FINANCIAL GENEROSITY AS WORSHIP TO GOD AT ST. LUKE'S

Our vision is to be a church family who…

Live for Jesus and LOVE one another, LEADing to transformed lives and communities.
LIVE | LOVE | LEAD

Practically speaking the outworking of our vision in terms of God's mission and ministry at St. Luke's is only made possible by the generosity of those of us who give to the Lord at St. Luke's. Generosity of course is offered to God in terms of people's time, their skills and in financial giving. In short, **everything we do is made possible by your generous giving.**

As part of our LIVE | LOVE | LEAD vision we regularly ask, '*how is what we're doing helping people to come to faith and grow in their faith in Jesus?*' It is a question that helps to guide what we do and how we resource the various ministries at St. Luke's. In short, it helps us prayerfully discern how we use our finances.

HOW CAN YOU PLAY YOUR PART?

Our first priority is always to pray. We need to pray asking God how he wants each of us to play our part in fulfilling God's vision to reach Maidstone and beyond with the good news of Jesus. Secondly, armed with what we believe the Lord is saying to us, we seek to serve His purposes in a particular ministry area at St. Luke's and give to God, informed by what the Bible teaches, from our income how the Holy Spirit directs.

To help us in prayerfully thinking through how we might give financially to God at St. Luke's, the following is a summary regarding what the Bible teaches us about giving to God. The following talks given at St. Luke's are also worth listening to:

WHY DO WE GIVE?

Biblically the reasons followers of Jesus practice financial giving tend to fall into two categories, personal and community.

Personal (Inward)

1. Worship to God - we give out of gratitude for all that God has done for and given us as an act of worship (Luke 7:47).
2. Growing Discipleship - as a practice of grace that opens our life to the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 9:6-15).

3. Stepping into Greater Freedom - to loosen the hold that money and possessions can sometimes have on our life (Luke 16:11-13).
4. Exercise Faith - trusting that God will do as He's promised and will provide. (Phil 4:19)

Community (Outward)

1. God's Mission - facilitating the mission of Jesus' church. (Mal 3:10) & (Eph 4:11-16)
2. Loving Others - caring for others in the community of faith. (Acts 6:1)
3. Transforming Communities - the relief of hardship. (2 Cor 8:14)

In essence as an act of *worship*, followers of Jesus give financially, because they see it as investment in God's Kingdom. Mal 3:8-11 describes God asking His people to test Him by giving what they need to then seeing if He doesn't shower them with blessing. 2 Cor 9:6 says, '*whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully'*.

In 2 Cor 8 & 9 Paul describes a cycle of God's supply, followed by human gratitude (in the form of generous giving), which is then followed by increased supply. The increased supply is not necessarily in the form of finance, but it does enable greater works of God's Kingdom.

WHEN SHOULD I GIVE?

The Bible talks about giving out of the '*first fruits*' of the harvest, before it's been distributed and before some has been eaten. There would seem to be something important in honouring God by giving straight away from what He gives us, as opposed to waiting to see what's left over and giving Him some of that.

1 Cor 16:2 teaches that giving should be regular. The Israelites gave as soon as the harvest came in and the Corinthians gave weekly, presumably due to wages being weekly. So, our giving should be out of our money as soon as we get it and in the frequency with which we receive it.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I GIVE?

It's essential that in our hearts we acknowledge that God is the owner of everything on earth (Ps 24:1; 50:10-12) and we are stewards whom He has delegated responsibility for its care and administration. As such we don't own anything.

Everything we have, our time, our talents, natural abilities, possessions, financial resources, families, health, places we live etc… are essentially on loan from God. It's our responsibility to manage those things wisely at His instruction and for His glory.

In the Bible God sets out the stewardship plan for His family (in both the Old Testament and the New Testament). This includes the giving of tithes and offerings. Tithing simply means one tenth. Our tithes should reflect a consideration of everything that we have received from God (1Cor 16:2). Tithing (10%) is a contribution to the ministry and mission of the local church. Disciples of Jesus give their first fruits 10% of all income to God (Prov 3:9, Mal 3:6-12; Matt 23:23; Heb 7:1-7).

In terms of additional offerings, biblically speaking an offering is any donation that is given at the Holy Spirit's leading over and above our regular tithe to the local church.

In the Old Testament, not only did God's people tithe, but they also gave other offerings to the Lord through the course of the year (sin offerings, freewill offerings, first fruit offerings etc). The New Testament also teaches that in addition to tithes, the early disciples frequently gave offerings for the purposes of ministering to the poor and advancing God's Kingdom over parts of the world (Acts 4:34-35; 11:29-30).

While the bible describes a very clear plan of biblical stewardship, it is not for anyone to say how much a person ought to give. That is between you and God. Quite simply, having understood what the Bible teaches, you should give the amount that God tells you to by His Holy Spirit. Of course, the next question is the tricky one, '*how do I know what God is telling me to give*?'

The way to do this is simply to ask the Holy Spirit to tell you. Don't dress it up in fancy words, just ask Him to give you a figure and then wait. Try to put aside thoughts of what you can afford or what you think the church needs, this process is about hearing and understanding God's perfect will for our lives. Please don't rush this as God will often speak to us through situations we experience and people we encounter.

Some people will want to take some time out alone to ponder, others will want to talk about it and still others will 'just know'. A good idea is to ask God to suggest a figure to you, monthly or annually, and then be alert for the figures that come into your head. Take those figures and simply mull them over for a while and then act upon it.

A good method if you're married is to separately ask God what He would have you give, see if you can come up with a figure and then come together and see if both your figures agree.

If you find listening to God hard, remember He's given us the biblical guide of tithing as a starting point. Alternatively, if you want to chat it through with someone, in the first instance your Life group leader or another mature Christian is a good place to start..

Finally, begin the practice of regular generous giving as an expression of your love for God and have fun! Giving generously to God and to others is actually a fun spiritual discipline, knowing that all we give brings glory to God.

WHAT ABOUT DEBT?

First, do not go into debt to give. Second, if you are in debt, please ask for help. There are mature Christians who can take a look at your finances, help you with budgeting and set you on the right track. There are also various agencies, some Christian, that are excellent at helping in even the most disastrous of circumstances.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO GIVE?

The best way to give is efficiently and regularly, making sure the receiver gets as much of your gift as possible. Regular giving really helps us with our financial planning at St. Luke's.

In the UK, taxpayers can give using gift aid, which means the church can reclaim the amount of basic rate tax you have already paid on the gift. So, for every £1 you give, if gift aided, the church receives £1.25. This is very good news.

(*Please note, you need to pay tax on the money you earn; if you only pay a very low amount of tax, we may not be able to claim any tax back. If you are in any doubt, please talk to Mandy, our Finance and Bookings Manager.*

If you are a higher rate tax payer, you can reclaim the difference through your self-assessment form.

A summary of different ways to give is on our website: stlukesmaidstone.church/give/

WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCH?

The PCC believes strongly that individual members should not be asked to do anything that the church as a whole doesn't commit to itself. So, 10% of all money received as general church income is given away each year to our mission partners. Additionally, at other times, the PCC gives money to various causes as need arises or even as extra income is received.

If for any reason you are unsure of the best way to give please don't hesitate to get in touch with Mandy Parris (finance@stlukesmaidstone.church).