

FIGURING OUT OUR FINANCES: LIVING GENEROUSLY

Part 3 of 3

November 18, 2007

For the last two weeks we have been looking at debt, and how debt makes us captive, and how God wants us to be free! So today, we are moving from debt to deliverance, by learning to live generously!

We're in a series I'm calling "FIGURING OUT OUR FINANCES." Today I want us to look at a version of our finances, a version of Love, which is "Living Generously."

Acts 20:35: "Remember the words the Lord Jesus Himself said, 'There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.'" Do you really believe that? That there's more happiness in giving than in receiving. Happiness is based on living generously.

Key words from the Bible.

The word believe, or believing is used 275 times.

The word pray, or prayer, or praying is used 371 times.

The word love, or lover, loves, or loving is used 714 times.

The word giving, or give, is used 2,162 times.

So my question is: Where does the Bible put the most emphasis? It's obvious, isn't it? On giving. The Bible is a book about giving. It's not something that's just tacked on to the Christian life. It is the essence of Christian living. Jesus was the ultimate giver.

The Bible says in Luke 6:38, "Give and it will be given to you for with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." Give and it will be given, we've all heard that.

My question is, What do I get back? Give and it will be given, the Scripture says. So if I give, what do I get back? Seven things, seven benefits of becoming a generous person.

1. GIVING MAKES ME MORE LIKE GOD.

God is a giver. The Bible says, "*God so loved the world that He gave.*" Everything you have is a gift from God. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. To be like God, you've got to learn to become a giver.

When I first fell in love with Deb, I could not keep money in my pockets. I spent it continually. Because you cannot love without giving.

If you're going to be like God, God is love, you're going to learn to become a giver.

2. GIVING DRAWS ME CLOSER TO GOD.

The Bible says, "*Where your treasure is, your heart will be also.*" Where is your heart this morning? It's wherever your treasure is. If it's in a boat, a house, your business, your clothes, your children, your family, your career -- where your treasure is, there your heart is. Every time I give to God, it moves me a little bit closer to Him. God is much more interested in raising disciples than He is in raising dollars.

3. GIVING IS A VICTORY OVER MATERIALISM

There's a lie that you see on television that says, happiness can be purchased -- life, liberty, and the purchase of happiness. You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give. When the whole world says "More", Giving says "Give away". It breaks the grip of materialism.

"Command those who are rich in this present world [and that's all of us -- if you live in America, you're rich] not to put your hope in wealth, but to put your hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." It's not wrong to enjoy nice things. The Bible says, God says it's ok to enjoy, He gives us everything for our enjoyment. But He does not make us prosper simply so that we can spend it all on ourselves. You make a life by giving. Giving is an antidote to materialism. It teaches us to give away.

Deuteronomy 14 *"The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives."* That's why Satan hates giving and he fights it so much.

4. GIVING STRENGTHENS MY FAITH

There are lots of promises in the Bible and there are more promises regarding giving than anything else in the Bible. With every promise there's a premise. As you know we've talked about this, God says, You give and I'll give to you. We often say, "God, you bless me and then I'll give." God says, "No, you prime the pump. You first." Why? Because that requires faith. Giving tests my faith and strengthens it. **Proverbs 3** *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. Honor the Lord by giving him the first part of all your income and He will fill your barns to overflowing."* A promise of God.

5. GIVING IS AN INVESTMENT FOR ETERNITY

You can't take it with you. Has anybody ever seen a hearse pulling a U-haul? But you can send it on ahead. You send it on ahead by investing it in people who are going there. Every time you give it is an eternal investment. Jesus said, Store up treasures in heaven. How do you do that? **1 Timothy tells us,** *"Give happily to those in need and always be ready to share whatever God has given you. By doing this you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven. It is the only safe investment for eternity."* It's a protected investment and it gets great rates. God says every time I give, it's an investment into the future.

6. GIVING BLESSES ME IN RETURN.

I always get more out of it than what I give. Proverbs 22:9 *"A generous man will himself be blessed."* Psalm 112:5-6 *"Good will come to him who is generous and a righteous man will be remembered forever."* What do you want to be remembered for? Fathers, when you die, are your kids going to say, "My dad was a generous man -- with his time, his money, his energy." Mothers, when you die are your children going to say, "My mom was a generous mom. If she had it, she gave it." The Bible says that we are blessed in return when we're generous with others.

"A generous man will prosper. He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." Have you learned this secret? Have you learned the secret that whatever you give out is what you're going to get back in life? Have you learned that when you give out criticism what you're going to get back is criticism? If you give out gossip, you're going to get back gossip about you. But if you give out encouragement, you're going to get encouragement back. It is a law of life that we sow and we reap. And we reap what we sow. The more we give away, the more we get back in blessings.

7. GIVING MAKES ME HAPPY

It is the source of joy. Jesus said, *"There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."* God has taught me to be a giver. It's my nature to be selfish. God is teaching me to be a giver because it feels so good to give. People who don't know that are people who have never done it. Nobody gives 'til it hurts. They give because it feels good, because it's the source of joy. God wants us to enjoy being a generous person. Karl Menninger said, "Giving is a good criterion of mental health. Generous people are rarely mentally ill."

1 Chronicles 29:9 *"The people rejoiced for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. David also rejoiced greatly."*

Do you know why we have a happy church? This is a giving church. It is an incredibly giving church. The people in this church are incredibly generous. As a result it's a happy church.

Here are five ways to enjoy an offering – **how to get the most out of giving:**

1. GIVE WILLINGLY

Giving is a matter of willingness not wealth. It's attitude, not amount. **2 Corinthians 9:12** *"For if the willingness is there, your gift is acceptable according to what you have, not according to what you don't have."* He's not saying equal gifts, but equal sacrifice. It's the willingness that makes the difference.

"Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give [that means you've thought it out, you've planned; it's not spontaneous] *not reluctantly or under pressure."* God does not believe in pressure giving

and I don't either. Some of you feel pressured just having a Bible study on it. That's not coming from me if you feel pressure. God says give thoughtfully. Give willingly.

2. GIVE GENEROUSLY

If you really want to be the kind of giver that God is pleased with, give generously. **2 Corinthians 8:3-4** *"They gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in the service to the saints."* These people are begging Paul to take an offering.

3. GIVE JOYFULLY

If you can't give joyfully, don't give. God's interested in your attitude. Give joyfully. I don't know if you're excited about what you're giving next week, but I'm excited. I know a lot of people who are excited. **2 Corinthians 9:7** *"For God loves a cheerful giver."* The word in Greek is the word we get hilarious. Are you hilarious when you give?

Satan hates giving. But you just can't ignore something God talks about 2,142 times in Scripture. When He talks about it more than praying or believing or loving. Give joyfully. It says they were hilarious.

I read about a bumper sticker last week: "Tithe if you love Jesus, anybody can honk!" That guy is a generous and joyful giver. He's got a great attitude.

4. GIVE THANKFULLY

It's a privilege to live in America. It's a privilege to live in North Platte. It's a privilege to be a part of this church. And with privilege comes responsibility. God says be thankful in your giving.

Psalms 116 *"How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?"* Giving is an opportunity to give back to God. "God, I realize I wouldn't have my health. I wouldn't have my family. I wouldn't have my career. I wouldn't have anything. God, I just want to give something back." Every time you make a gift, you're saying, "Thank You, Lord. I just want You to know I'm not ungrateful for it."

5. GIVE EXPECTANTLY

You cannot out give God. Giving is not a debt we owe; it is a seed that we sow. It is not an obligation. It is an opportunity to build our faith. Every time I sit down and write out a check for my tithe, knowing that the money could go to pay bills, that's a test of my faith. I give expectantly. People say, "When I get more, then I'll give more." God says, "Who are you kidding? You prime the pump." Give expectantly.

If people on the outside see that what we have here at Messiah is special, we of all people who are blessed on a weekly basis ought to say, "What can I do? What can be my part?"

What's the starting point? **2 Corinthians 8:5** *"They first gave themselves to the Lord."* He wants you. But He doesn't have you unless He's got your money, too. Unless you say, "God, all of it belongs to You. My time, my money, my energy, my efforts. I'm Yours." That's what it's all about.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I know that You are much more interested in building disciples than You are in raising dollars. Thank You for the privilege of knowing You. Help us to become generous people -- people like Jesus who gave everything He had. Lord, help us to live lives with open hands. I pray that You would break the grip of materialism in each of our lives, that we would realize that life comes from what we give not from what we get. Thank You in advance for what You're going to do in the hearts of your people. Thank You for the deep conversations throughout this congregation, both with me and others of the commitment and the sacrifice and the excitement of people saying, I want to learn to trust God in this area. I thank You for what You're going to do in this place. In Jesus' name. Amen.