

More Blessed To Give Than Receive

Why Giving Is Good

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I would like to read the following quote to you which is usually attributed to Mother Teresa. And because I think that it is so meaningful something that gives some food for thought within it. "We, the willing, led by the unknowing, are doing the impossible for the ungrateful. We have done so much for so long with so little we are now qualified to do anything with nothing."

When I first clipped this out, it was in the early 80s, and, and I thought that it had within it certainly a goodly amount of sarcasm and cynicism. And I also felt that it kind of typified the way at least I think many Americans are. Well, since that time I have been able to evaluate it and what is going on in the world as well. So now I find out that it is an inclination or a way that everybody in the world has to some degree. I hope that we do not though, even though there is a lesson or two within what it says because there is something to be learned from it that I think is very helpful.

It is very easy for us to feel put on because everywhere that we turn almost at any moment we are being hit with some kind of an appeal, maybe even a demand, we might say, for our time, our attention, and our money. And we can easily become frustrated, irritated, wearied, and cynically resigned to all of the demands that seem impossible to escape.

This is especially noticeable watching television or listening to the radio. I believe that on television, there is a commercial every seven minutes and some pitch is being made at you and me to sell us something. And I believe I believe that they occur even more frequently on radio.

Adding to this fact that it is occurring every seven minutes or so is that the rhythm that is within these advertisements is vigorous and sometimes even

quite forceful. Sometimes indeed, it seems as though everybody is making a pitch at us to buy, to donate, or to contribute something of ourselves. It appears to be an atmosphere that can create within us cynicism and suspicion.

It has ever been like this. Maybe the advertisements and the demands did not come quite so frequently in the past, the ancient past, when there was no radio, there was no television, there was no telephone system, but they had the same kind of things, in principle, hitting them as well.

In the midst of this, Jesus said at one time, "It's more blessed to give than it is to receive." Now the apostle Paul is the only one that we know of that this was recorded of. It appears in Acts 20 and in verse 35. He says,

Acts 20:35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Here is God doing, in principle maybe, the same thing.

Now it might be good to consider the backdrop of Paul's thoughts because his entire life from the time that he was called was one of almost continuous giving of himself in sacrifice. At the time that he actually said this, he was on his way to Jerusalem and of course we know that this ultimately led to his imprisonment and death. Now, in addition to that, I am sure that he and the other apostles understood, were able to perceive that the church was clearly headed for troublous times, and that is why Paul said that to these men who were the elders in the Ephesian area.

These troublous times were going to create situations in which it would be easy for these elders to slip into the attitude that is dignified or whatever by what I just said. You know, we, the willing, led by the unknowing. Sort of a who cares who notices this or this does not seem to be getting me anywhere. And here is the apostle Paul saying, "Away with these thoughts! Throw off your fears, frustrations. Give of yourself. Sacrifice yourself."

Do you know the major reason why we do not give of ourselves and of what we have more generously? Well, it is because we are fearful of what *might*

happen. So, we spend much of our time in our lives hoarding and protecting what we have in anticipation of that disaster that *might* happen. It is not certain that what we are thinking of will happen. It might happen. And I have read enough, so the surveys seem to show that those things that we feared really did not happen very often. They just *might* have happened and it is in our mind.

Now we are going to take a look at an interesting occasion in Peter's life in Acts the 3rd chapter, verses 1 through 8. He was not the only one involved in here. He is just the main character. John was also with him. Acts 3 and verse 1.

Acts 3:1-8 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered into the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." And he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus of Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking and leaping and praising God.

Peter was going about his normal routines, and his mind was probably already busy and intent on what he wanted to accomplish on that day. And here this beggar asked him to break his routine and make an offering, not to God but to the beggar, one of the many who were undoubtedly loitering around the Temple hoping to catch a person in a weak moment. What had Peter to gain by even noticing, let alone what he eventually did give? But Peter did notice.

There is a parallel that we can learn something from here. The church is surrounded by a world full of spiritual cripples and people are being crushed by ignorance and the hard march of events transpiring in this world. People

are being crushed by fear and hatred and other burdens that are too great to bear. But Peter had something that he could not keep to himself.

Now there are some things, like pickles, you see, that will keep. But things that will break people's paralysis will not keep without turning into something else. For example, Christ said, if we keep our life we are going to lose it. See, it is going to turn into something else. If one keeps and nourishes desire, it turns into lust. If one tries to keep peace to oneself, it turns into passivity. If one tries to keep Christ to oneself, one turns into a bigot. And if one tries to keep money, it becomes mammon.

Well, Peter had something to give. Something that he felt that he could not keep to himself, and look what it did. The lame man asked for money. But God through Peter, generously gave him healing, walking, running, leaping, and joyful praising. Now the cripple only wanted something to get himself by for that day, but God through Peter gave the cripple a relationship with God.

We are that cripple. What we are looking at here is a major key to an abundant life. Now God asks for obedience but surely we can give Him our mind, our imagination, our hands, our voice, our desires. Now, the willing spirit that should characterize our giving regardless of what area of life should arise from the ready acknowledgement that this is a duty. Giving is a duty that we are privileged to discharge.

Now there is a tendency for us to be squeamish about giving, let us say, with the hope of return. But the Bible teaches both sides of the coin. There should be also an expectation of return. We might even use the term compensation for doing such a thing. The context here shows that very expectation.

Jesus urged that without expectation of return (that is, we should give without expectation of return), but at the same time He did not condemn His disciples when they asked Him what they would have after giving all. They said, "Lord, we have given all." And what was Jesus' reply? He said up to 100 fold in return. That shows us that Jesus said we should expect to receive back. We do not give directly with that in mind but yet the law of compensation works.

Now one thing that we have to understand is that the blessing, the compensation, the reward that we receive because we give may not be in the same kind as we give. But blessed we will be. "It is more blessed to give than it is to receive." Think about that.

We must understand that there cannot be blessings without the previous sowing. The giving, you see, of the seed. Suppose a farmer planted no seed because he feared that it would not rain, or he feared that viruses and insects would destroy the seeds or the plants. There would be no crop.

Are you beginning to see the principle that is involved here? In order to receive, God is saying you first have to give. And so there should be an expectation of compensation when we sow. Did not Solomon say, "Cast your bread upon many waters, for you *will* find it after many days"?

The first principle that is involved in this, therefore, is that sowing *must* precede reaping.

Now the second principle involved in this is that the reaping, the blessing, may not be in kind. We may give, let us say, money. But in turn what God gives us back is good physical and mental health; confident living, boldness in demeanor, a multitude of good friends, maybe healing. He gives understanding, discernment, and wisdom.

So we must understand for our good that it must be this way. In other words, this second principle, what we get back may not be the same as what we give, it has to be that way because human nature is such that if we expect money in return, that is the only reason that we are going to give. Human nature will just twist that. It cannot be that way.

We have to give, first of all, let us say, with the expectation that whatever God chooses to give back is going to be just what we need. And He will decide what that is going to be. And so we leave that to Him, and it leaves us free to give without worrying about what we are going to get back. Because He will give back. God will determine when, how, and what. Can we not do that? Sure we can.

A third principle is that what God wants us to learn is the generous spirit in giving in other areas of life produces more good things. This is not something that is confined to money or to seeds. It is generosity of spirit that God is after. So that we can be generous with our time. Generous with our encouragement. At times maybe generous with our correction in kindness, and so forth. Generous with our kindness, thoughtfulness, sympathy because we are thinking of others.

And there is even a fourth principle. It is that this whole process of supplying man's need has God and His purpose at its very foundation, and *nobody outgives God*. And to those who give, what does God do? He increases their power to give more. This is where the real blessing is. A farmer sows seed. Let us say he sows five seeds. Does he only get five seeds back? Let us say he gets 25 seeds back. He has been increased fivefold. Now he has 25 to give instead of only five that he began with.

That is how the whole process works. God gives back more than we sow by far. Are you beginning to see there is no way we can lose? Because God stands behind this principle and nobody outgives God. That is wonderful!

Now there is a fifth principle. And that is that God enriches, you see, the one who originally sows, He enriches in order to produce a harvest of liberality which in turn produces thanksgiving to God. Giving an offering is a practical expression of love, and when a person knows he is loved, does that not in turn produce thankfulness both to God and to the human who showed the love? It does.

Let us finish here in Philippians 4:

Philippians 4:16-17 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek fruit that abounds to your account.

Incidentally, the Philippian church has been shown historically to be very poor church and yet they were giving Paul out of their poverty to help him in Thessalonica. And so he is reminding them of that.

Paul is saying back to them in few words exactly what I just said to you. These people were sowing and Paul was happy about that because he knew that God would bless them abundantly for what they did. And that is the whole principle here in a nutshell. There is no doubt in Paul's mind as to what he had in mind in regard to the blessings that they would reap because they sowed generosity.

So we must always remember this as being true, or God's Word is not true. For every generous gift, the giver obtains more than the receiver because God gives back to the giver and nobody outgives Him. So if this is done with proper understanding, this truth leaves no room for the sarcasm and cynicism that was expressed in my opening thought.