

### 1 Peter 4:7-11

In the extraordinary times in which we live, I have so appreciated the generosity that I see in our nation, as well as here at Hillcrest Chapel.

Think of the millions of dollars that have been donated across the nation for victims of the disaster that took place on September 11 of 2001. It may be impossible to know the exact dollar amount that has been given, but it is substantial. America has always been generous in disaster as well as in times of war. During these types of events around the world, Americans have rushed to the aid of people in need. During these times of great need in our country and our world, we don't often hear that it is inappropriate to be generous in our service or in our giving. It is, in fact, acceptable and appropriate to ask for the necessary finances to carry out needed repairs, reconstruction, cleanup, rebuilding, or medical care.

In the church, we have enormous spiritual, physical and building needs before us, and it certainly isn't inappropriate to ask for the necessary finances to meet our needs. There are four priorities and needs in 1 Peter 4:7-11 to which we need to give our attention.

1. The [first priority \(for extraordinary times\) calls us to pray](#) . v. 7—"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray."
2. The [second priority inspires us to love one another](#) . I Peter 4:8—"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."
3. The [third priority encourages us to offer hospitality](#) . "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling"—I Pet. 4:9.

Peter 4:10 introduces us to our fourth priority in the extraordinary times in which we live.

**The fourth priority calls for us to faithfully administer and use our gifts in serving others.**

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v. 10—*"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."*

In other words, in our extraordinary times, it is important we faithfully administer our spiritual and financial grace gifts, so they can in some measure be used in serving others.

As an historical example, during the Second World War when the boat owners along the shoreline of England's coast determined that they would launch their own boats and brave the waters and the shells of the enemy, they were faithfully using their "gifts" in a greater cause than their own enjoyment or need. They were so dedicated to rescuing the 375,000+ soldiers that they also filled small boats with supplies and fuel to make the roundtrip from England to Dunkirk, France. They financed the rescue event willingly; no one gave them money to carry out their rescue mission.

Today we have a similar situation. No other human being will be giving us the money we need to rescue the generation of people in need around us. We will bear the cost to wage spiritual war and to rescue people. It would be nice if we had some hidden source to draw from, like winning money in some contest. I have never won anything; but I have told the Lord many times, "Lord, if you let me win the Reader's Digest or Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes, I'll give a good portion to the church." Well, He's never let me win...and I stopped sending the application in a long time ago. I think the Lord knows me too well.

How about you? Have you ever said, "I'll be generous when... (I get ahead, or I graduate, or I pay off some bills.)" Or, "I'll be generous if... (I get a raise, a new job, or sell my house.)" A lot of churchgoers across our nation are waiting to be generous.

Back in the first years of Hillcrest Chapel, there were two families who gave the biggest portion of the finances here at the church. I never know how much anyone gives, but it was obvious at our beginning stages that we were being carried by the generosity of these two families. Sadly, in most churches today—large or small—30 percent of the potential givers give 70 percent of the finances the church needs to carry out its mission. Of course, that means 70 percent of the congregation is only taking care of 30 percent of the church's needs. Why is that?

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It isn't because only 30 percent have anything to give. The truth is, in the normal congregation the vast majority of givers have average wages, so it is the average person who provides most of the finances of a healthy church. The problem is, many of the potential givers in a local church have other priorities, and choose to ignore the clear teaching of Scripture regarding their giving.

I believe people who say, "I'll be generous when..." have good intentions that when they get better off financially they will give more. But the question that needs to be asked of any of us who hope to give more in the future is, "Are we giving anything now?" If the answer is no, or we are giving only a few dollars here or there, then sadly, my observation is if we don't find a way to give in less-than-ideal circumstances, we will give little or nothing in the future.

According to [Barna Research Online](#), "evangelicals are the most generous givers, but fewer than 10 percent of born again Christians give 10 percent to their church." In fact, according to Barna: "In general, the more money a person makes the less likely he/she is to tithe." I'm sorry I have to make that observation, because it represents so many people! So the statement, "I'll be generous when..." never really works.

That reminds me of the farmer whose friend was concerned about the farmer's giving pattern. One day this friend said to the farmer,

"Hey, if you had \$200, would you give \$100 to the Lord?"

And the farmer said, "You betcha, I sure would."

The friend said, "If you had two cows, would you give one cow to the Lord?"

And the farmer said, "Absolutely, you know I would."

The friend said, "If you had two pigs, would you give one pig to the Lord?"

And the farmer said, "Ah, that's not fair, you know I have two pigs!"

So in review, what are we waiting for? The reality is, many of us are waiting for more: "When I get more, I'll give more; when I have more, I'll become generous."

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But the truth is, generosity is never a function of what we have, it's always a matter of the heart. If we are ever going to be generous, it must begin right now in our hearts and with the resources we presently have. Generosity probably won't happen if we wait until we have big wins, or we receive something extra. All of us know people who have very, very little, but are very, very generous with their time and ministry to others. Isn't that true?

In fact, the Bible makes it clear that God gives to those who give a greater capacity to be generous. 2 Corinthians 9:6,10 says,

*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously... "Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11] You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."*

As I have said many times, giving to get is not giving at all: it is trading. We believe when we give out of a generous heart with no thought of return, we will get something: a greater capacity to give and to be generous. God blesses the generous, and generosity enables greater generosity. One of my mentors, Jerry Cook, once said to me, "God is blessing us as much as He can bless us...what we need to do is to broaden the base so He can bless us more."

At first I didn't understand what he meant by that statement. But now I think the follow-up is, **are we blessable**? Are we broadening the base so He can bless us more? If we look up the "bless" words in the Bible (they show up about 443 times in the NIV), we will find several qualities that God blesses. One is named over and over again, and is most often associated with God's blessing.

**The most often associated quality with God's blessing is obedience.** Obedience is named time and time again.

**The second quality that is most often associated with God's blessing is generosity.** God blesses the generous.

Now I want to talk about how we can be blessable, but before I dive in I want to say one quick word to our visitors—our newcomers. If you're new or visiting, relax; we are not after your money. You don't have to give a dime today. In fact, I can promise you if you come to Hillcrest Chapel on a regular basis you will not be badgered for money. We do not "drag for dollars" here. We are not "beating the drum for bucks." I think our regulars will vouch for that.

On the other hand, I want both you newcomers and you who are regular attenders to know, when I talk about this subject—about generosity or giving—I do it today without apology for one reason. It's in the Bible. As I have told you before, the subject of giving is mentioned more often than love or praying. It is mentioned 2,162 times; this is no minor subject.

The Bible speaks about giving more than heaven or hell. Over half of Jesus' parables are about money. There are more promises related to giving than any other subject. Therefore, since it is my job as a pastor to tell you what the Bible says, that's what I'm going to do. I'll just lay it out plain and simple and we'll go from there.

How do we become "blessable?"

### **God blesses those who give to Him—Malachi 3:8-10.**

*8] Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. 9] You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. 10] Bring the whole tithe 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."*

Let me give you a little background on this passage to help you better understand it. In the Mosaic Law (the first five books of the Old Testament), God established the tithe for the

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Israelite people. (The practice of the tithe preceded the law with Abraham's tithe—Genesis 14:20, and was reaffirmed in the New Testament by Jesus. He just infused the practice with a proper heart motivation—Matthew 23:23.)

A tithe is ten percent, or 1/10th. God said to the Israelites that the first one-tenth of their income... of all they produced or generated... belonged to Him.

Leviticus 27:30—*"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord."*

In the law, they were to give a tithe of what was called "the first harvest" (the first crops of the year...). All the farmers and shepherds were to bring the tithe to the tabernacle, or later to the temple, and offer it to God. The tithe belongs to Him and is holy to Him.

Lev. 27:32—*"The entire tithe of the herd and flock, every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod will be holy to the Lord."*

What did God do with all this stuff they brought? It paid for the work of God that was done there at the tabernacle or temple, and was given to the priests and Levites.

Num. 18:21—*"God says, 'I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.'"*

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When Israel finally made it into the Promised Land after wandering in the desert for 40 years, they divided the land. There were 12 tribes in Israel, so they divided the land 11 ways. Eleven of the tribes got a portion of the land, but one tribe (Levi) got no land, because the Levites were to devote themselves to taking care of the tent of meeting; doing God's work there around the tabernacle or the temple.

That was their inheritance—to do God's work and be paid for it out of the tithes of the rest of the nation. Now many of you are doing some quick math. That means the Levites got 11/10ths, right? Pretty good deal; except the Levites were also to tithe on that tithe.

*Num. 18:26—"Speak to the Levites and say to them, when you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord's offering..." v. 28—"In this way you will also present an offering to the Lord from all the tithes you receive from the Israelites. From these tithes you must give the Lord's portion to Aaron the priest."*

Aaron the high priest then distributed what he had received among all the priests, who had no other means of support. So everyone in Israel gave one tenth, and that was used to pay for God's work done at the tabernacle or temple by the Levites and priests.

By the time of Malachi, a few hundred years before Christ, this habit of tithing had largely been forgotten among the Israelites. Because people weren't tithing, the priests and Levites had no way to be supported, so they had—for the most part—given up their work in the temple and gone into either merchandising or farming, etc. The temple basically was in shambles. God gave Malachi this message to the people in chapter 3 to remind them that they were to give the tithe; that the tithe belonged to Him; and that God would bless them if they gave it.

Now with that background, I want to make five observations from this passage.

### **First, the tithe belongs to God.**

vv. 8-9—*Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. 9] You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me."*

We should underline these words at the end of verse 9: "...you are robbing me." When we keep the tithes we should give, God says, "You are robbing Me, because it belongs to Me. It's got My name on it and you shouldn't keep it." We understand this: if we keep our mortgage, we're robbing the bank. If we keep our utility payment, we're robbing the utility company. God says if we're keeping the tithe, we're robbing Him. It doesn't belong to us; the tithe belongs to God.

Did you notice the phrase in v. 9—*"You are under a curse...?"* Think about the possibility of a curse on our resources or work. Does verse 9 give us insight into why some Christians just don't thrive as others do? That's a significant question; and the answer may explain the reason some struggle.

### **Second, we are to give tithes and offerings.**

v. 8b—*"How do we rob you?" "In tithes and offerings."*

This verse points out that there are two ways to give to God—tithes and offerings. What is the difference between the two? The tithe is that first 10 percent, and it belongs to God. An offering, on the other hand, is something above and beyond that we decide to give in addition; like a Faith Promise, or a Legacy (building fund) contribution.

Now most of us get a Puget Sound Energy bill every month, right? On our bill there's a little box we can check that says, "I want to give something to the Warm Home Fund." All the monies donated to the Warm Home Fund are distributed, through PSE's partnership with the Salvation Army, to help pay the utility bills for the needy in our community,

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especially in the winter. No doubt many of you donate to the Warm Home Fund. When you do, you make out the amount of your own bill and then you add a few dollars to be given to this Fund.

Well, the money you use to pay your bill belongs to PSE, just like your tithe belongs to God. But the money you add for the Warm Home Fund would be an "offering." The Bible says we are to give tithes and offerings, and in fact, generosity really doesn't start until you go beyond the tithe and give an offering. I am not considered generous for paying Puget Sound Energy what I owe them. When I send them a check for the monthly utility bill, I do not get a thank you note saying, "Thank you for your generosity."

It's not until we give above what we owe and give something extra that it's an offering

**Third, we're to give the whole tithe.**

v. 10—*"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse..."*

Now, why would God say that? Human nature being what it is, we all tend to look for loopholes. I heard about a pastor who said, "We don't want to be legalistic about this in our church. So I tell people it really doesn't matter if you give 3 percent, or 5 percent, or 8 percent." I'm sorry, but I don't understand the logic. To me his approach doesn't make any more sense than if I said, "We have 16 banks in Whatcom County, but we don't want to be legalistic, so let's just rob 8 of the banks."

God said to bring the whole tithe.

I understand that pastor's heart, but I don't think it has anything to do with legalism. When the bank sends me my mortgage statement each month it's always for the full amount. When I open that envelope and look at the statement I don't say, "Oh, that bank is so legalistic. They always want the whole amount every month." That's just the payment due, plain and simple. It's simple math.

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You may be thinking, "Bob, the whole 10 percent; I just can't do that. I cannot afford to give God 10 percent of my income right now." Let me tell you, I understand. I've been there. Nancy and I were talking about the fact that 35 years ago this coming March we began our ministry career. One of our challenging times was when we had only \$5 left after we paid our tithes, school bill, and all our other family bills. We looked in the neighbor's paper and noticed that the store down the street had a sale of 5 TV dinners for one dollar. Well, we bought 25 of them. We took them out of the package and put the food on plates to make them look like real dinners. We survived, but it was an adventure. I have to admit I don't like TV dinners even today. I guess I had my fill way back when.

Nancy and I know what it's like to look at the budget and say, "How's this going to work?" (And by the way, it was the same when I was 12 and had a paper route. "How am I going to tithe when I have so many things I want to do and buy?") But because we understand it to be the first fruit—that is, the first check to be written—we write it and then say, "Lord, it will be interesting to see what you do at the end of the month. I trust you to help us to be responsible and enable us by creative or miraculous means to meet our other obligations."

If you do this for some time, you soon understand the way it works: nine-tenths goes further than ten-tenths when we give the first one-tenth to God. I have seen it proven over and over since I was a young teenager.

There are people hearing this who truly are scraping by. Your budget is lean; there isn't any fat there. I understand. But it's possible there may be more fat in your budget than you realize. I'm going to lean on you a little bit because I love you and I want you to be more blessable. What does it say about us when we say, "I can't afford to give to God" or "I can't afford to be obedient to the commands of God" but we *can* afford payments on new items, or a cell phone, or cable TV, or on down the list...we can all complete the list.

What does it say about us when we can justify robbing God? It says that our priorities are not really what we say they are. If God is a priority to us; if He is first place in our heart and life, it ought to be reflected in our budget. It ought to show up there. Let's make sure we take an honest look at our budgets and make some adjustments so we can give to God.

**Fourth, God invites us to test Him.**

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v. 10—*"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty...*

Almost everywhere else in the Bible it says, *"Do not put the Lord your God to the test"*—Matthew 4:7; Deut. 6:16—but here God says, "Test Me in this." He says, "Go ahead, give it a try and see what happens. See if I don't come through for you." Now, this challenge from God is something I just love to tell people when they come to me and say, "I'm really wrestling with tithing." My response is always, "Why don't you give it a try and see what God does?" because that's what God says: "Test Me in this."

Let me read you the testimony of one of our attenders. I will keep her name anonymous. She has attended here for over 15 years and, in an appropriate way, she has put God to the test. She represents many who may struggle with giving because of the special circumstances in their life. In October 2001 she wrote:

"Pastor Bob,

I just wanted to drop a quick line and share with you a few 'things' I've been learning. Do you remember when you shared with the congregation about tithing from the whole amount you earn, and to take the tithe for the whole month and set it apart before you spend anymore? Well, on that particular Sunday it really made sense to me, in part because I had been wrestling with this whole idea, and the other part was that I was plain ol' curious.

So I made a decision to do just that. You know what happened, don't you? God has truly made His love for me clear. He has honored my little act of faith and astounded me with providing my every need in some simply creative ways!

Ever since my marriage... failed, and I had to look... painfully deep at myself and let God show me my heart, His grace and love... has been more real to me than ever...

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So, now I drive a car that has gone above and beyond what normal cars have for mileage, and it still runs well. I do say a few prayers before I head out anywhere, but God has always provided me with a car without it costing me any money. He's done this with the past two cars. My house payments are always met on time, I always have food, clothes, and all the big bills (including taxes) are always met on time. I am now facing some even bigger bills and expenses, and you know what?

I am very confident that God will take care of these, too, because He loves me and likes it when I trust things to Him.

P.S. With all the Legacy changes going on, and the call put out to the people to be generous and keep giving (that can be different for all of us), I am certain God will strengthen our faith and make us very cheerful givers. I think He is preparing us for some pretty exciting times. I feel like a bride and bridesmaid waiting expectantly; with excitement and joy at the prospect of being with my Groom..."

I couldn't have said it any better. What a wonderful testimony of God coming through! Obviously this lady doesn't believe she has a blank check. She is acting very responsibly and making sure her bills are paid. But in the midst of her faithful administration of the resources God has given to her, she is also seeing God "creatively" provide for her too. Her spiritual growth is also very evident. I am so proud of her and what God has done for her!

Let me read you the testimony of another Hillcrest family I received just this week. This, too, will be an anonymous testimony. This is a family of four—a mother, father and their two small children. They write:

"Ever since we got married, we have tithed. Our parents tithed; we just figured it was the thing to do, so we agreed that we would. Never did we realize the impact consistent, planned, sacrificial giving would have on our life together.

Tithing has always been a non-negotiable item for us. Even when other charitable giving had to be curtailed, we continued to tithe. Even when we had made poor and/or

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necessary financial choices and ended up in a good deal of debt, we continued to tithe, choosing to pay off the debt more slowly. In that way it has cost us to tithe, but spiritually we've been blessed far beyond.

Not only have the "urban legends" about God's provision proven true (the unexpected refund check; the anonymous gift right when we needed it; the generous bonus); aside from that, we've had the great joy of being obedient. What's more, we've been able to fully share in the destiny of this body of believers....We have invested in Hillcrest and have seen that investment multiply many times over in ministry. And unlike Enron, we know God's kingdom will never go bankrupt or become corrupt. This is one solid investment.

To give 10 percent to God of what is His already seems awfully difficult to us, but in truth, it's very little. *When we look at the scope of His blessings, our redemption, our families, our children, our friends in this church, our home, our marriage, our fabulous good looks (just checking to see if you were paying attention), giving a tenth back to Him is a concrete, sacrificial, tangible act of worship and gratitude. We're so glad we've kept our commitment to tithe, and we trust in Him to continue to provide for us so that we can continue to give more."*

I particularly like the last two sentences. (By the way, this a family from Hillcrest Chapel who has not only given faithfully, but served faithfully as well.) I couldn't be more proud of this family. The fact that they have chosen to invest in Hillcrest Chapel really blesses me.

Those two testimonies, and I'm sure there are hundreds more in this church, lead to the fifth thing I want you to notice in Malachi 3:8-10.

### **Fifth, we can't outgive God.**

v. 10 says: *"Bring the whole tithe 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."*

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The blessing that God promises far exceeds what we give. Did you notice God's promises to "throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing there won't be room for it?" How many of you have ever stood beside an open spillway at a dam? Or just stood beside a huge waterfall? It's awesome, isn't it? I used to love to stop at Rocky Reach Dam near Wenatchee when I was growing up, and look up at the water flowing over the dam.

The sound of the water pouring over the spillway and crashing on the rocks below is an awesome thing. The mist sprays and covers everything. Fix that image in your minds and then listen to the Lord as He says,

*"I'm going to throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing you won't have room for it."*

God's blessing is so huge. I hear people say all the time, "I can't afford to tithe." This promise makes me think, "I can't afford *not* to tithe." God really blesses those who give generously. I want you to read these passages, and look for the theme of generosity that runs through each one.

1. Proverbs 11:24-25: 24] *"One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. 25] A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."*

2. Jesus said this in Luke 6:38: *"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."*

3. Paul said in Acts 20:35: *"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

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4. Finally, 2 Corinthians 9:6: *"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7] Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8] And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."*

All these verses teach that generosity will be rewarded and blessed. This theme runs all the way through the Bible. It is God's promise that He blesses those who give to Him and to His work. Let me conclude with a question:

People often ask me, where should we take our tithe? There are lots of worthy causes, right?

I believe just like the Israelites brought their tithes and offerings to the temple to give for God's work, Christians bring their tithes and offerings to the church they attend and give it for God's work. As I understand it, we bring the whole tithe into the place where we and our family are fed and nurtured spiritually. I often tell people, "If you buy your groceries at Haggen's, who do you make the check out to?" (This is not a trick question!)

If we are fed spiritually here, then we should make the check out to Hillcrest Chapel. But if you belong to church X down the street and that's where you're fed spiritually, your tithes should not be given here; they should be given down there. By the way, for those of you who attend our college ministry on campus, if you give to University Christian Ministries you are giving to one of our ministries, and in fact, giving to Hillcrest Chapel.

Again, God designed His work to be paid for by His people; and our tithes and offerings, the money we put in the little bag each week as it goes by, pays for God's work that's done in this place.

On behalf of the hundreds of people whose lives have been transformed here (many who are sitting here today), I want to say thank you. Thank you for giving. Your participation makes this a life-giving place. It really is a team deal. We do it together. When we work

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together, pray together and give together, God can do incredible things; and I am so proud of you and so honored to be part of this church and what God's doing here. Thank you, thank you, for your generous hearts. I know God will bless you for it.

### Appendix #1: Tithing Is Rare

"One of the central teachings of many Protestant churches is that the Bible commands people to donate 10 percent of the annual income to the church. The survey confirmed that the admonition is rarely followed. One out of every six born again Christians (16 percent) gave no money to his/her church during 1999. The proportion who tithed to their church was just 8 percent.

In general, the more money a person makes the less likely he/she is to tithe. While 8 percent of those making \$20,000 or less gave at least 10 percent of their income to churches, that proportion dropped to 5 percent among those in the \$20,000-\$29,999 and \$30,000-\$39,999 categories; to 4 percent among those in the \$40,000-\$59,999 range, down to 2 percent for those in the \$60,000-\$74,999 niche; and to 1 percent for those making \$75,000-\$99,999. The level jumped a bit for those making \$100,000 or more, as 5 percent of the most affluent group tithed in 1999."

"...The size of the church a person attends is related to their giving habits. Churches that attract limited numbers of people also raise the least money per person. Among adults attending churches of less than 100 adults—which make up a majority of America's Protestant churches—the average (mean) donation was \$488 over the course of the year. Adults attending churches of 100 to 200 adults donated a cumulative mean of \$794—63 percent more than those in small churches donated. People attending churches of 201 to 999 adults contributed a mean of \$1,561 in 1999—more than three times the average in the smallest churches. Giving dropped off a bit in churches attracting 1,000 or more adults, to \$1,462."

### Appendix #2

Another way God blesses us is when we give to the poor.

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Deut. 15:7—*"If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard hearted or tight fisted toward your poor brother. 8] Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.*

(Notice the word "lend" there. The Israelites were told by God to loan to each other without interest. In other words, basically you're giving someone something and saying, "Just pay it back, no interest, when you can.")

9]—*"Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: 'The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near,' so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. 10] Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to."*

Every seventh year the Israelites canceled all of the debts they owed each other. That was done so that no one would get so deeply in debt that they wouldn't be able to get out and would have to sell themselves, basically, into slavery to be redeemed. Therefore God says that if you see some needy person and go to loan them something interest-free but think, "Wait a minute, this is the sixth year; next year is the seventh year. Their debt will get canceled and I'll never get paid back. I don't want to do this..." God says we shouldn't think that way. It doesn't matter if the seventh year starts tomorrow, give them what they need generously. Give generously to the poor.

Prov. 22:9—*"A generous man will himself be blessed for he shares his food with the poor."*

The Bible is filled with verses about God's concern for the poor. Friends, every time you do something for the poor you are doing something close to God's heart and God will bless you for that.

### Appendix #3

## Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 4

Written by Bob Stone

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"A wanderer who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day he met another traveler who was hungry, and the wanderer opened his bag to share his food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone in the wanderer's bag, admired it, and asked the wanderer to give it to him. The wanderer did so without hesitation. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the jewel was worth enough to give him security for the rest of his life.

But a few days later he came back searching for the wanderer. When he found him, he returned the stone and said, "I've been thinking. I knew how valuable this stone is, but I give it back to you in the hope that you can give me something more precious. If you can, give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone"—Alexander Lockhart, , Richmond, VA: Zander Press, 1997, p. 216.