

THE GRACE OF GIVING

Dowlen Road, May 31, 2009 AM

INTRODUCTION:

- A. We are wrapping up our series of lessons entitled *Prosperity, Poverty and the Wisdom of Proverbs*.
 1. Our goal in this study has been to examine the wisdom that can be found in the Bible to help us properly manage the financial resources God has entrusted to us. We've seen that He has a lot to say.
 2. We have emphasized that God tells us these things because He wants us to have peace. He does not want us to experience the anxiety and grief that comes with a crushing burden of debt (Proverbs 22:7).
- B. But this is not the only reason for these instructions.
 1. God wants us to be responsible with our resources because He has plans for them.
 2. We began this series by emphasizing that everything we have belongs to God. King David acknowledged this as he celebrated Israel's great contribution for building the temple (I Chronicles 29:11-16).
 3. I don't think we have a problem acknowledging this to be so, but we do wrestle with the implications. Since this is God's stuff, He has the right to tell me what to do with it. And there are definitely some things that God wants me to do with the financial resources He has placed in my trust. I must be responsible with my money so I am able to do all that God wants me to do with these blessings He has given me.

WHAT DOES GOD HAVE IN MIND?

The only way to properly answer this question is go to the Bible and allow God to tell us how He wants us to use these resources He has placed in our hands.

- A. God wants me to take care of my family and provide for the things they will need (I Timothy 5:8).
 1. To do this, I must be responsible with my money (I Thessalonians 4:11-12). I need to get a job, work hard and earn what I need. I need to follow the guidelines we've discussed from God's word – avoid over-spending and debt (Proverbs 22:7), plan for emergencies, etc. I need to do these things so that I avoid falling into need and becoming dependent on others.
 2. It's one of the things God wants me to do.
- B. God wants me to support gospel preaching.
 1. Paul taught that those who proclaimed the gospel were to be financially supported in this work (I Corinthians 9:14). This would allow them to devote their full attention to this critical task. Paul received this kind of support in this work (Philippians 4:15-16). The Christians in Philippi had given their money so that this church could support Paul's preaching work in other places.
 2. This need continues. God wants His word to be spread in this community and the world. He wants us to take from the money with which He blesses us and use it to provide for men who are preaching the gospel.
 - a. It is awesome to realize that there are men who stood up in little rented rooms in rural parts of Mexico, who gathered under trees in villages in Zimbabwe and were able to preach the gospel because many of you used your resources to help support them.
 - b. In just a few months several of our men will gather with 20 or more African preachers and teach them to preach more effectively. They can do this because you have shared your resources.
 - c. Many in this crowd are Christians today because the disciples in this place shared their resources, built this building, trained teachers, advertised in this community...and helped you learn the gospel.
 3. It's one of the things God wants me to do.
- C. God wants me to help needy Christians.
 1. We see this immediately among the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-45). It was a practice that continued (4:32-35, 11:27-30). It's no surprise that this would be one way God wants disciples to use their resources. We are a spiritual family; there is bond of brotherhood and love that exists between us. When someone is suffering a need, it is a natural impulse to desire to help (I John 3:17).
 2. Those needs continue to exist and it is God's will that we use His resources to help...and many of you have. There are Christians in Zimbabwe who are still alive today only because many of you took from the resources God entrusted to you and gave to help feed them.
 3. It's one of the things God wants me to do.
- D. God wants me to be generous and share with others.
 1. When we think of sharing and helping others, our minds immediately goes to our family and brethren. But God does not limit individual Christians to these two groups. While churches are limited to helping disciples, individual should help whenever they can (I Timothy 6:17-19, Hebrews 13:16).
 2. We need to be busy in our community finding opportunities to do good and share our resources with the less fortunate (Galatians 6:10).
 3. It's one of the things God wants me to do.

Summary: Remember, this is all God's stuff anyway. He has the right to tell me what to do with it...and this is what He has said.

WHY DOES GOD WANT ME TO DO THIS?

Sometimes our instinct is to hoard our blessings. We would like to spend up our money buying things we want and indulging our own desires. So why is God so insistent that I share my resources in all these different ways?

- A. It will be a blessing to the cause.
 1. We've tried to teach our boys to spend their money on things that really have value, and not to squander it on worthless things. Perhaps you've had the experience of spending a lot of money on something that quickly lost its luster (cars that look good and fall apart).
 2. One of the great things about spending our money on the cause is we are using it in a way that really matters.

- a. The money we send to support preachers in Mexico has helped the church in Ojinaga thrive for decades. Countless people have been brought to Christ. An eternal difference has been made in their lives.
 - b. There are churches that met today in villages of Africa, villages where the name of Jesus had never been spoken. They learned the truth because we supported men who went there.
3. We help advance the cause when we support the work of God. There is not a more important way to use our resources (Ecclesiastes 12:13).
- B. It will be a blessing to others.
1. This is inseparably tied to the first. Because the gospel is a blessing to others, as we support its advance we bring the most important blessings into the lives of those who hear and respond.
 2. Even as we help people with physical needs in a time of crisis, we are lifting a burden and blessing their lives. I remember after Rita carrying ice to people who had been without electricity for several days. You could see it in their eyes – it was a blessing to them. You've seen it too, the joy you give to others when you help with a need. It gives them joy...and it gives us joy too.
- C. It will be a blessing to me (Proverbs 22:9).
1. Notice what Paul says about the support sent to him by the Philippians (4:17): *Really, it is not that I want to receive gifts from you, but I want you to have the good that comes from giving.* (NCV)
 2. How are we blessed by giving in the ways that the Lord requires?
 - a. We receive joy from the knowledge that we are doing with His resources what the Lord told us to do.
 - b. We experience the joy that comes from sharing in something that genuinely matters.
 - 1) The material things into which we invest so much will never satisfy and give true joy (Ecclesiastes 5:10).
 - 2) No matter what you buy – whether it's a luxury car or a vacation home in the mountains – it gets old and loses its significance to us.
 - 3) Sharing in the work of God brings a joy that never fades. We are making an eternal difference in people's lives.

Summary: But maybe I'm not there yet. Perhaps I'm much more focused on hoarding my blessings than sharing them. Maybe it's a real struggle for me to get over that thinking and truly be a joyful giver as God desires (II Corinthians 9:7).

HOW DO I GET THERE?

Let's close by working on our thinking. Let's make a quick list of some things we should run through our minds as we think about giving.

- A. Think about God.
1. It's His stuff and He has told me that He wants me to be generous, support His cause and share with others.
 2. Remember also that He watches to make sure I do that. Through the prophet Malachi God charged the people with robbing by failing to give as they should (3:8-10). We need to think about this dreadful possibility.
 3. I need to decide on a number from my income that I will devote to the Lord and His work each month and take it off the top.
- B. Think about the sacrifice.
1. We are often reluctant to give because we feel like we are giving up something significant.
 2. The truth is, many of us could do a little more than we do simply by taking from our excess. We could come up with a little more simply by forgoing a few of our luxuries from time to time (eating out). I'm not saying we should never eat out again, but there may be a time when we forego that for a time and use the extra money for some urgent kingdom matter (needy saints in Zimbabwe).
 3. In view of the need, it's a small sacrifice.
- C. Think about the need.
1. This will help us answer the thorny question: how much should I give. Too often we ask this question because we are treating giving like a bill we have to pay. We want to know the exact amount so we can pay just that much and no more. I think we should see giving in the way grandparents see buying Christmas presents for their grandchildren. For most, it's not some burdensome obligation they must fulfill. It's this really cool thing that we get to do and they have to be careful not to do too much.
 2. Perceiving the need helps us do this. When I realize that the money I give will help some brother weather a crisis, or put gas in the tank of a preacher traveling the back roads of Mexico, or feed a starving saint in Zimbabwe, it's not a burden.
 3. It's something we're eager to do. It should be our desire to be extravagant, to overflow with generosity (II Corinthians 8:1-5).
- D. Think about your blessings.
1. It is interesting that we have traditionally taken up the collection right after the Lord's Supper, although we are careful to distinguish between the two.
 2. God has been lavish with His blessings – in every way (Ephesians 1:3-8). In light of what has been done for us, it should be a difficult thing to be meager in our support of His work.

CONCLUSION: JESUS HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US...

Am I truly grateful for all He has done? Do I demonstrate that gratitude by the way I live my life?