

# THE JOY OF GIVING

It has been said that we are most like God when we are giving. Although there are activities other than giving which could also be substituted into that statement, it is true that giving is central to God's character. Since all genuine Christians should long to be more like Christ, giving ought to be an activity in which we find delight.

Now, let's be blunt. More often than not, the subject of giving is problematic in the American church. It is a tempting subject to avoid because some teachers who stress giving are a disgrace to the name of Christ. Those who are old enough to remember the televangelist scandals of the late 1980's still cringe. Do you remember the husband and wife ministry team who were multi-millionaires and even had an air-conditioned dog house? What was their favorite topic? The giving of money to their ministry. Even back in Paul's day there were people who viewed the gospel as a means for personal financial gain (I Timothy 6:5-10). Pastors who are sickened by the spectacle of ministries which seem to exist primarily to collect money often go to the other extreme and ignore the topic of giving altogether.

I confess that I lean away from teaching on giving. In my desire to distance myself from \$\$\$ oriented ministries I have probably missed the healthy balance and have gone too far in the other direction. This is unfortunate, because Becky and I have enjoyed practicing biblical giving from the first day we were married. What has been a great blessing to us personally has not been consistently taught by me in my public ministry. I hope this little article helps put things in their proper place.

Ever since our kids were old enough to understand, Becky and I would pray with them on Sunday mornings regarding our family offering. My children have always heard me pray something like this: "Lord, thank you for the money we can put in the offering today. Everything we have comes from you. Please bless our offering". Becky and I enjoy giving. We fully believe that we can't outgive God. Someone who took a close look at our finances might say we can't afford to give. I believe the opposite. We can't afford not to give. I have wanted my children to grow into adults who are committed to giving joyfully, generously and expectantly. In other words, I want them to give biblically.

Here are a few brief points to consider. Giving is a command God has given us (I Corinthians 16:1-2). At a core level, giving is an act of obedience in response to God's will. Giving can also be a step of faith. Sometimes we hold back because deep down inside we are not sure God will meet our needs, so we had better take care of ourselves (Malachi 3:7-12).

Giving is also an eternal investment. In his book The Treasure Principle, Randy Alcorn gives this great illustration:

"Suppose your home is in France and you're visiting America for three months, living in a hotel. You're told that you can't bring anything back to France on your flight home. But you can earn money and mail deposits to your bank in France.

Would you fill your hotel room with expensive furniture and wall hangings? Of course not. You'd send your money where your home is. You would spend only what you needed on the temporary residence, sending your treasures ahead so they'd be waiting for you when you get home" (p. 45).

Alcorn's illustration is completely consistent with what Jesus taught in Matthew 6: 19-21.

Biblical giving is also a recognition that God is the true owner of all that we have. There is great freedom in letting go of ownership claims on our possessions. It is liberating to think of God as the owner of our possessions and that He has simply loaned them to us. We tend to get less attached to things (and therefore less controlled by them) when we view them as not being ours to keep.

Biblical giving also deepens our passion for ministry. Do you want to get really excited about missions? Give to missions above and beyond your regular giving. Give enough so that it is a sacrifice. I guarantee you that not only will you become intensely interested in the ministry of your missionary, you will celebrate and share in the joy of the missionary's successes. Your heart will beat right along with the missionary's. Now that's exciting. The same excitement is ours when we give sacrificially to our own church.

There are many passages of Scripture which are useful for developing a proper view of giving. If I had to pick just one passage, I would choose II Corinthians 8:1- 9:15. I read this passage and marvel at its power. Among several vital truths this passage teaches about the necessity of giving with a cheerful heart, not reluctantly. It also stresses what it means to be thankful. It is not a coincidence that thankfulness and cheerful giving are closely related.

Finally, what about tithing? Is it an Old Testament requirement only, or does it carry over to the New Testament as well? This question is often debated, with Christians coming down on both sides of the issue. The purpose of this short article is not to explore the relationship of Old Testament tithing with New Testament giving. Becky and I have never believed that the answer is found in legalistically sticking to a mathematical formula. Our thinking has been most shaped by II Corinthians 9:6-11. Personally, we look at the tithe as a principle, or as a yardstick. We use it as a starting point. Paul said each one should give what he has decided to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion (II Corinthians 9:7). This verse leads me to conclude that percentages can be guidelines, but they should not be laws. Whatever the amount is that you commit to the Lord's work, always remember that you cannot outgive God, and that if having less now means that you have stored up treasure in Heaven, it will be the wisest investment you ever make.



