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I love how God's command is not just for us to give, but to give with willing hearts. It just shows me how He really is about relationship. He doesn't want us to give anything from a sense of obligation. Rather, He wants us to give from the heart... because we want to. The thing that blows me away is that He gave me more than I could ever give back... not out of obligation, but love. That's wonderful news.

*Blessings,
Jonna*

Luke 10:25-37

Giving of my wealth with a generous, willing heart is a wonderful offering of worship, but that's only one aspect of the giving God wants me to do. Giving of my personal time and treasure as I care for someone in need even takes my giving deeper. It is an act of love. I learn about this in the story of the Good Samaritan.

This story starts out with a lawyer standing up to put Jesus to the test... as if he could catch Jesus in a trap and defame Him. There are times in scripture when God says, "You shall not put the Lord to the test," like when the devil tried to tempt Jesus. When the testing of God is to show defiance to Him, He's not good with it. But there are times He welcomes the test, like in Malachi 3:10 when God says, "Test me in this," when He's saying, "Be obedient to Me and see how I will bless you in that." It's all in the motive behind the testing. When someone tests God in order to make God look bad, watch out... it's going to backfire.

Here, the lawyer had every intention to make Jesus look bad. It didn't work. He asked Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" I love how Jesus so often answers a question with a question. He asked, "What does the law say about it. How do YOU read it?" The lawyer said, "You shall love the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said, "Good answer. Do this and you will live."

Well... the lawyer probably knew he didn't love as deeply as the commandment implied. It would have been much easier if Jesus had said, "Tithe to the church. Don't kill anyone. Keep the

Sabbath." But truly, any commandment we follow that isn't motivated by love is worthless. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am NOTHING. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain NOTHING."

So the lawyer wanted to justify himself. Maybe if Jesus would define neighbors in a very narrow category, he could get by with just a little bit of love. What Jesus said definitely proved to the lawyer that Jesus was not derailed by His test. I don't know what the lawyer wanted Jesus to say, but I don't think Jesus said it.

Jesus told a story about a guy who was walking from Jerusalem to Jericho. Surely, this would have been a Jewish man. But while he was on his way, he was robbed, beaten, and left for dead. A priest was also going down that road and he saw the beaten man. But instead of helping him, he crossed to the other side of the road. Maybe he thought he was too good to be bothered. Then a Levite passed by and cross the road to the other side. Both the priest and the Levite were religious men. They should have been the ones that cared the most. But they crossed the road so that they didn't have to come close to their Jewish brother.

But then a Samaritan came to the beaten man, and he had compassion. Samaritans were considered to be second class citizens by Jewish people. Jews completely avoided even having to travel through Samaria. If anyone should have ignored this man, it would have been a Samaritan. In fact, he might have even wanted to beat him some more. But that's not what happened. He bound up his wounds and then put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. Then he paid for his care when he had to leave.

The Samaritan man didn't consider, "What's in it for me?" He didn't think about whether or not this man deserved his help. He just loved him. This was an example of fulfilling the great commandment... both loving God AND loving his neighbor... who wouldn't have considered himself a neighbor to a Samaritan. The Samaritan did not base his love on the man's behavior, but on the love of God.

How does modeling myself after this Samaritan display my love for the Lord? I can see how it was loving to the man, but Jesus? Jesus said, "When you've done it unto the least of these My brothers, you've done it unto Me." When I am motivated by my love for God, I WILL care for others in need as if it was Jesus Himself. And Jesus takes how I treat others personally. How am I treating my neighbor??? O Lord, please open my eyes and show me how to love more genuinely and completely.

Jesus asked the lawyer, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said, "You go, and do likewise."

How often do I try to define what God wants me to do in such a way that I can minimize God's

command so that I don't have to let it cost me anything? In truth, genuine love will always cost me something. But let me never forget what loving me cost Jesus. Let me never think I'm too important to care for anyone God places in my path. Let me never avoid and cross over to the other side.

Let me also see that Jesus made Himself to be like that Samaritan man for me. Through His own blood, He bound up my wounds. He paid my debt. He made me whole. Jesus never calls us to do anything that He doesn't first model for us. Thank You, Jesus. I pray that I will never put You to the test in defiance. Help me to act in obedience and experience the proof of Your promised faithful love as I do.