

The Joy Of Giving

While on earth, Jesus gave one of the most powerful and motivational statements on giving that can be found throughout the Bible: *"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you"* (Luke 6:38).

Money is only a means to an end. The question is -- to which end is it taking us? Some years ago a newspaper told of a woman recluse in New York City who died of malnutrition in a dingy room. Police uncovered nearly \$250,000 in her bank accounts -- and found that she had sealed the window cracks in her Staten Island apartment with dollar bills. Such hoarding is tragic! Paul observed, *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: for some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"* (1 Timothy 6:10).

Our giving to the Lord's cause is not like paying dues in a club, nor trying to get a tax deduction, nor even securing fire insurance. We give because He gave; He gave because He loved us. Little wonder that approximately one out of every six verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke relate to the right handling of material goods. Then Paul quotes the words of our Lord which were not recorded in any of the gospels: *"And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'"* (Acts 20:35). The stewardship of giving is inextricably intertwined with our relationship to God.

Jesus warned, *"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses"* (Luke 12:15). He reserved one of His strongest epithets ("*You fool*") for one who *"lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"* (vs. 21).

We cannot ignore the topic of giving by explaining "we aren't wealthy" or "we can't afford to give" (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5). A visit to the Third World -- to say nothing of some of the poverty-stricken areas within the continental United States -- will dispel that view. Moreover, as an unknown poet said:

It's not what you do with millions,
If riches should be your lot,
But, friend, what are you doing,
With the dollar and a quarter you've got?

Giving involves all Christians. Do we give to God in proportion to our prosperity (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)? A test to determine if we are giving in proportion to our prosperity is very simple: take the total amount we give each month and multiply it by ten. Could we live on that amount each month? Does it balance out close to the total of our monthly income? It is hard to imagine giving less than 10% of our income, as was required under the Law of Moses. This is especially true when we consider that we are living under "*a better covenant, which was established on better promises*" (Hebrews 8:6). If those living under the first covenant gave a tenth, should we not strive to give at least that much, and even more? Also, are we cheerful givers (2 Corinthians 9:7)?

It is a cliché but still true, "You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving." Let us imitate the Macedonians. Paul described their generous giving, then added, "*And this they did, not as we had hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God*" (2 Corinthians 8:5).

Adapted From R. J. Evans