

Making Change

Title: Part 3 – Giving is Good

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Transition: Band Continues Softly

If you would stay standing for the reading of God's Word today. In the Old Testament book of 1 Chronicles, King David is about to commission his son Solomon to build the temple in Jerusalem. The nation has given generously to accomplish this, as David sees the people's gifts, he pauses and prays this in chapter 29, he says: (v.12-14)

Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and at your discretion people are made great and given strength. "O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name! But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us!

David expresses the very heart of wisdom—everything he had attained throughout his life was because of the loving mercy of God. We give nothing to God that He has not first given to us! This realization prevents three things we all struggle with: **PRIDE**, **GREED**, and **REBELLION**. Anyone else battle those things in the secret places of your heart?

So, let's humbly acknowledge that God is the source of every good thing and be set free this morning, pray with me.

[PRAYER TIME]

Before you grab a seat, take :30 seconds and say "Hi" to some people around you, thank them for being here today. While everyone here in the house is saying "Hi," I am incredibly thankful for everyone joining us on our app or social channels. We consider you a part of our family so let us know how we can pray for you or serve you.

If you're just joining us, today we are continuing a collection of messages called "Making Change" where we are talking about managing our resources in a way that will honor God and actually change our lives? We are making... change. If you missed the first two messages, as always you can get caught up on our app or website, but we've got four big themes we are covering.

If you've been with us, you know the first two well, let's review them. We're going to repeat these a lot because we're planting them in our hearts. We believe they will reap a big harvest one day as we internalize these four truths, so say these out loud with me: *{These will all be on one slide with icons}*

Less is More

Stress is Bad.

Giving is Good.

Tomorrow Matters.

So, help me out, what are we going to talk about? Let's say them all together: Less is More, Stress is Bad, Giving is Good, Tomorrow Matters. Again: Less is More, Stress is Bad, Giving is Good, Tomorrow Matters. That's really good, let's do them one more time: What are we going to talk about? Less is More, Stress is

Bad, Giving is Good, Tomorrow Matters. I'm going to be annoying, because I really want you months and months from now to be able to say these things. Help me out, what are we talking about...

The first week we talked about the principle that less is more. Better is one hand full with tranquility than two hands full with toil and chasing after the wind. Less is more. Last week, we talked about that stress is bad. Financial stress is bad, to be in bondage, the borrower is what... a slave to the lender. Today we're going to talk about giving is good. Everybody say, "*Giving is good.*"

In Acts 20:35 there is a powerful verse that illustrates this awesome truth. The Apostle Paul is speaking to the church Ephesus and tells them this:

You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is MORE BLESSED TO GIVE than to receive."

It's more blessed to give than to receive. Say that with me: *It's more blessed to give than to receive.* One more time: *It's more blessed to give than to receive.*

That doesn't mean it's not a blessing to receive. Right? My birthday is coming up in December and if you graciously remember and get me something I will be blessed to receive that, right? When someone remembers or thinks of you and gives you a gift it is a blessing no doubt, it's just MORE blessed to give.

Here's what I mean. When I think about my receiving or getting or consuming, I cannot remember most of those gifts. Like who remembers what they got for Christmas last year off the top of your head, no one remembers it! When I look back over my life, I can think of only a couple times (maybe) when I was overwhelmed with emotion because I got or consumed something. I don't have a lot of stories like, "I remember when I got my first flat screen TV, and I cried all the way home. I was just so overwhelmed..." I don't have those stories. I don't have memories like, "I got my first pair of Jordans when I was seventeen and I felt so close to God. It was the most spiritual moment of my life when I slipped my feet into those shoes." You don't have those either! You have never said, "When I got my first Coach purse, I think the angels in heaven sang!" We don't have emotional stories around consumption.

BUT I bet you've got some emotional GIVING stories! If you've ever prayed about giving something and it was a big gift to you and then you gave on faith and it really impacted someone, what does that make you feel? Maybe some of you, the first time that you ever tithed, that was a big step of faith, and you felt the joy of being obedient to God and you saw the provision and blessings of God in your life in an undeniable way. You remember that! OR you prayed about making a sacrificial gift and it was really emotional to you or there was something you could have sold but you thought, "You know what? No. I think we're supposed to give this to someone," so you did, and they were so blown away by your generosity. Come on, how many of you know it's more blessed to give than it is to receive? It's just MORE blessed.

A few years ago, when my dad passed away, he left me his truck. It was a nice truck, the nicest vehicle I had ever driven. I drove it for about a year and then we swapped it for a GMC Acadia that Cheryl drives today. That was a huge blessing, it was a blessing to receive that. BUT let me tell you what I remember more! About 2 years before that we bought Cheryl a pre-owned Chevy Equinox. There wasn't anything particularly wrong with the SUV she was driving, it was clean, drove great, cold A/C, were we just able to buy her something a few years newer at the time. AND we could have traded her old SUV in, we could have listed it on Craigslist and honestly probably got what we paid for it back, but instead we gave it to someone who only had one car at the time. We just felt like it was what we were supposed to do.

AND I'm here to tell somebody that it was a blessing to receive but with no hesitation in my mind do I tell you it was more blessed for us to give on that day. The fulfillment, the joy, the sense of being used by God to make a difference in someone else's life is more blessed!

And that's what we are talking about today. Giving is Good! Say it with me. *Giving is good.* Say it again, *Giving is good.* One more time. What is giving? *Giving is good.* It's more blessed to give than to receive.

I love the way the Apostle Paul says it, this time in 2 Corinthians 9:11 when he says this:

You will be enriched in every way [WHY] so that you can be generous on every occasion. Your generosity will produce thanksgiving to God.

Imagine people thanking God. Imagine the relief of someone who just got an auto repair bill taken care of who was praying about how they were going to pay for it. Imagine someone eating a meal they didn't know how they would afford. Imagine someone experiencing Jesus for the first time because they received an unexpected gift in a time of need no one knew about. Imagine people thanking God. Why? Because you were generous and a blessing in their lives! It's a blessing to receive, but come on, it's more blessed to give than to receive.

BUT, and let's get real today, if we know that giving is good, if we know it's more blessed to give than to receive, that raises the question: Why don't we do it more often? Seriously, why don't we do it more often? As I wrestled with that question this week I came up with three answers from my own life and experience. See if these sound familiar to you. The first is:

We don't feel like we have enough.

We'd love to do more but we're kind of struggling right now. Our hearts are in the right place but we just don't feel like we have the ability. Can anyone say "inflation!" Another reason I think is because we've actually:

Seen generosity abused.

Maybe you have seen this in a church or something you caught on your grandmother's TV, the big haired preacher says, "If you sow your seed today, you put \$100 into our television ministry, and you'll get \$1000 back! And to show our appreciation we will send you a copy of my new book on how to be more generous for God's glory!" So, I get that there's some skepticism about this. "Oh, here we go again. Another giving message..." I think we have all seen or heard about generosity being abused as the preacher or non-profit leader drives off in his \$150,000 Mercedes.

The third reason I struggle sometimes, and this goes back to my childhood, my parents did a great job providing for my needs and they sacrificed for my wants, but I realized around middle school that we were not "rich" by the world's standard. And maybe you can relate, you grew up with a:

Scarcity mindset.

Instead of an abundant mindset. Right? If I give, I'm going to have less, and there's really not enough to go around it seems like, we are watching every dime we spend, so I have to hold on tightly to everything I have. I need more before I can give generously, right? A scarcity mindset rather than having an abundant mindset, which is I'm blessed to be a blessing! We serve an abundant God who provides for the needs of His people.

So, maybe today is about retraining our minds around these core truths. Whenever you give, you are always a **BLESSING**, number one. AND whenever you give, you are always **BLESSED**. Let me say it again. Whenever you give, you are always a blessing. AND whenever you give, you will always be blessed. That doesn't mean that you give \$100, and you get \$1,000 back overnight. You might. But what it means is you have the fulfillment, the joy, the sense of destiny that God used you to make a difference in someone else's life. You will be a *blessing* and you will be *blessed*.

I love the way the Message Bible translates Proverbs 11:24 & 25, it highlights this so beautiful, this recalibration of our brains, you will be a **blessing** and you will be **blessed**. Look at this:

The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller. The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.

Isn't that good! When you give, you're a blessing to others and you are always blessed. This is so backwards to the world's economy. In God's economy generosity often determines prosperity: one must give in order to gain. Right? That's what this says. You give in order to gain. Those who are generous toward others will be provided for themselves.

That's why I say without any hesitation, without any weakness in my voice that giving is good, giving is good, giving is good, because it is always more blessed to give than it is to receive.

SO then how do we get better at this? If giving is good, then I want to get better at it! If giving is good, then I want to grow in generosity. Amen? As you search Scripture for how to grow in generosity you find some consistent themes from both the Old and New Testaments. In fact, I've got three of them for us to explore a little more so if you are taking notes this is where it begins. This is the foundation. This is giving 101. As a follower of Jesus:

Learn to trust God with the tithe.

This is where we start. It's the beginning point. Trusting God with the tithe.

What is the tithe? Maybe you have heard that word if you grew up around the church. But the tithe comes from the Hebrew word "masser" {moss-air} which means one-tenth. It's a tenth of whatever we produce or receive. This goes all the way back to the time of Abraham and it was laid out for the people of Israel in Leviticus 27. It says:

One-tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy.

To bring that into a modern economy, if my paycheck this week was \$1,000 (let's say that's my take home pay) then \$100 of that paycheck doesn't belong to me. It belongs to God, so I return that to Him as an act of trust and worship.

AND here is what I know just happened in some of your minds. You said back to me, "That's crazy! I did not sign up for this when I said yes to Jesus. This doesn't make any sense. Why does God want my money?" Right? Some of you had that thought, and that's OK. You can be honest about that. Because it gets even worse (your perspective maybe) because in Malachi chapter 3 verse 10 God says this to His prophet:

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, [Which is a picture of the local church] **that there may be food in my house.**

What kind of food? Well, what are you receiving today? Spiritual food! You're being nourished and strengthened in the things of God. Your children are being strengthened as they are spiritually fed. Then God says, only place in Scripture, this is really interesting, no other place are we allowed to test God but in this one area. God says: **{BUILD ONTO ABOVE}**

“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 there will not be room enough to store it.

This is the only place where God says, “You can test me.” But WHY? Why did God give us permission to test Him in this area? I don't know for sure, but I think it's because God knew it would freak us out! Amen? “10%!!! Are you serious? How in the world am I going to do this?”

AND some of you right now, your mind is racing to last week, “Let me get this straight, so now I'm supposed to be getting out of debt and I'm supposed to give 10%! Slow your roll bro! This is crazy. I don't think my financial advisor would sign off on this.”

You're like, “In order to do that, I would have to totally and completely, 100%, rearrange my life around God.” Well, that's kinda what I'm saying. You'd have to change some things to actually put God first with the tithe, kind of like you maybe do in other areas of your life. We're going to seek God first in the day by giving Him some time in prayer and reading His Word and trust that He will bless the rest of our minutes that day. Right? “Well, I'd have to rearrange my finances completely and say no to some things and that would take such a leap of faith and...” Yep! That would take a lot of faith. And without faith it's impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:16).

Trusting God with the tithe, like nothing else, moves us out of our comfort zone and into a position of dependence upon God to provide. Which is the point. So, God says test Me in this and see if I will not be faithful to provide. It's literally God's money back guarantee!

“But Brian, that's nice and all, but that's the Old Testament and see now we are living under grace and so the tithe is no longer applicable to the New Testament believer and...” OK, words of Jesus, Matthew 23:23, Jesus speaking to some of those teachers of the Old Testament law, He says:

“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.”

“Whoa so you're telling me tithing is like following Jesus 101, and that there are more important things after I learn this, oh...”

For Cheryl and I this has been the bedrock we have built our lives, home, and family on. From the moment we got married—and get this, our grocery budget was \$67 a week—but from the beginning we returned the first 10% of everything back to God. Our household income was \$32,000 a year, but we returned the tithe faithfully week after week. My truck had over 300,000 miles on it and hers had over 100,000 miles, but we brought the full tithe into the storehouse. We had to use buy one get one free Dairy Queen ice cream cone coupons as a date night, but we never missed writing the first check to the local church. Two years into our marriage we were getting our taxes done and the guy (who we first thought was homeless, that tells you the kind of place we went for tax preparation) but he says there was a mistake and long story short, not only saved us \$3,600 that year, but went back and got us another \$3,600 from the IRS the year before! The IRS doesn't admit mistakes and give you money back every day, amen? And do you know what the first thing we did with the money was? We tithed off it!

And hear me, I'm not saying if you trust God with the full tithe that the IRS will send you money too, that's not what I am saying, but what I am saying is that when you test God He will prove Himself faithful in some way!

You will see the goodness of God! The floodgates of blessing will be opened in the spiritual and physical realms!

If you trust God with your first and best He will bless the rest! If you trust God with your first and best He will bless the rest! God can do more with 90% that's blessed than I can do with 100% on my own!

Tithing teaches you to have an abundance mindset and it builds your faith like nothing else. So, if you want to grow in generosity, it begins by learning to trust Him with the tithe. Here's another theme you see in Scripture:

Plan your generosity.

You have to make a plan for it.

What if we sat around and said, "How can we as a family plan not just to get more or consume more, but how can we plan to give more? How can we plan to be more generous?" What if we strategized like we do when we are trying to justify that new truck we want so bad? What if we rearrange our lives since it's more blessed to give than receive.

Isaiah 32 verse 8 says that's exactly what generous people do. Generous people do what? Help me out:

Generous people PLAN to do what is generous, and they stand firm in their generosity.

They plan. It's not accidental or incidental. It's intentional! It's who we are as Jesus followers!

One of the things tithing has taught Cheryl and I is that God can be trusted when we are generous. God can be trusted when we give over and beyond the tithe. God can be trusted when we give to things like the FOR Fund. God can be trusted when we help and bless people around us in need. BUT that never happens by accident. It happens by planning, by being intentional.

SO, if it's truly more blessed to give than it is to receive, then what are we going to do? We are going to plan to be generous. How do we grow in generosity? It starts with the tithe. God, we return our first and our best and trust you to bless the rest. Then we plan to be generous because it won't happen by accident.

One more, if you're taking notes, we're simply going to:

Start being generous right now.

Well, I thought we were getting out of debt? Absolutely we are, but this is the supernatural part along the way! We're not going to wait until we're out of debt to be a blessing. We're going to be a blessing along the way and watch as we bless others how we are always blessed as well. We're going to start now!

The Apostle Paul told an early church leader this in Philemon 1:6:

And I am praying that you will [What? Let's say it] PUT INTO ACTION the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ.

Our only reasonable response to the One who gave His Son for us is to give our lives back to Him. God doesn't just own the first 10%, He owns everything that we have, so we're not going to wait, we are going to start being generous now!

