

Is it OK for a pastor to give to his own church? Is it acceptable for churches to receive commercial income? Should visitors be encouraged to give? Generous Giving is committed to answering stewardship-related FAQs thoughtfully, and we have arranged our answers according to topic. While our answers address the many finer points of stewardship, our position statements summarize our general views. Learn what qualifies Generous Giving to answer these questions.

Must pastors preach about giving?

Yes. Even though Americans like to keep finances private, the church shares a mutual responsibility for the spiritual growth of its members (John 13:34; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Galatians 6:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:11). And because spiritual growth includes use of money, this means, among other things, that pastors must preach on financial issues. The preacher's job is to proclaim whatever God says in his word (Acts 20:27). Since God gives instruction for the use of money, then the preacher is obligated to preach what God says about it. Even though preaching about giving may be unpopular at first, faithfulness over time will yield a healthier church.

Why does my congregation respond so negatively when I speak on money, possessions and giving?

Indeed, many churchgoers feel threatened when the pastor begins to teach on this subject. "Here comes the money sermon again!" is a familiar sentiment shared by believers when the pastor seeks to lead in the area of giving through teaching. Many Christians automatically throw up a protective wall around their hearts and wallets. Why is this? We think that it is because most sermons on money and possessions are preached in anticipation of a capital campaign or during the fall budget month. Therefore, believers have made a mental connection between the teaching on money and the "ask" that is about to occur. This connection has tended to lead to a "culture of tipping" in relation to the God who saved them, where people give just enough to satisfy their guilty consciences or their pastor, keeping everything else for themselves. Related to these reasons are many common excuses that people give for not giving.

How can I combat the perception that the church just wants people's money?

First of all, the pastor should examine his heart to see that he (and the other church leadership) is in fact not out for people's money. There is no place for selfish gain in God's church (Ephesians 5:3), especially not in the work of preaching the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:5). Much of the popular distaste toward church giving, though, is based on gross misunderstanding. The pastor should do everything in his power to dissociate true Christian giving from pulpit greed. Pastors should let their pulpit language, accounting practices and their own standard of living be simple, biblical and above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2-3). Congregants may be suspicious when a pastor begins preaching about giving, but with time and prayer and living examples, they can be led beyond suspicion into generosity.

How often should I preach about giving?

There is no formulaic answer to this question, but we can set up some boundaries: Weekly is probably too often, annually not often enough. If a pastor preaches on giving

every week, his view of the Christian life is seriously lopsided. No single soapbox issue should so consume any pastor's attention lest the gospel of Christ be obscured. But if a pastor preaches on giving only once or twice a year (which is far more common), then he is robbing his people of an important biblical doctrine. It is significant that both the Old and New Testaments are full of instruction on financial matters, all of which points to the central place of money in human life and Christian spirituality. And if giving is such an important topic in Scripture, then it is certainly an appropriate topic for regular Christian teaching. Pastors need not preach on it monthly or quarterly, but certainly regularly. Some pastors dedicate several consecutive Sundays to the study of money and giving by preaching a sermon series. A good rule of thumb is to preach through the Scriptures and to preach stewardship wherever it shows up, which is more frequently than we sometimes think.

When is the best time to preach on giving?

Pretty much any time is OK, provided it isn't exclusively during the annual church fund drive. If the only time we preach on giving is when the church is raising pledges, we communicate, "The church needs your money," rather than, "Your finances are central to your relationship with God." But in truth, the only fuel for deep and lasting generosity is the gospel of Jesus Christ—not the needs of the church, however worthwhile they may be. Of course, it is fine to preach on giving during stewardship month; we just can't stop there.