

Lesson 12

Giving

Introduction

Giving is the channel to blessing: *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 back to you,* Luke 6.38.

Giving brings us reward from God. If you want blessing from God, if you want it poured out, overflowing, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, then give. You give and He gives back more.

Perhaps this is why Paul quotes Jesus, who said, *it is more blessed to give than receive,* Acts 20.35. What you give always brings you greater blessing than what you receive.

In and of themselves, Luke 6.38 and Acts 20.35 should be enough to create the type of response needed to influence us to give generously, unselfishly, and sacrificially. How much do we believe these promises? How easy is it to operate from the perspective of protecting everything and holding on to it? For some, self-preservation has led to stinginess. Will we operate by only what we can see, or will we move in faith and trust in God?

Just before Paul closes his letter to the Philippians, he writes out an incredible promise: *And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus,* Philippians 4.19. God will meet every need. Because of Him, we have some security in the promise of tomorrow. God will meet *every* need. We have nothing to fear for tomorrow. This is a foundational principle for the Christian life, and it should have a tremendous impact on our giving. Will we trust in God's promise?

But there is more. This is also a matter of obedience. Going back to our text in Luke 6.38, Jesus issues a command: *Give.* So, *not giving* is sin. It is a sin against God because of a lack of trust. It is a sin against God because of a lack of obedience.

The Early Church Was a Giving Church

Reading through the New Testament we observe:

Christians supported their leaders

The early church supported apostles, evangelists, prophets, and elders because they were charged with serving and working for the church. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul is referencing his own ministry when he writes:

Or do only Barnabas and I have no right to refrain from working? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Or who shepherds a flock and does not drink the milk from the flock? Am I saying this from a human perspective? Doesn't the law also say the same thing? For it is written in the law of Moses, Do not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain. Is God really concerned about oxen? Isn't he really saying it for our sake? Yes, this is written for our sake, because he who plows ought to plow in hope, and he who

threshes should thresh in hope of sharing the crop. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it too much if we reap material benefits from you? 1 Corinthians 9.6-11.

Soldiers serve the government, and the government pays them. Those who plant a garden eat from it. The ox is fed for his plowing. Likewise, those who work and serve the church should be supported by the church. There are two other passages written by Paul after this that are very direct:

- 1 Corinthians 9.14: *In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel.*
- Galatians 6.6: *Let the one who is taught the word share all his good things with the teacher.*
- 1 Timothy 5.17: *The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.*

All these passages leave us with the example of providing ongoing support for the elders, ministers, and other servants of the church.

Christians Met the Needs of People

Benevolent needs were always present inside the early church. Widows, orphans, and poor people had needs that had to be met. Those who had been blessed with resources were instructed to share and thus store up treasure in heaven:

Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life, 1 Timothy 6.17-19.

There were great needs to share ... then ... and now. Many among us have needs. God calls upon us to share. The principle is found throughout Scripture:

“If there is a poor person among you, one of your brothers within any of your city gates in the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Instead, you are to open your hand to him and freely loan him enough for whatever need he has. Be careful that there isn’t this wicked thought in your heart, ‘The seventh year, the year of canceling debts, is near,’ and you are stingy toward your poor brother and give him nothing. He will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty. Give to him, and don’t have a stingy heart when you give, and because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you do. For there will never cease to be poor people in the land; that is why I am commanding you, ‘Open your hand willingly to your poor and needy brother in your land,’ Deuteronomy 15.7-11.

Note the directive Israel had concerning the care of other poor Israelites:

- They were not to be hardhearted or *tightfisted*.
- They were to open their hand to him and *freely loan him enough for whatever need he has*.
- When you give, the Lord will *bless you in all your work and in everything you do*.

Give and God will bless. The Psalmist wrote:

Happy is one who is considerate of the poor; the LORD will save him in a day of adversity. The LORD will keep him and preserve him; he will be blessed in the land. You will not give him over to the desire of his enemies. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed; you will heal him on the bed where he lies, Psalm 41.1-3.

You should also take the time to discover the principles in Proverbs 14.31; 19.17; 22.2, 9.

A Greater Motive

When we see the early church giving to meet the needs of the poor, it wasn't just out of meeting someone's need . . . it was to be generated by genuine love and concern. We must not forget the tremendous racial hatred and animosity of the first century. (Ours is not the only era of racial tension and hatred.) The hostility between Jew and Gentile must not be forgotten. Overcoming it was a serious concern. When those in the church helped others, no matter what race or background they were, it was an expression of love and spiritual unity.

2 Corinthians 8: Giving is the Behavior of Dedicated Christians

2 Corinthians 8.1-8 – The Example of the Church in Macedonia

The Jerusalem church had fallen on hard times. Once a rich church, see Acts 2.42-47 and 4.32-37, now they were beset by poverty, brought on by persecution and famine. The Macedonian churches became a wonderful example of giving to meet the needs of the church in Jerusalem. What is notable about these churches is that they were impoverished themselves. They were profoundly poor. Yet *in their extreme poverty they overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part*, 2 Corinthians 8.1-3.

2 Corinthians 8.9 – When we Give, we are Being Like Jesus

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich, 2 Corinthians 8.9. Paul has just written about the generosity of the Macedonians and now he turns attention to Jesus, the greatest example of giving. The gift Jesus brought has made us infinitely rich.

2 Corinthians 8.10-12 – Giving is the Desire of the Converted Heart

And in this matter I am giving advice because it is profitable for you, who began last year not only to do something but also to want to do it. Now also finish the task, so that just as there was an eager desire, there may also be a completion, according to what you have. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have, 2 Corinthians 8.10-12.

Giving is commanded. Giving is important. But, as for the amount, that is left up to the giver. Giving is something that we should desire to do, and it should be something that arises from the heart. It is never a matter of manipulation or intimidation. It is the desire to bless others. It is done in proportion to what one has. It is to be done with eagerness.

2 Corinthians 8.13-15 – Giving is the Compassionate Response to Need

It is not that there should be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality. At the present time your surplus is available for their need, so that their abundance may in turn meet your need, in order that there may be equality. As it is written: The person who had much did not have too much, and the person who had little did not have too little, 2 Corinthians 8.13-15.

We do not give to make ourselves poor so that others may become rich. We give so that there may be balance. Presently, you may have a surplus. But one day you might not. Give to those in need so that you might be blessed when you have need. It's all done out of compassion.

2 Corinthians 8.16-21 – Giving is Honorable before God and Men

Indeed, we are giving careful thought to do what is right, not only before the Lord but also before people, 2 Corinthians 8.21. Paul had regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of God, but also of men. While our first responsibility is to be pleasing to God, we do not live in a vacuum. Others outside the church are also watching. How do they see our generosity? Do we back up our profession with action?

2 Corinthians 8.22-24 – Giving is the Proof of Love

Therefore, show them proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you, 2 Corinthians 8.24. When we give, we demonstrate the proof of our love for others. It is the following of Jesus' command: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another, John 13.34-35.* A loving church is a generous church.

For Thought and Reflection

1. Read Luke 6.38. Is giving a suggestion or a command? In this verse, what is the promise connected to giving?
2. What is the point of Paul's teaching in Acts 20.35?
3. For what two purposes did the early church give?
4. How did the churches in Macedonia set an example in giving?
5. What motivated the Macedonians to give so abundantly?

6. How has Jesus set the example in giving?

7. Why should the Christian be so eager to give?

8. How is giving an act of compassion?

9. How can our giving reflect positively on the church?

10. How would John 13.34-35 connect with the principle of our giving?