

Chapter 8

FAITHFUL GIVING

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. This statement communicates the blessedness of giving. “God has given us two hands—one to receive with and the other to give with” (Billy Graham).¹ As nice as it is to receive gifts, it is even more meaningful to give them. When we give, we quickly discover the true joy in giving. We have all experienced the excitement and thrill of giving someone a special birthday, Christmas, or anniversary gift. We can’t measure the joy of watching the happiness that our gifts bring to others.

In Acts 20:35 Jesus says, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* Jesus knew that the act of giving returns more to us than what we give. God only wants the best for us when He asks us to give. He uses our generosity to build His kingdom and to strengthen and bless us as givers. We are fulfilled and enriched through a generous, giving spirit. Generosity is an important component of “life at its best.” When we give freely and fully, we discover the key to living. Giving is a privilege and a joy and can change our lives.

In the matter of God’s gifts, we can choose to be channels or terminals. What we do with God’s money demonstrates our spiritual maturity. Some of us share sacrificially with God and others, others give proportionately from our incomes, and still others hoard what we receive. God wants us to be channels of His blessings, and He enriches us so we can be blessings to others. We are blessed to be a blessing. *“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”* (2 Corinthians 9:11).



Those who do not share, but hoard, become terminals, rather than channels, of God’s gifts. They get no satisfaction except for fleeting happiness in using the things of this world. Those who do not share will never experience the joy of giving. Remember the Rich Fool who amassed great wealth strictly for his own pleasure. He died before he had time to enjoy the products of his labor. All he left behind was his wealth for others to use. He never experienced the fulfillment of helping others nor the joy of being a channel of God’s blessings. His memory lives on, not as a gracious benefactor, but as a selfish fool, a terminal of God’s gifts. Lasting happiness and contentment come from employing our lives and possessions

in service to God and others. “*God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Corinthians 9:7), and promises to reward him: “. . . *if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will reside in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday*” (Isaiah 58:10). Jesus said, “. . . *Freely you have received, freely give*” (Matthew 10:8).

The miracle of giving is that the more we give, the more we receive. Although we are not likely to receive in kind, or dollar for dollar, what we receive is more precious than what we give. God’s gifts to us are greater than our gifts to Him. This miracle is described in the following medieval story:

An announcement was made that the king—and everyone loved this good king—was going to make a tour throughout his kingdom on a certain day. Great preparations were made for the occasion. Roads were repaired, bridges built; houses were painted. The people were to wear their holiday attire. If they cared to, they might express their loyalty and love by making some gift to their king.

Now there was a certain poor widow. She lived alone in her little cottage. She had no gift fit to give a king, nor had she a suitable dress for such an occasion. So she decided she would just stay in her little house on the great day. Oh, she might peep through the curtains and get a glimpse of his majesty as he passed.

The day came. The people gathered by the hundreds along the highway; the widow looked out her window and saw the multitude. She looked down the king’s highway and saw the procession coming; she heard the music; the people shouted and cheered. The old woman could not stand it. She grabbed her old bag and ran out into the big crowd. “Oh, he will not see me,” she said, but just as the chariot approached her, it stopped. The king looked right through the crowd and into her face. The old woman thrust her hand into her bag and took out a big copper coin, the only coin she had, and put it in to the hand of the king.

The king smiled and said. “My dear good woman, you can’t afford to give all that gold to your king. Here, take it back.”

“O king,” cried she, “don’t poke fun at a poor old woman. I know that copper coin is not fit to give a king, but it was all I had.”

“Here,” said the king, “take it back.” And lo! When she took it back, it had been turned into pure gold!²

The story describes what happens when we give our best to Christ Jesus. He accepts it, blesses it, changes it, gives it back, and our copper is turned to gold.

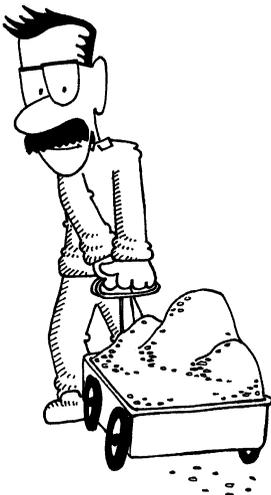
Our willingness to give should be guided by two truths: First, everything God asks of us is based on something He has already given to us, and everything He asks of us will benefit us as well as the recipients of our gifts.³

PROPER GIVING ATTITUDE

It is crucial to give with a proper attitude of love. We can give without loving, but we can't love without giving. Giving is a natural expression of love. If we dearly love and give ourselves to others, we will do everything possible not to forget occasions or opportunities to share with those individuals. Loving spouses show their love for one another without any limitation or constraint. The young man who loves his girlfriend never thinks he has given enough to her. Parents who love their children will give whatever they can to contribute to their well-being. Followers of Christ who truly love Him know no limits to their giving. When we give God our money without giving Him our hearts, we have missed the purpose and joy in giving. If our hearts are opened to the Holy Spirit, we will grow spiritually and desire to give.



A familiar story tells about the love two brothers showed one another.



Two brothers shared a field and a mill, and each night they evenly divided the grain they had ground together during the day. One brother lived alone; the other had a wife and large family. The single brother started thinking, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I only have myself to care for and my brother has children to feed." So each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary to see that he was never without. The married brother said to himself one day, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly because I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has no one. What will he do when he is old?" So

every night, he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary. As a result, both of them always found their supply of grain mysteriously replenished each morning. Then one night, they met each other halfway between their two houses and suddenly realized what had been happening. They embraced each other in love.⁴

Love causes us to do thoughtful, kind, and sacrificial things. The more love we share, the more love is returned to us. As these brothers loved and gave generously, they were replenished. They discovered the benefit of giving; we cannot lose by giving. We only gain when we give (Proverbs 11:25). We live “life at its best” when God’s love and generosity are seen through us.

“We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The Lord set the example of giving motivated by love. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). First God loved; then He gave. We know how to express our love because we have experienced the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, Who gave His life for us. Our giving is a way to show our appreciation to God for the greatest gift of all—our redemption.

God continues to give. *“He Who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?”* (Romans 8:32). Paul, in the eighth chapter of Romans, describes some of God’s Gifts to us:

- We have Jesus interceding for us at God’s right hand (vs. 34).
- We have God’s promises that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ (vs. 35).
- We are assured that through Christ we are more than conquerors (vs. 37).

John 1:12 tells of the high honor God bestows on us: *“Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”*

As children of God, we are recipients of His care and protection. He provides for us and tells us not to worry about our physical needs (Luke 12:22-31). God’s grace in our lives makes it possible for us to receive and then to give. In fact, Paul said God’s grace virtually compels a response to His love (2 Corinthians 5:14). Even a superficial comprehension of the depth of God’s love for us should erupt in joyful, generous sacrificial giving.

God is concerned with more than the giver’s gift. He is more concerned with the love of the giver. Two women were worshiping at a church for the first time. The time came for the offering, and the plates were passed. The first lady reached into her purse to retrieve some money. The second said, “Oh, no, I’ll get this one. You got the bus fare over here today.”⁵ There is no merit in giving if it is to pay off an obligation or to follow the crowd. We are to give because we love to give. Paul wrote about the importance of love in 1 Corinthians 13:3: *“If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”* We need to continually monitor our motives for giving. Is it recognition we seek? Are we giving for tax reasons? Are we giving to fulfill an obligation or to “pay a pledge”? Do we hope to earn God’s favor with our giving? Giving is intimately connected with the conditions of our spiritual lives. The more we give

in faith, the less our interest in things of the world and the greater our desire to respond in love through joyful, generous giving to the Lord Who is our gracious Provider. An attitude of giving that pleases God, therefore, has little to do with obligation, self-recognition, or even our financial positions, and everything to do with gratitude for what God has done for us and given to us.

REASONS FOR GIVING

1. We give to honor God as the Creator of all things. All that we have is a gift from Him. Our bodies, intellects, occupations, and abilities are gifts entrusted to us from God. The opening affirmation of inspired Scripture is *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1). God is the Creator, Controller, Provider, and Sustainer of all we possess. We are His through creation and then His again, because He purchased us through Jesus’ blood on the cross. Our giving recognizes, then, that God sustains life and blesses us. We give as an act of thanksgiving for all that He has done for us.

We give offerings because we desire to express gratitude to God for His faithfulness. Thomas Jefferson was reported to have said, *“When the heart is right the feet are swift.”*⁶ The conditions of our hearts more so than the fatness of our wallets will determine our generosity. Thus, we can say giving our money is more a spiritual decision than a financial decision. When we give our money because we want to give, it is an act of worship that demonstrates the important place God has in our lives. Stewardship is really like bodily crawling into the offering plate; it is giving all of ourselves, not only our money.



2. Another motivation for giving is to demonstrate our commitment, love, trust, and thankfulness. We witness to others that giving is not a burden, but a privilege, an opportunity, not an obligation. Cheerful giving takes the grind out of giving. When there is deep joy, no challenge seems too great. Paul, in speaking to the Corinthians, said, *“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”* (2 Corinthians 9:8). God’s grace empowers us to be faithful with our lives and resources.

3. We also give because we are part of God’s family, the Church. Giving to our local congregations proclaims that the church is important to us and that we want to be involved in its mission and ministry. Giving to our places of worship helps provide the funding necessary to nourish believers and reach unbelievers. If our churches are spreading the Gospel, supporting the less fortunate, educating the

youth, and serving our communities, we should be glad they need our money. Our churches are stewards of what we give to God.



4. We give to grow as believers. When we are generous with our money, we acknowledge God's ownership of all we have, and we put our trust in Him, knowing that He is our security; our security is not our wealth. The Apostle Paul wrote about the Macedonian Christians, "*Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity*" (2 Corinthians 8:2). These believers gave, not because they had a surplus—they were really suffering from a lack—but because their joy in God and their faith that He would provide was their security. They had

their priorities straight. ". . . *they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us [Paul and his fellow servants of the Gospel] in keeping with God's will*" (2 Corinthians 8:5). Giving our money is important, but far less important than giving ourselves. A gift without the giver is bare.

It is easy to get caught up in the desire to possess things. Soon our thoughts and activities revolve around accomplishing that goal. Absorbed in attaining our own selfish ends, our spiritual growth is stunted, and we no longer are able, nor may we want, to worship God as we ought. Worship of the Creator is reduced to worship of the creation. We are caught in the grip of money.

Giving loosens that grip. It frees us to put our trust in God instead of our own abilities to provide security. Just as nothing succeeds like success, so nothing teaches us to trust like trusting. As God proves His faithfulness to us over and over, we grow deeper in faith and our example of faith-prompted giving encourages other Christians who struggle in this area. We become disciples to those who are on the same road we've already traveled. Our money is an extension of ourselves. We earn it by expending work, energy, and intellect in exchange for wages. The following statement has been made: "The world uses people to make money while the church uses money to make people."⁷ Therefore, when we give of our wealth, we are using it to make other disciples.

GIVING PRINCIPLES

When we give, we are only returning what God has already given us. Since all we have belongs to Him, the question we need to ask ourselves is "How much of God's money will I keep?" Martin Luther wrote, "There are three conversions necessary for a believer: the conversion of the heart, mind, and the purse."⁸ It may be that the conversion of the purse is the most difficult. In His Word, God has outlined His plan for our giving.

1. We are to give to God first. Exodus 23:19 commands, *“Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God . . .”* In a non-agricultural society, rather than bringing in our crops, we give from the firstfruits of our income. We are to honor our commitment of firstfruits giving before we buy the things we desire. God is not looking for our leftovers. We honor God when set aside His portion in the beginning.



2. Each of us is to plan to give regularly and proportionately. 1 Corinthians 16:2 directs, *“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income . . .”* In both the Old and New Testaments, God asks for disciplined and regular giving. Paul suggests that *“On the first day of every week . . .”* we give our offerings. Although some find it more convenient to give every two weeks or monthly, we should remember that the giving of our gifts and tithes is part of our worship. In that light, Paul’s command seems reasonable as well as beneficial to our Sunday morning worship.

Giving is incumbent on all of us: *“Let each one of you . . .”* For God’s people, giving is not an option, but rather a privilege and responsibility. Each one of us is to honor God with our giving.

Giving is to be made a priority. *“. . .set aside a sum of money . . .”* Checking our wallets on Sunday morning as we see the offering plates moving through the pews ahead of us is not what pleases God. What we give is to be determined ahead of time and *“set aside”* so that we’re sure we’re not haphazardly throwing in the leftover change from the twenty dollar bill we used for Saturday night’s movie.

We are to give as we have been blessed. God, speaking through Paul, asks for a planned percentage or portion of our incomes to be set aside for Him and the work of the Church. We may be able to give \$10,000 or just \$10. When we give proportionately, God looks at each gift equally. *“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have”* (2 Corinthians 8:12).



Our giving is an outward expression of our love for Christ, and in some ways, giving is more of an indication of a person’s

spiritual condition than knowledge, service, or church attendance. We may be able to “talk the talk,” participating in or even leading Bible studies, helping others, and occupying our regular seats every Sunday morning, and yet hold our checkbooks too close to our hearts. Many see and are encouraged by our attendance and leadership, but who knows what we give? Not many! It is an area of spiritual immaturity that can be easily hidden.

3. We are called to give a generous portion of our incomes. Tithing (giving ten percent) was expected in the Old Testament. God instructed, *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house”* (Malachi 3:10). Both rich and poor can use the tithe concept. A one-dollar gift from ten dollars of income is just as meaningful as a \$5,000 gift from \$50,000 of income. *“Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you”* (Deuteronomy 16:17). Percentage giving is one of the easiest and most reasonable ways of moving to the goal of the tithe. We may need to start at a lower percentage, but we can still have the tithe as a goal.

God did not require the tithe because He needed the resources. On the contrary, He said, *“I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills”* (Psalm 50:9-10). His purpose in commanding the tithe was to remind us of His ownership (Psalm 24:1) and to pour out His blessings on us. *“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’”* (Malachi 3:10b). Neglecting to tithe breeds indifference to God and robs us of the good things God wants to give us.

When we give ten percent of our incomes, we put our priorities in the right place as illustrated by the following account:

A certain missionary was working to form new disciples in an African nation. As a part of his work, he tried to educate the people on the joys and the fruits of tithing, even in their simple economy. One of his special students was a twelve-year-old boy. One day the boy came to the missionary compound carrying a beautiful, freshly caught fish from the river. He laid the fish on the table with a broad smile, and said, “Preacher, here is my tithe for this week.”



“That’s great,” replied the missionary, “but where are the other nine fish?”

With the same big smile and great excitement, the boy said, “Oh, they are still in the river. I’m going back to catch them now.”⁹

We may not give our first fish each Sunday morning, but we can give the first percentage of our incomes. It never occurred to the little boy that God would not provide the other nine fish. Tithing is impossible without trust. When we tithe, we are confirming that we trust God to supply our needs.

As New Testament believers who acknowledge God's ownership of our lives and His love and grace, we will be motivated to see the tithe as just the beginning. We will be eager to give Him our total devotion and commitment, as well as a generous share of our resources. Those with large incomes have the financial ability to give beyond the tithe. *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked"* (Luke 12:48b). With wealth come added responsibilities and challenges. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8:14, *"At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality."*

Giving ten percent of a large income may be an inappropriate expression of one's gratitude for God's bountiful gifts. There is the story of the man who went to his pastor and said he had a problem with the tithe. He told the pastor that he had an income of \$300,000, and a tithe would mean he would have to give \$30,000. The pastor acknowledged the man's predicament and suggested they pray about it together. In his prayer, the pastor asked the Lord to decrease the man's income so he would feel comfortable tithing.

Our giving flows from our understanding of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. The infinite love of God was shown to us by the death of His Son on the cross. Jesus gave Himself, and we are asked to respond to His love by sharing our resources with Him and those in need. As we grow in our dependence on and trust in the Lord, our faith will prompt us to give a higher percentage.

4. Jesus recognized sacrificial giving. Luke 21:4 records *"All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."* In this story of the widow's mite, Jesus commends the widow, who gave all that she had, not just the excess, as the others did. The widow did not expect to go hungry because she knew God would provide. She gave sacrificially, knowing that God would take care of her. Giving is an act of trust.

If we have plenty and give only a few dollars or a small percentage, the giving has little meaning. The level of generosity is much more important than the size of the gift. Our need to give is much greater than the church's need to receive. Practically speaking, the widow's two coins probably didn't go too far to satisfy the budget of the temple treasury, but that



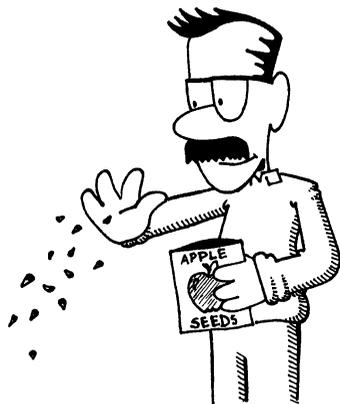
wasn't the concern then any more than it is now. God doesn't need our money. However, he does want us, and that's what the widow gave. Her whole life, her only means of support, went into that offering box. It was a visible expression of the depth of her inward relationship with the Lord. Giving little when we are capable of more expresses a very shallow relationship with God. We should ask, "Does my giving cost me anything? Am I giving up something I value for something or someone I value even more? Does my gift properly reflect my love for the Lord?"

Many churches properly emphasize "not equal gifts, but equal sacrifices." It has been stated that we are to give until we can feel the giving. Many of us have become possessive of what we have, and we see our luxuries as necessities. Jacob Stam said, "O Lord, the only thing most of us know about sacrifice is how to spell the word!"¹⁰ With God's help, though, we can be the givers He wants us to be. Giving that is genuine is not motivated by God's demands, but from our desire to give and our willingness to give up.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. In the context of giving, what is the difference between a channel and a terminal? Which are you?
2. What assurance do you have that God will give you the means to give (2 Corinthians 9:10)?
3. Why does God ask you to give when He has all He needs?
4. Why does God look beyond the size of the gift?
5. What allowed the Macedonians to give so much when they were experiencing bad times (2 Corinthians 8:5)?

PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD



God has developed a partnership with us. The partnership is not an equal one, because what God gives us is many times greater than what we provide. God is the Creator, Owner, and Provider of all things, so our stake in the partnership is very small but still acceptable to God. In our partnerships, God provides us with the tools and resources to accomplish His purpose in our lives. God is expecting us as His partners to be faithful and obedient servants who will extend His kingdom and love those He places around us.

The partnership is analogous to the vocation of farming. We don't have to be farmers to see how farming illustrates the one sidedness of our partnership with Christ.

- God furnishes the farmer . . .
- God furnishes the farmer's health . . .
- God furnishes the knowledge . . .
- God furnishes the seed . . .
- God furnishes the soil . . .
- God furnishes the sunshine . . .
- God furnishes the showers . . .
- God furnishes the night . . .
- God furnishes the day . . .
- God furnishes the seasons . . .
- God furnishes the fertility . . .
- God furnishes the harvest . . .
- God furnishes the customer . . .
- God furnishes the market . . .



Would you estimate that God furnishes 90 percent of the power and energy that goes into making the crop? Would you estimate that He furnishes 95 percent? How about 98 percent? God furnishes 100 percent, doesn't He?

After the crops are harvested, how much of the proceeds does God ask for? Does He seek 50 percent, 80 percent, or 95 percent? No, He asks for ten percent and expects us to manage the other 90 percent in a proper way.



Each and every day we see that God gives and gives. What He expects in return is the commitment of our time, talents, and treasures. He loves us so much that He wants to give us back more than what we give Him. Therefore, He stretches our time, enhances our talents, and multiplies our treasures. When we give, we always get something better in return. Think again about the widow. It is no small thing to receive God's

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commendation as she did. Our coins, too, joined with the coins of the poor widow and others and given to our Savior are accepted, magnified, and enhanced in value.

Jesus wants us to understand that our money is an extension of who we are and what we value in life. How we manage, invest, spend, and give money is important. The way we handle our money and how much of it we give away are expressions of who we are. In our partnerships with God, He gives us the resources and the generous spirit to be His instruments. We can choose to be generous or tightfisted. The choice is ours to make.

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him” (1 John 3:17). In our lifetimes, we will have many opportunities to share with those in need. John is saying that if we don’t share with our brothers, we do not show them love, and we do not show the love of God in us. Helping others in need is the same as helping Jesus. *“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me”* (Matthew 25:40).

During His life on earth, Jesus identified Himself with suffering people. Understanding the heart and compassion Jesus had for the unfortunate is a powerful motivation for us to be involved in Christian care and service. How willing are we to take up the task of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, etc.? As true followers of Christ, we will be caught up in compassion for the poor.

BENEFITS TO GIVING

When we give unselfishly to God to help others, God gives us sufficiency. *“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”* (Luke 6:38). God knows what we need, and He will provide. To experience “life at its best,” we need to trust God and separate ourselves from a possessive attitude with our money. When we give and reach out to others, we experience the true joy of being a Christian. Being generous does something for our spirit. We live fulfilled lives when we share with those in need. Our giving breaks the selfish attitude that holds many of us. The gifts God gives us as a result of our generosity are much greater than what we give Him.



A Korean legend tells of a noble warrior who died. When he arrived at the heavenly portals, he asked to see what hell looked like before entering the celestial area. He was amazed to be shown a magnificent chamber. A huge table was heaped with bountiful foods, but all the people in the room were cursing and screaming in anger. The guide explained the problem. They were all trying to eat with chopsticks three feet long. They had learned how to pick up their food, but the length of the chopsticks prevented them from getting the food to their mouths. When the warrior got back to heaven, he saw the same kind of room and the same kind of table. Here, however, there was laughter and joy. What made the difference? Here, the people had learned to feed each other. In giving, they received.¹¹



We can't say it enough: It's impossible to outgive God. When we give, God blesses us more in return, but we need to be careful not to give for the purpose of receiving. We are to give out of gratitude and obedience to Him as our Creator and Redeemer, not in the anticipation of receiving rewards for our giving. When we give to God first and foremost, we can humbly accept the following benefits Howard Dayton shares in his book *Your Money Counts*:¹²

Increase in Intimacy

It has been said that the last thing Satan lets go of is our pocketbook. When we release our tight grip on the money God has entrusted to us, we have eliminated a great block to spiritual intimacy. God's lordship over our lives does not allow a disclaimer that says, "I'm all yours except for my money." God wants all of us, including our treasures.

In Matthew 6:21 Jesus reminds us, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" Generous giving will help us grow spiritually, because we will experience a greater connection and closeness to God. Giving to God is an act of worship. By offering God the best of what we have with hearts full of love and gratitude, we worship Him Who provides for all our needs.

Giving is part of God's plan to develop trust in Him. One of the first things Zacchaeus did after meeting Jesus was to give away half his possessions (Luke 19:8). The release of his personal wealth removed the barrier to an intimate relationship with Christ Who



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assured, “*Today salvation has come to this house . . .*” (Luke 19:9). No longer did money have center stage in his life, usurping God’s rightful place as Lord. We need to heed Paul’s warning in 1 Timothy 6:10: “*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*” Rejecting that love is a step toward increased intimacy with our heavenly Father.

Healthful Living

A leading psychiatrist once said, “Generous people are rarely emotionally or mentally ill.” Giving to God and others allows us the opportunity to forget about ourselves and focus on others. Peyton Conway March said, “There is a wonderful mythical law of nature that the three things we crave most in life—happiness, freedom, and peace of mind—are always attained by giving them to someone else.” Giving is not just a minor influence on good health, but the key to physical and mental well-being.

In his book *Give to Live*, Douglas Lawson reports on a study conducted by a life insurance company of policyholders who lived to the age of one hundred years or older. One of the survey questions asked by the insurance company was, “What is the most important thing you have learned in your long life?” The most frequent answer was, “To love thy neighbor as thyself.” People who love and give to others live longer. The people in the study had learned to give themselves as well as what they had.¹³ Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.”¹⁴ We’re keenly aware of the effect of our emotion well-being on our physical health. Helping others, serving them, giving to them, promotes a healthy emotional outlook, contributing to health of the body as well.

Development of an Unselfish Character

Our heavenly Father wants us as His children to conform to the image of His Son. In contrast to our selfishness, Jesus was totally unselfish and giving. The more we give, the more we become like Christ. When we give freely, we break the selfish and possessive attitude that money often has on us as people of this world. If we hold on to money and possessions, we will be self-centered and miserable people. By sharing our money rather than hoarding it, we acknowledge that what we have really belongs to God, not us.



1 Timothy 6:18-19 exhorts, “*Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*” Life that is truly life belongs to those who are unselfish givers.

Giving is an indicator of our unselfishness and an outward litmus test of the inner condition of our hearts.

The astonishing thing is that, in God's economy, the more we give, the more we have left to give. Because God replenishes us, our giving can be a daily and a lifetime activity. *"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"* (2 Corinthians 9:11).

A little girl exclaimed, "Poor Jesus!" when her mother told her that she had to give only one dime of her ten-dime allowance. May we acquire the same unselfish attitude as the little girl when we come to the Lord with our offering.

Investments for Eternity

We are in the world, but we are not of the world. Only what we do for God's kingdom has eternal ramifications. There is no lasting value to the things of the world. Jesus warns us that:

- what we own will rust. . .
- what we own will be lost. . .
- what we own will be destroyed.

When the Lord takes us to our eternal home, we will take nothing with us. Seeing the eagerness and effort of most people in the pursuit of things during this life, one would foolishly assume we are entitled to use a U-haul at death to take our lifetime possessions with us. We don't see a trailer-hitch on a hearse; do we?

What are investments for eternity? Someone once said that the only things we can take to heaven are the things we've returned to God. Words on an old gravestone: "What I spent, I used; what I saved, I lost; what I gave, I have."

We lay up treasures in heaven when we love and help others. Helping others can involve our time, abilities, or money. We receive eternal treasures through our church service and involvement, as well as giving. When we are ministering to others, we are doing the work of the Lord and making investments for eternity.

The Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:17 said, *"Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account."* This passage indicates that God has an account for each one of us. The work done for God does not go unnoticed. Those who take and hoard what they've collected are the ultimate losers.

A funny comedian of the past, Jack Benny, made us laugh for decades. A recurring theme in Jack's self-deprecating humor was his stinginess, his affection for money and reluctance to part with it. In one of his routines a mugger accosted him. As he felt the cold steel of a gun in his back, Jack heard the bloodcurdling

Life at its Best

threat, “Your money or your life.” Silence. Then the threat was repeated more loudly. Again silence. Finally, as the sweat poured down Jack’s grimacing face, the threat was made for the third time. “Your money or your life!” Jack blurted out, “I’m thinking; I’m thinking!”¹⁵



This story is humorous because we can relate to it. We, too, struggle with the control money can have over our lives. The challenge we face is to set self aside and to store up treasures in heaven that are of lasting value. “We exist temporarily through what we take, but we live forever through what we give” (Douglas M. Lawson). Our gifts are investments for eternity.

Increase in Blessings

Scripture is full of passages that indicate that when we give generously we will receive generously (Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38). Giving with a proper attitude increases the value of the gift to the receiver even while it blesses us, the givers. When we honor God, He, in turn, honors us. We receive God’s abundant life in Christ as we share our blessings with others. This poem in a special way relates giving to living abundantly:

Jesus came down to live life abundantly;
His Spirit still comes that we do the same.
By His own choice with servant humility,
He emptied Himself, making giving His aim.

In doing God’s will, but never reluctantly,
His days moved ahead at a good healthy pace,
Full of compassion, His touch ever brotherly,
Each one He met could measure His grace.

Jesus our model for days lived out joyfully,
Always our example of life full of zest.
He came here to serve and live sacrificially,
Mapping the way to live “**life at its best.**”

Odd that we think that in grasping most selfishly,
We can exact what life has to give,
But Jesus’ life shows, that in sharing all generously,
We find the way to abundantly live.¹⁶

In Malachi 3:10, God tells His people that if they would give Him ten percent (tithe), they would be blessed. *“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.”* This verse is God’s promise that when we honor Him with our hearts, lives, and possessions, He will provide us with more blessings than we can imagine.

Proverbs 11:24-25 reads, *“One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”* God does not abandon those who share with Him and others. God has ordained that when we give generously we will receive generously. The Lord blesses us so that we will have enough to share with others. When we do God’s work His way He provides us with what we need (2 Corinthians 9:8).



ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

LIFE-ENRICHING

Gives
 Is generous
 Helps
 Rejoices in giving
 Has an eternal perspective
 Is a channel of God’s blessings
 Surrenders self and money
 Sees the needs of others
 God is our treasure
 Gives cheerfully
 Sees life as a partnership with God
 Shares

LIFE-DESTROYING

Keeps
 Is selfish
 Ignores
 Rejoices in having
 Lives for the moment
 Is a terminal of God’s gifts
 Takes and keeps
 Is blinded by own needs
 Things are our treasure
 Gives grudgingly
 Lives for himself
 Hoards

WRAPPING UP

Our faithful giving honors and glorifies the Lord. The act of giving is discussed extensively in both the Old and New Testaments; both the poor and rich, both young and old gave. We are not to give out of duty or for recognition. Rather, faith in and love for God motivate us to give, and giving generously evidences our faith. God's grace empowers us to be faithful with our lives and resources. God's love and generosity are seen through our giving. We live "life at its best" when we joyfully share God's gifts with Him and others.

A foundational truth about Christian giving is that it comes from the heart, not just from the pocketbook. It is an expression of love and care. We are to be compassionate and eager to share God's blessings with those in need. Giving springs from the recognition that the bountiful blessings of our lives are from God. Our giving recognizes that God is the ultimate Giver. We are not only to enjoy the blessings God gives us, but to share them as well. In addition, Scripture promises us that God will enrich us when we are faithful in our regular and proportionate giving (Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38).

God asks us:

- to give for the ministry of the church. . .
- to spread the Gospel. . .
- to feed the hungry. . .
- to comfort the afflicted.

Of course, God, Who owns everything, is not in need of our money. He graciously allows us to take part in building His kingdom and accepts our offering as an act of worship.

We need to sever our firm attachment to things of this earth. We are to love the things that endure. Things come and go, but our service and gifts to the Lord last forever. We offer our gifts to the Lord through the Church because the Church is Christ's body on earth, commissioned by Him to tell others about God's love and forgiveness. Giving can be viewed as an investment in God's kingdom. We may invest some of our money in stocks, bonds, CD's, homes, or businesses, but the greatest investment we can make with our money is what we give to the Lord. This is the only investment that will pay both present and future dividends that cannot be surpassed.

This chapter has dealt primarily with financial giving, but Scripture shares some creative ways individuals have given. Think of several of the wonderful and unique gifts given to Jesus:

- The gift of worship from the shepherds to Jesus at His birth . . .
- The gifts of the Magi to the Child Jesus . . .

- The gift of gratitude from one of the ten lepers . . .
- The gift of valuable ointment from Mary to anoint Jesus . . .
- The gift of a dinner from Zacchaeus . . .
- The gift of bread and fish from a little boy so Jesus could feed thousands.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. How do the following Scripture references explain the phrase, “What goes around comes around”?

Matthew 7:12

Luke 6:38

2 Corinthians 8:13-14

Galatians 6:7-8

2. When giving to the Lord, what is more important, the size of your gift or the spirit in which you give the gift? Why?
3. How does the concept of giving change from the Old Testament to the New Testament?
4. What Biblical principles of giving do the following verses reflect?
Proverbs 3:9
1 Corinthians 16:2
2 Corinthians 8:12
2 Corinthians 9:7
5. What does sacrificial giving mean to you? Why is it important to look at what’s left after you give?
6. What does the principle of sowing and reaping have to do with giving?
7. How might God reward and bless you for faithful giving?
8. What is meant by “Where your treasure is your heart will be also”?
9. How does your lack of giving block your spiritual growth?
10. How important is it that you trust God when you give generously to Him?
11. God’s will is to give and give and give. The world’s way is to _____ and _____ and _____.
12. Why was God angry with the people of Malachi’s day (Malachi 1:6-14)?
13. What is the primary motive for Christian giving (2 Corinthians 5:14)?

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14. What can be given in addition to money? What is the best gift you have ever given?

Notes:

¹ *Words of Wisdom*, (Silver Springs, Maryland, Philanthropic Service for Institutions, Adventist World Headquarters, 1993) 58.

² J.E. Dillard, *Good Stewards*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Broadman Press, 1953) 43-44.

³ Max Anders, *The Good Life*, (Dallas, Texas, Word Publishing, 1993) 60.

⁴ Ronald E. Vallet, *The Stepping Stones of the Steward*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994) 18.

⁵ Brian K. Bauknight, *Right on the Money*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Discipleship Resources, 1993) 37.

⁶ Charles R. Swindoll, *The Quest for Character*, (Portland, Oregon, Multnomah Press, 1987) Page 115.

⁷ Bauknight, page 41.

⁸ Woodrow Kroll, *Proverbs, God's Guide for Life's Choices*, (Lincoln, Nebraska, Back to the Bible, 1996) 64.

⁹ Bauknight, page 51.

¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe, *God Isn't in a Hurry*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books, 1994) 22.

¹¹ Herb Miller, *Money is Everything*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Discipleship Resource, 1994) 45.

¹² Howard Dayton, *Your Money Counts*, (Longwood, Florida, Crown Ministries, 1996) 73-76.

¹³ Douglas M. Lawson, *Give to Live*, (Lajolla, California, ALTI Publishing, 1991) 20.

¹⁴ Words, page 33.

¹⁵ Bauknight, page 35.

¹⁶ Jack Brown, Pilgrim Congregational Church, Bloomfield, Michigan, 97.