



SUN OCT 8
9AM & 11AM

Where is the Offering Plate?



Sunday, October 8, 2023

“Where is the Offering Plate?”

Charlie Berthoud | 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4:10

1 Corinthians 12: 4-12, 25-27a (The Message)

God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful. All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.

You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body. It’s exactly the same with Christ.

The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don’t, the parts we see and the parts we don’t. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. You are Christ’s body—that’s who you are!

“Where is the offering plate?” Several people have asked about this in recent months. Since returning from Covid isolation, we have **not** passed the offering plate—the large deep plate where people place cash or checks to support the ministry of the church. Instead, we are inviting people to leave any offerings in the lectern at the entrance of the sanctuary or to give online. There are several reasons why we have not passed the offering plate.

- We continue to be Covid cautious.
- Sometimes we spread out in the sanctuary making it challenging.
- More and more people are giving online.
- We haven't seen a noticeable change in our finances.

And for me, the most significant reason for not passing the offering plate is because we don't want anyone, especially visitors, to feel obligated to put anything in it. There is an unfortunate sort of peer pressure or fear that people are watching. So I don't want what I call "guilt trip five dollar bills." We're not about guilt trips here at Covenant.

Overall, money and religious institutions have a complicated relationship.

When healthy, people give their dollars and the churches or synagogues or mosques and great things happen with those dollars.

I believe that is what happens here. People's contributions come together allowing us as a church

- to worship God with wonderful music in this beautiful space,
- to encourage and support each other as we seek to follow Jesus,
- to provide learning and fun for children and youth,
- to be a resource for neighbors and this community
- to work with partners local and global to make this world a better place,
- to be a way for anyone to recharge their batteries, so that we go out and can live with faith, hope, and love.



This is what we call *Learning God's Love and Living God's Love*.

The reality is that money helps make all these things happen.

Unfortunately, there are a small percentage of church leaders who are greedy and corrupt, leaving too many people with bad impressions, thinking that churches just want money.

Please note that we have lots of checks and balances in place to ensure proper use of funds. We have lots of eyeballs on the money and the books and every three years we have an extensive financial review from an outside accounting firm to make sure things are in order.

These rare but high-profile greed and corruption cases make it hard for the rest of us. Already challenging conversations about money become more challenging.

But as with talking about sex or death or alcohol, difficult conversations are vital. So, we need to talk about money every so often and be mindful and intentional.

Jesus himself said more about money and possession than any other topic. For me the essence of the Bible's message about money is "be careful" and "be generous" and "be wise."

A few samples of the biblical message on money and possessions:

Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

- Matthew 6:24

There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment.... For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

-1 Timothy 6:6, 10

Give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that I need.

-Proverbs 30:8

Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

-Luke 6:21,24

Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for God has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

-Hebrews 13:5

I have one more verse that isn't specifically about money, but it is for those of us who have a more than average amount of money, influence, or privilege.

Jesus said, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."

-Luke 12:48

According to *The Message*, that same verse is:

Great gifts mean great responsibilities;
greater gifts, greater responsibilities!

-Luke 12:48 (*The Message*)

We talk about money every so often because it's a central topic in Scripture and because we need to remind each other of basic financial common sense, like:

- Don't spend more than you earn
- Save for the future
- Discuss your finances with your family and loved ones
- Consider a plan, like 80-10-10, which means live on 80 percent, save 10 percent, and give away 10 percent

We're focusing a little bit on money today because this month at Covenant is our Generosity campaign, where we are asking people to prayerfully think about how to use their gifts for the sake of the church and the world.

If today is your first Sunday with us, or even your second or third, please ignore this part of the sermon.

October is when we ask our members and friends to consider making financial pledges to support the ministry of Covenant in 2024.

In a week or so, members and regular attenders will get a packet of info, including a pledge card. You can also make a pledge on our website.

Three weeks from today is Generosity Sunday. We would like to have as many financial pledges as possible by then, to help the Session—the elected leaders of the church—plan appropriately for the future.

Here at Covenant, what we encourage is a spirit of generosity, with our collective time and talent as well as our treasure.

If you've worshipped here previously, you've hopefully heard us say that the offering part of the service isn't just about money but also about how we offer our hands and hearts and words and lives to serve God.

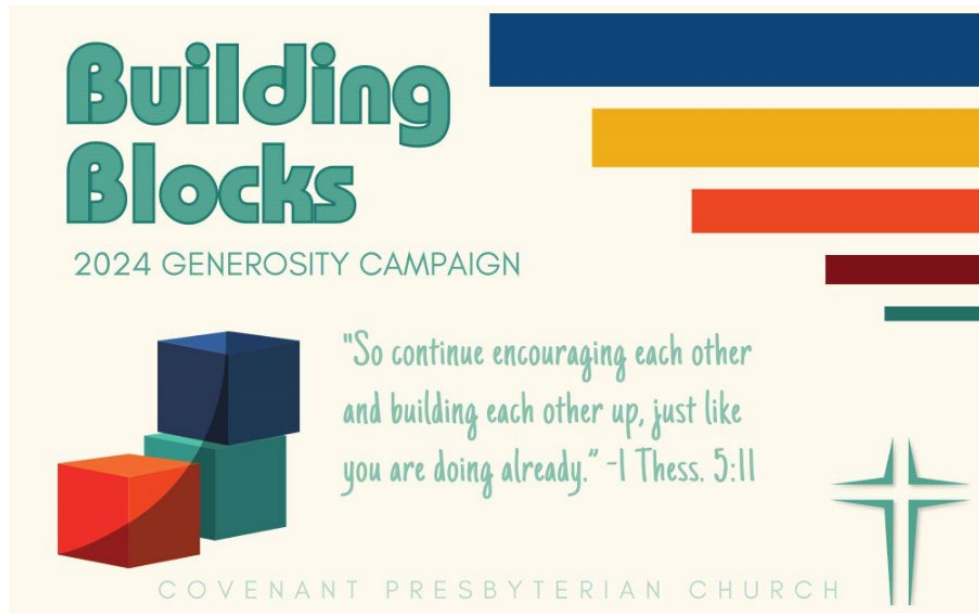
This is why money is only part of our generosity. We also ask people to fill out a **Serving Survey**, a hard copy or online, to list ways that you might want to support the church, doing anything from gardening, to making coffee, to ringing bells, to going on a mission trip.

As a church we are called to build up each other and build up God's kingdom—with our money, with our time, with our talents.

In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul encourages the early church in this building up work:

So continue encouraging each other and building each other up, just like you are doing already. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Those words help us as we begin our new sermon series today, as part of the Generosity campaign.



We are continuing with the **building block** theme from September, when we focused on building blocks for Christian living, talking about energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. The October series on building blocks for the church.

The inspiration for this series comes from scripture and more specifically from our constitution, the *Book of Order*, where we find a section titled **the ministry of members**. What follows is a list of what membership and being a Christian mean, with a dozen bullet points. We're going to read it in a minute.

These are the building blocks of a healthy church—members who are living out at least some of these points.

I've shared this list in the church newsletter, and in my newsletter article I suggested that you might want to focus on one of these points to work on, the implication being find one that you're not doing and start doing it.

But I've changed my mind since then. I'd like to offer an alternative suggestion: Instead of putting your energy into your weakest one and going against the flow, maybe recognize your strength and passion on this list and think about building it up. The introduction to the list reads:

"Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ's mission. A faithful member bears witness to

God's love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church. Such involvement includes..."

We're going to read the list out loud now. It's a bit long, but it's important. As we read, think about what bullet points reflect you, which ones you are doing well and can build on.

- proclaiming the good news in word and deed,
- taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,
- lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,
- studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life,
- supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,
- demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,
- responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,
- living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,
- working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment,
- caring for God's creation,
- participating in the governing responsibilities of the church,
- and reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one's membership, and considering ways in which one's participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.

I trust you found yourself on that list somewhere. Each of us has something to offer.

Each of us is a building block in a healthy church.

Today we're focusing on "supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents" and over the next three Sundays, we'll focus on three other bullet points from the list.

I want to close by sharing a verse from the little book of 1 Peter which reminds us that

we all have something to offer, that we're all part of building up God's house.

1 Peter 4:10 reads:

- Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. NRSV
- Serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God's diverse gifts. (CEB)
- Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it. (*The Message*)

Friends, God has made us in God's image, and we're all different, with a wonderful variety of skills, gifts, experiences, and opportunity.

Jesus calls us to follow him into a new and more meaningful life, where we recognize our gifts and find ways to share them—

for the sake of the church, for the sake of our neighbors, and for the sake of God's kingdom, so that together we make this world a better place.

Let us pray...