple? Or are you sending God's apple to your mortgage company? Don't eat God's apple, or give it away. Give it back to Him. Then you take another apple and place it safely away for future use. In Proverbs God says we should notice how the ants store away food and follow their example. Then you take those other eight apples and pay your bills. The key to making the 10-10-80 plan work is act your wage. Rearrange your expenses so you can live on 80% of your income. For some that might require some radical changes—drive a used car, or downsize your house. For others it might requires a lot of small changes like dropping the premium cable package, or canceling your magazine subscriptions. But the key is to give God His apple first.

## CONCLUSION

Giving isn't a matter of legalism, it's all about love. There's a great story about a dad who took his four-year old son, Jimmy, to McDonald's. Jimmy asked for French fries, and his dad loved him so much that he supersized the fries and bought him a coke as well.

Even before they got to the table, Jimmy couldn't wait to sink his teeth into those golden, crispy fries. They sat down at a table and had a short prayer. As soon as the "amen" was said, Jimmy grabbed the fries and started eating them. The dad was pleased that such a simple blessing of French fries could make his son so happy. The father decided to share in the blessing, so he reached over to get a couple of fries out of the box. To his surprise, Jimmy quickly put his arms around the fries making a little fence, and pulled them toward himself and said, "No! These are MINE!"

Jimmy's dad was in shock for a moment and couldn't believe what his son had just done. But instead of reprimanding him, he simply pulled his hand away and sat back and reflected on Jimmy's attitude toward the fries. The first thing he thought was, "My son doesn't recognize that I am the source of those French fries. At the counter, I was the one who took out my wallet and bought the fries. And not only that, I bought a larger serving of fries than he expected, and here he is talking about HIS fries." He smiled as he continued to ponder Jimmy's attitude. He thought, "And Jimmy doesn't know that I'm 6 feet tall and weigh 200 pounds and if I wanted to, I could easily take those fries away from his small hands. And he doesn't know that I really don't NEED his fries. I have enough money to go back to the counter and buy 30 servings of fries, more than he and I could ever eat."

As he thought about it, he knew the issue was not just a couple of fries; the issue was he simply wanted his son to invite him into his world by offering to share his blessing with his dad—the very same blessing his dad had provided in the first place.

What a lesson for us. Our heavenly Father supplies every blessing we have and He loves us so much He desires for us to invite Him to sit down with us at our table and share the blessing He has provided. But too often we're like Jimmy and we say, "No, God this is MINE! No. No. No.

No. You go get your own!" And we build our own little fences around our blessings and try to keep them to ourselves.

Friends, God doesn't need our French fries or our apples. But it's an honor and a privilege for us to share our blessings with the One who gave them to us. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "Give and it will be given to you." It's a great circle of giving. God gives to us and we give back and He gives more so we can give more, so He can give more. I challenge you to get into a giving contest with God, you'll lose that contest every time, but you'll be blessed in the process!

## OUTLINE

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GOD'S ECONOMY: GIVE ALL I CAN!

"Remember the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" *Acts 20:35*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes