

LESSON 3

Understanding Tithes and Offerings

AS A MEMBER OF HIS FAMILY AND THIS BODY, WE ARE TO INQUIRE OF THE LORD REGARDING OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK HE IS DOING IN AND THROUGH THIS FELLOWSHIP.

This week we address an important question that presents an opportunity for us to pursue the heart of God, as relates to provision in general, and specifically for our campaign. There are two dimensions to this question, which we will explore today:

1. Why do we have to ask Him, if He already knows the need?
2. Why does the public have to be asked to participate? Shouldn't they just want to contribute?

Rick Dunham, in his book bearing a title similar to this lesson, sums it up well: "The ability of a ministry to fulfill God's calling is in direct proportion to its ability to fund its work."ⁱ In other words, just we ask His insight as to direction (i.e. calling), so too we ask His clarity as to provision (i.e. funding).

The problem arises when many of us buy into one of the great lies of American culture: you can make it on your own. Independence may ring true as a political concept, but there exists no scriptural basis for accomplishment apart from the "life-sap" of Christ. Indeed, to the contrary.ⁱⁱ

In such a "do it on your own" environment, there prevails a strong disdain for dependence, typically decried as personal or collective weakness.ⁱⁱⁱ But scripture – and the Biblical worldview that upholds its inerrancy – embraces a different attitude. Many passages speak of the wisdom and value of the Lord's assistance, defining His role as someone to hold to^{iv} and who provides solid support.^v Help, guidance, insight, wisdom – and, best of all! – collaboration and cooperation originate in Him, effectively funneled through others who recognize their unique roles as part of His body.^{vi}

Such purposeful dependence marks the maturing disciple of Christ.^{vii} The curious convergence of humility and initiative reveals an inquisitive heart that longs to know the deep things of God, and then to act on them in faith.



KEY CONCEPT: Asking teaches supplication.

Translated in scripture as a request or petition, supplication simply means you are asking God for, or to do, something. The use of this word in Philippians 4:6 directly connects our petitions to our conscious choice to be grateful and not anxious. James 4 goes even further and shows that the motive behind our asking carries great weight and affects the outcome. The message in these and many other verses is clear. The Father is not put off by our asking; to the contrary, He desires it and He knows and takes into account our motivation in asking.

Asking God for help – be it insight, answers, involvement, practical assistance, protection - puts our focus on His power and strength and takes our eyes off the distraction(s) of the enemy. Scripture teaches us that Satan distracts, divides, and destroys.^{viii} Therefore, the spiritual battle we wage^{ix} takes on new energy when we consider the great responsibility we share in managing God's resources in our physical world.

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If God can provide, why do we have to ask?



DISCUSSION:

- a) How do we learn to ask for things, without becoming selfish in the process?**
b) Share and celebrate faith-inspiring examples of having asked God for something specific – be it healing, salvation, provision, jobs, intervention, favor, opportunity, etc. – where He showed His power and confirmed His love for you.

LEADER NOTE:

- a) Petitioning God is about aligning our will with his, not simply bringing him a wish list. When this happens, “the desires of our heart” (Ps 37.4) begin to resonate with His priorities and perspective. Delighting ourselves in Him means that our attention is on Him and our motivation is to bring glory to His name, not our own. When we have a heart to meet needs and manage well what we’re given, we do so with a focus on others, not ourselves. This honors the gift of Christ on the cross.
- b) Remind your group that part of the goal of being in fellowship as a youth group & class is to live life together as the family of God. That means learning to (a) be bold in sharing what God has done for us, and (b) learning to rejoice with those who rejoice, even while we may still be waiting for our own breakthrough or answer. Sharing testimonies releases great faith through both the telling and the hearing.



KEY CONCEPT: Asking teaches submission.

Because we believe this vision is God’s will, then we must equally believe He knows how and when to release all the necessary wealth and expertise needed order to accomplish it. As we’ve already established, His resources are entrusted to us to manage; they are not ours to “own” and thus we submit to His ownership. ^x

Inherent to true submission are sub-themes of patience, deference, and expectation. ^{xi} It can be summed up like this: “I think I know how this need is going to be met, and I have an idea of how I want to proceed, but I willingly defer to His plan, as revealed and confirmed through His Word and through those under whom I serve.”

The “asking” of which we speak in this lesson gives no credit to the type of cynical inquiry which so frequently reveals our disrespect for authority and leadership – both inside the church and out! No, instead we purpose to elevate a manner of petition rooted in humility as a holy priority. Understanding our proper position allows the heart of God’s children to align with His.

Division in the church frequently arises due to the unmerited criticism and questioning of leadership & authority in areas outside the scope of involvement or understanding of those who levy the charges. Conflict over the handling of funds, specifically, typically finds its root in jealousy, misunderstanding, greed, and a divisive spirit. ^{xii} Make no mistake: there is always a call to ensure accountability and faithfulness; however, we must establish our attitude on such matters ahead of time, and then do battle to protect what God sets in motion.

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In the context of a financial campaign, leaders must engage believers to fund God's work; when we do, we present the Body with an opportunity to serve God more fully as they submit to earthly authority. When leaders earn the confidence and support of those who would follow, momentum builds and hearts respond.



DISCUSSION: What does submission look like with respect to our church campaign?

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

- Actively inquiring of the Lord while purposing to obey what He says
- Serving / Volunteering
- Praying for leaders
- Leaders communicating what God is saying/revealing/directing
- Resisting gossip and undermining comments
- Communicating well
- Giving of \$ now
- Pledging future funds

LEADER SUMMARY: Remind your class that at the core of submitting to authority is a heart of humility and a commitment to esteeming others higher than oneself. (Phil 2:3) Jesus modeled submission to the Father's will (Luke 22:42) and therefore we must choose to follow his example – especially when we are not in charge and/or the situation runs contrary to our preferences or priorities.



KEY CONCEPT: Asking teaches surrender.

God wants our hearts, not our stuff.

The response of the rich young ruler ^{xiii} shows that our affection for material possessions can easily supplant a desire to follow Christ. At the core of this issue is the question of surrender: does what I hold onto bring greater fulfillment to my life, compared to what I gain by giving it up?

Again, we can simplify the concept like this: “It looks and feels like it's mine, yet I know He gave it to me; therefore I willingly sow it, by faith, to advance His sovereign purposes.” In the context of our capital campaign, the decision to relinquish control or possession of that which is “ours” is in large part prompted by the invitation from our leaders, i.e. the “asking” for our participation. This speaks directly to the interconnectedness of surrender with submission.

Accountable to the Father in all things, our leaders will ask for our involvement and our resources in a way that honors God ^{xiv} and directs you specifically with regard to the target of your giving. ^{xv} The church will issue a challenge to God's children to examine their hearts ^{xvi} and will show them the impact of their gift. ^{xvii}

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Just as the positive consequences of a fully surrendered life are clear, so too are the opposite. By definition, idolatry takes its form as anything that displaces the Father on the throne of our hearts, often revealed in our deep yearnings and our treasures. Resources withheld, be they items or fortunes or abilities, translate into missed opportunities for individuals and for the church as a whole. Limited or untapped resources reduce Kingdom impact rather than fueling the momentum needed to bring about the things near to God's heart.

Reinforce to your class that material prosperity factors significantly into God's unique purpose. (1 Tim 6:17-19) However, point out that personal or congregational abundance is never the end goal, rather it is always a means to an end (v19). For this reason, an ongoing conversation with Father is imperative, that He may expose our clinging fingers and that we would respond to His admonishment and leading.



DISCUSSION:

a) What has God called you to surrender – in the past, or presently?

b) Are you even asking Him to show you? What does that tell you?

LEADER NOTE: Explore this question from the standpoint of life in general, not just with a focus on money, or stuff. It might include behaviors, attitudes, or activities. The potential for idolatry remains the focal point of why everything should be on the table. It's not that He is necessarily going to ask us to give [x]; it's about our willingness to do so if He does.

Get as much of the class as possible to participate in this question! One way to do this is to prompt a "shout out" response from the class, in the form of rapid-fire short phrases and one-word answers. However, encourage replies here to be personal NOT general; thus they should vary widely and spark much faith! Hone in on part (b) in particular.

LEADER SUMMARY: To whom much is given, much is expected. Compared to the world in general, our disproportionate amount of wealth as American Christians means that we bear far greater responsibility with respect to God's Kingdom. This should be viewed not as a burden but as a privilege. Resources have not been given to us to keep; rather, we are to sow and to invest, all the while rejoicing in the beautiful cycle (Luke 6:38) which God has established and confirmed.



PERSONAL / HOUSEHOLD APPLICATION

DISCUSS

What does "asking" look like for you/your household? Are you really asking, or is it more like telling God what you want to do, and then convincing yourself that He approves?

DECIDE

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Determine to “wait upon the Lord” and discern what submission and surrender need to look like in your life. Becoming mature means changing, but never with the goal of being evident to, and thus receiving the worldly approval of, others. Rather, bear the fruit of generous works in your church and community.

DO!

Count the cost. Submit to God's principles and honor your leaders in specific, overt ways. Make a list of things or time or talent that you can surrender – to a family member or neighbor in need, to Goodwill, to your campaign.

I	Rick Dunham, If God Can Provide, Why Do We Have to Ask for Money? Dunha Books, 2007	ix	Eph 6:12
ii	John 15:5	x	Psalms 24:1
iii	Dr. Ralph Wilson, “Is Christianity a Crutch?” http://www.joyfulheart.com/evang/crutch.htm	xi	Psalms 27:14, Isaiah 40:31
iv	Isaiah 41:13	xii	Rom 16:7
v	Psalms 18:2	xiii	Mark 10:1-227
vi	1 Cor 12	xiv	2 Cor 8:21
vii	Phil 4:13	xv	1 Chron 29, 2 Chron 24:8
viii	John 10:10	xvi	2 Cor 9:7-8
		xvii	2 Cor 9:12-14