

## Lesson 4

# Share Your Blessings

## 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.

Modern audiences may miss the imagery in this verse. Most Jews wore long robes that extended to their feet and would wear a belt around their waist. The bottom portion of the robe could be pulled up above the belt and be formed into a large pocket for things to be carried. This is what Jesus is referring to when He says the blessings will be *poured into your lap*. The garment would literally be filled with grain.<sup>21</sup> The point that Jesus is trying to make is that God wants to fill our laps with abundant blessings to the point where they overflow.

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.

Maybe 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.

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.

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.

## Meeting the Needs of People

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<sup>21</sup> We also see this practice in Ruth 3.15.

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.

This is clearly seen with what happened with the early church of Acts 2. Although Gentiles were not yet present in the church, among the Jews were sharp divisions between groups of people – so much that they had no fellowship with each other. Now, because of Christ, all those barriers had been removed. What we see is a total commitment to share. The main thing we should pull away from these verses is the amazing generosity practiced by the first Christians. Are we close to being as generous? The new

converts of Acts 2 not only sacrificed their present reserves of cash and goods – but also their future – in acts that demonstrated sacrificial love.<sup>22</sup>

## The Practice of Generosity

The ancient writer Chrysostom left us his thoughts on these verses:

Observe the increase of piety. They cast away their riches, and rejoiced, and had great gladness, for greater were the riches they received without labour. None reproached, none envied, none grudged; no pride, no contempt was there. The poor man knew no shame, the rich no haughtiness.<sup>23</sup>

What we have with the practice of the early church is a beautiful expression of sacrificial love, in its purest form. It was really nothing new to the Jews as there was a very strong tradition in the Old Testament of caring for the poor. Deuteronomy 26.12 prescribed:

“When you have finished paying all the tenth of your produce in the third year, the year of the tenth, you are to give it to the Levites, resident aliens, fatherless children, and widows, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

The principle of generosity denoted here remains the same for God’s people of all time. While the New Testament makes this a matter of the heart and never goes into specific amounts that are required to give, we do read of two examples of the church going into action:

- Acts 2.45: *they distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need.*
- Acts 4.34-35: *for there was not a needy person among them because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of what was sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet. This was then distributed to each person as any had need.*

Later the apostle John would write:

If anyone has this world’s goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God’s love reside in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth, 1 John 3.17-18.

It has been said that “Christian fellowship is Christian caring, and Christian caring is Christian sharing.”<sup>24</sup>

### ***Generosity should not be limited to only our people***

While the actions of the church body as a collective appear to be limited to helping saints from the treasury, no such limitations were placed on the individual. Let us be careful in our stand for what has been called “limited benevolence,” that we do not ignore our individual responsibility to all:

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<sup>22</sup> MacArthur, Acts, Vol. 1., p. 87.

<sup>23</sup> S. John Chrysostom. *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Acts of the Apostles: Parts I & II, Hom. I-LV.* A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church. Oxford; London: John Henry Parker; F. and J. Rivington, 1851–1852, p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World.* The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994, p. 84.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work *for the good of all*, especially for those who belong to the household of faith, Galatians 6.10.

See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and *for all*, 1 Thessalonians 5.15.

But if your *enemy* is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head, Romans 12.20.

Christians must never ignore the misery and destitution of the world. To meet the needs, we may need to be prepared to reorient our lifestyles so that we can maximize good deeds for all, as well as those who are part of the faith.

## Conclusion

The church of 2022 can and must be characterized by the same type of generosity ... demonstrated through sacrificial giving, donation of skill, and supply of time. We need to get out of ourselves and begin looking with a keen eye on how we can serve others. This is the type of church that will produce a credible witness that moves people to glorify our Father in heaven and cause us to have favor with all men.

## For Thought and Reflection

1. What has God promised for those who give sacrificially?
2. Why do you think humans are so apt to rely on self-preservation? How does that impact the sharing of our resources?
3. Why is giving such an important matter? What did Jesus say about it?
4. In the church, what were those with resources instructed to do to help the needy among them?
5. With what kind of spirit are we to give?
6. Why should our generosity not only be limited to God's people?