

Faithful (Part 1)

We've been studying the book of Revelation, and having reached the halfway point, we're going to take a short break. Just for the month of October. Instead, we're going to focus on what it means to be faithful. It's related to our Hold Fast theme, but from a slightly different perspective.

The fact is, everybody with an ounce of responsibility wants to be faithful in life. Faithful to your spouse, faithful to your family, your workplace, friends, you name it. And everybody who loves the Lord wants to be faithful to *him*; and faithful to his church.

After all, **1 Cor 4:2** says – *It is required of stewards that they be found faithful*. Stewards, as in estate managers. By virtue of our inclusion in God's family, we are *stewards* of God's kingdom. Entrusted with his goods, for his purposes. And faithfulness is required.

The issue is, what does that mean? Especially in the area of *giving*. What does it mean to be a faithful *giver*? That's the focus this morning.

And to answer that, I'm going to give you 10 characteristics.

10 Marks of a Faithful Giver

10 qualities of a faithful steward. So turn with me to Mal 3.

While you're turning there, I want you to understand something. Two things.

1. If you don't give, this is *not* intended to make you feel like a worm. Rather, it's intended to inform you, and bring the conviction of God's word to bear, and change you. By the power of the Holy Spirit, this is intended to change you. From a *non-giver*, or occasional giver, to a faithful giver. A faithful steward.

2. This isn't about money. We're doing great in our budget; better than we have in a long time at this point in the year. This is about you. This is about the Lord; and bringing glory to him. This is about you experiencing his best. This is about thriving instead of just surviving. This is about *fully* participating in the work of ministry, and fulfilling yours.

That said, the first mark of a faithful giver, is that . . .

1. You give first (Prov 3:9)

Before anything else. Before you pay taxes, before you contribute to your retirement, before you fund your HSA, anything. A faithful giver gives first. Off the top.

Like it says in **Prov 3:9** – *Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce*. (ESV) *Firstfruits* in that day, meant the first of the *fruit* that ripened. The first of the *grain* that was harvested. The first of the *oil* that was squeezed. The first of the *animals* that were born. It's a principle repeated over and over again in Scripture.

In *our* day, it means giving from your gross. The amount you're paid *before* you pay taxes; the amount you take home *before* you invest. A faithful giver gives first.

Second, the second mark of a faithful giver, is that . . .

2. You tithe (Mal 3:10)

Look at Mal 3:10. God is speaking, and says – *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I*

will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

The word *tithe* means “a tenth.” 10%. So God's command here is to give a full 10% of your income. If you make \$10, you give one. If you cash in a stock, you give 10% of your gain. If you take money out of your business, you *tithe* on the increase. *Tithe* means tenth.

➤ What it doesn't mean, is whatever you want. As if bringing the full tithe is optional. Don't rationalize this. It's a command; a command that still applies. Because tithing is a part of Scripture, and 2 Tim 3:16 says *all* Scripture is profitable. Profitable *for training in righteousness*. Including the righteousness of faithful tithing.

You say, “Oh pastor, it's the *Old* Testament.” Ya. And the New Testament says it was *written* for our sake. Written for our instruction. Rom 15:4. 1 Cor 9:10 and 10:11. Which means that in *principle* the Old Testament still applies. Not the particulars or consequences of the commands, but the heart of God *behind* them. Which in this case, is to give a fixed, equitable portion of our income. 10%. And faithful givers do. You *tithe*.

Third, and closely related . . .

3. You tithe to your church (Mal 3:10)

That's the idea of the *storehouse* in v10. *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse* God says. Which in Malachi's day, was a literal room connected to the side of the *temple*, used to store the tithes of grain, oil, and money. Grain, oil, and money used for the work of *ministry* and those who did it. Like the Levites and singers and priests (Neh 13:5).

In other words, we are to bring a tenth of our income God says, to the place he's designed and designated for discipleship, worship, and ministry. The primary place we are fed and led spiritually. That's the principle. And in our day, that's the church. Your local church.

Just like the temple was God's primary source of discipleship and ministry *then*, the local *church* is God's primary source of discipleship and ministry *now*. It's called storehouse tithing, and it's the third mark of a faithful giver.

4. You give obediently (Mal 3:8-9)

There's no delay, no withholding, and no rationalizing. When God gives, you give. When God provides, you provide. You don't think, “Well, my expenses are a little higher this month, so I'm going to cut back on my tithe.” Or, “I spent \$100 dollars to send my kid to church camp, so I should be able to deduct that from my giving.” Or, “I gave some money to hurricane relief, so it's okay if I skip my church.”

That's rationalizing. And God calls it robbery. Look at v8-9. God is speaking, and says – [8] *Will man rob God?* [It's a rhetorical question to point out how unthinkable it is.] *Yet you are robbing me* [God says]. *But you say* [the people say], *'How have we robbed you?'* [And God responds] *In your tithes and contributions. [9] You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.*

Fail to tithe, fail to be obedient, and you face discipline. That's how the *New* Testament says it (Heb 12:5-11). Discipline, as in whatever it takes in the way of trouble, hardship, or consequences to get your attention and change your mind; change your giving. So that you give obediently, instead of conveniently.

That means tithing even when it hurts. Even if you have to cut back somewhere else. Even if you have to change your standard of living. Otherwise you're robbing God.

This isn't easy to say. Because I *hate* the thought of you struggling or barely getting by because you're faithful in giving. I do. But I love the discipline it creates; and the ripple of righteousness in your life. I love the trust it builds; in the Lord. I love the joy it produces. And the satisfaction it gives. And the blessing it brings. None of which you'll ever know if you're *disobedient*. Unfaithful.

5. You give humbly (Luke 19:13)

Acknowledging that it's not your money anyway. It's a gift. A gift from God. After all, *the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof* [all that fills it]. Ps 24:1. *Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine* [God says]. Job 41 (11). And King David nails it in **1 Chron 29**. Speaking to God he says – *Both riches and honor come from you . . . For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you* (v12-14). What we *have* comes from God, and what we *give* comes from God.

Which ought to humble us. We're just stewards. Entrusted with kingdom matters and kingdom *money* of all things. Like Jesus said in the parable of the ten minas. **Luke 19:13**. *Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas* [ten chunks of money], *and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.'* Bear fruit until I come. Drawing an analogy between business and ministry.

The point being, he *gave* them the money. God did. Just like he provides for us. And gives us the privilege of *giving* his money. Which faithful givers *do*, with all humility. Acknowledging, every time we write a check, every time we make a transfer, that *God* is the primary giver, and we're just stewards.

God bless you in this. So many of you give so humbly and so faithfully, it's crazy. And because of it, we're thriving as a church instead of just surviving. Growing our ministries instead of just maintaining them.

6. You give cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7)

Because that's what God *loves*; a *cheerful* giver. 2 Cor 9:7. God loves someone who's *happy* to give. Someone who doesn't look back, wishing they would have kept it. He loves those with a supernatural *delight* in his work. And those with a Spirit-led *eagerness* to contribute. That's where cheerful giving starts. An internal disposition of "yes" to the things of God. "Yes" to the work of ministry.

If you lack joy in your giving, something's wrong. And instead of just gutting it out, don't you think it would be better to figure it out and put it to rest? To search your heart and get your questions answered? Repent and cultivate a *love* for ministry? A *love* for our church? A *love* for giving? I think so. Because grudging giving is no better than no giving.

7. You give generously (Prov 11:24; 2 Cor 9:6,11)

This mark and the next one is about giving over and above your tithe. Giving an *offering* as it's often called. When the Lord prompts and you feel compelled. It could be an additional gift to our church, or someone outside our church. It could be a regular thing, or an occasional thing. Because that's what faithful givers do. They give generously.

And while they never give to get, that's one of the benefits. One of the benefits of generous giving, is generous receiving. **Prov 11:24**. *One gives freely* [generously], *yet grows all the richer* [receives all the more]; *another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want*. Only comes up *short* at the end of the month. Short in the course of life.

And Paul says in **2 Cor 9:6** – *Whoever sows sparingly* [gives sparingly] *will also reap sparingly* [receive sparingly], *and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*. It doesn't make sense, but that's how it *works* in God's economy. You literally defeat your purpose of getting ahead, by hanging *on* to your money instead of giving it.

But God's *primary* goal in giving you more, is that you would *give* more. Be all the *more* generous. **2 Cor 9:11** – *You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way*. And *faithful* givers are all about it.

➤ Now, at this point you might be thinking, "There's no way, pastor. I'm already squeezed with my budget. I can't even afford to tithe." To which I would say, you can't afford not to.

So let me recommend this. Wherever you are on the spectrum of giving, make a plan to eventually tithe. A 3-month plan, 6-month plan, whatever it takes. Make a plan, and then take a step of faith. Right away. Move from giving nothing to something, something to tithing, and tithing to generosity. Start with a plan, and trust the Lord. Because *faithful* givers give generously.

8. You give sacrificially (Mark 12:43-44)

Like Jesus said the widow did in Mark 12. Giving over and above her tithe. After watching the widow put 2 small coins in the offering box (**Mk 12:43-44**), he called his disciples and said, "*Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. [44] For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.*" That's sacrifice. Extreme sacrifice.

Does that mean you should do the same? Empty your bank account every week? No. But it *does* mean you should be willing. It *does* mean you should give to the point of going without sometimes. It *does* mean you should *respond* if God presents a need and compels you accordingly.

Whether once a quarter or once in a lifetime, faithful givers give sacrificially.

9. You give wholeheartedly (2 Cor 8:7)

Because grudging obedience is *never* godly obedience. Grudging giving is *never* faithful giving. No matter how much you give. It's one of the reasons Paul says in **2 Cor 8:7** – *As you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also*. The act of giving. That's the context. Excel in that too he says. Put your heart into that, just like you put your heart into everything else with the Lord.

Faithful givers are wholehearted givers. Going all out to go all in. Thereby ensuring that your treasure is where your heart is, and your heart is where your treasure is. Faithful givers give wholeheartedly.

And last, the last mark of a faithful giver:

10. You give expectantly (Mal 3:10-12)

Look at Mal 3:10 one more time. [10] *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house* [the means for ministry and discipleship]. *And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.* [11] *I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts.* [12] *Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.*

Faithful givers give expectantly, because God promises a blessing. A blessing of provision, protection, and delight. Provision, because God says in v10, *put me to the test* and watch. See if I won't *pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need*. That's provision. As is v11b – *your vine in the field shall not fail to bear*.

When we tithe, God promises to provide. Sometimes by giving us more, sometimes by helping us live on less, and sometimes by making us more content with what we have. Whatever the case, whatever the form, it's a blessing of *provision* we can expect.

And so is God's protection. *I will rebuke the devourer for you* [he says in v11], *so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil*. Faithful givers can expect God's faithful protection. Not that we're *immune* to hardship, but that God is near and God is gracious. Diminishing the impact and maybe even preventing it altogether.

And last, faithful givers can expect great joy. V12 – *all nations will call you blessed* [God says], *for you will be a land of delight*. A people of joy. A church of gladness. Highlighting the fact that we're in this together. Our faithfulness, or lack thereof, affects those around us.

Provision, protection, and joy. 3 reasons that faithful givers give expectantly. Not presumptuously, as if God *owes* us those things, but eagerly. *Looking* for the blessing, and waiting for it. Knowing full well that *God* is faithful.

10 marks. And if they describe you, praise the Lord. Keep on; good and faithful *steward*. But if they don't describe you, make a change. Miss out no longer and rationalize no more. Glorify God to the *fullest* in your giving, and be found faithful.

Prayer – Lord, help us in this. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Give us humility to repent and conviction to obey. Give us hearts to receive and faith to change. And be glorified in all you've promised, as we're faithful in all we give.

You Are Loved