

Why Giving Blesses You

Acts 20:35

Good afternoon! We've reached the end of our journey together in this 6-part series called "Legit: Becoming a Real Christ-Follower". I hope you all had a wonderful journey as we learned to examine ourselves whether we are true followers of Jesus or just mere admirers of him. There are a few criteria in which we measure ourselves whether we are his followers or not. Like keeping the faith in whatever circumstance, serving lovingly, overcoming sin. Certainly, there are some more which I didn't discuss in this series but I thought the ones I gave you were quite fundamental.

Today, what I'd like to share with you is another fundamental trait that would characterize us as genuine followers of Jesus. And this is the trait of giving. Why is it fundamental or basic? It is because it is what characterized Jesus primarily. He is a giving Lord, a generous master, a lavish God. He just loves to give. He gave his time, efforts, resources, and ultimately his life because of his great love for each of us. He said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve". (Mark 10:45)

Giving may be a basic trait but certainly not an easy thing to do. Even the very rich has a hard time parting with their riches. Like this lawyer in a story I read. He was the town's most successful lawyer and a local United Way office realized that the organization had never received a donation from him. The person in charge of contributions called him to persuade him to contribute.

He says to the lawyer, "Our research shows that out of a yearly income of at least \$500,000, you give not a penny to charity. Wouldn't you like to give back to the community in some way?"

The lawyer mulled this over for a moment and replied, "First, did your research also show that my mother is dying after a long illness, and has medical bills that are several times her annual income?"

Embarrassed, the United Way rep mumbled, "Um ... no."

The lawyer interrupts, "or that my brother, a disabled veteran, is blind and confined to a wheelchair?"

The stricken United Way rep began to stammer out an apology, but was interrupted again.

"Or that my sister`s husband died in a traffic accident," the lawyer`s voice rising in indignation, "leaving her penniless with three children?!"

The humiliated United Way rep, completely beaten, said simply, "I had no idea..."

On a roll, the lawyer cut him off once again, "So if I don`t give any money to them, why should I give any to you?"

Giving is a hard thing to do. It is something that doesn`t come naturally to us. We have to learn it and then learn to practice it continuously. That`s why we always teach our little children to share their toys, their food, etc. We, ourselves, we all learned this when we were growing up. And many of us are still learning.

Let`s read our verse for today.

Acts 20:35b "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Do you really believe that? It is more blessed to give than to receive. You`re a person who is more blessed when you give than when you receive.

The question is: Why does giving make you feel blessed or happy when it runs counter to our nature? This afternoon, let me share with you 7 things why giving makes you feel happy or blessed.

Now, as I share this message with you, some of may be familiar with it because I`ve shared some of the content of this four years.

Back then, I gave you only five reasons. But I've added two which makes it seven. Perfect number. And after this message if anyone can tell me what those two are, I'll be glad to give you a present. Because I want to be happy and feel blessed. So, let me see who is keeping notes.

OK. The first blessing of giving is this.

BLESSING #1: GIVING MAKES ME MORE LIKE GOD.

God is a giver. The Bible says, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..."* (John 3:16) 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 Anabel, I could not keep money in my pockets. I spent it continually. Because you cannot love without giving. And now that we're married, she even owns my wallet. I still keep giving and more so because we have three children. You cannot love without giving.

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

BLESSING #2: GIVING DRAWS ME CLOSER TO GOD.

The Bible says, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Mat6. 6:21) Where is your heart this morning? It's wherever your treasure is. If it's in a car, 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. It draws me closer to Him. because that's where my treasure is. Our theme this year begins with "Draw Near to God."

If you want to really get closer to him, you've got to start giving to God. You give him your time, your talent, your treasure.

But, mind you, God is not interested in raising dollars. He is interested in raising disciples.

BLESSING #3: GIVING IS A VICTORY OVER MATERIALISM

Someone has said that this country has become so material-conscious that a line in the Declaration of Independence should change to – Life, Liberty, and the purchase of Happiness. You see, there's this thinking that if I can just get a certain thing, then I'll be happy. We get more and more. If that were true, obviously the people with the most would be the happiest, but that's just not true, is it? You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give. Every time I give, it breaks what I call the "I've got to have more" Syndrome. It's the only antidote I know to materialism. When the whole world says "More", Giving says "Give away". It breaks the grip of materialism in our lives.

Paul says to Timothy, *"Command those who are rich in this present world [and that's all of us -- if you live in America, you're rich compared to the rest of the world] not to be arrogant or not to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, 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. Paul continues, *"Command them... to be generous and willing to share. In this way... they may take hold of the life that is truly life."* (1 Tim. 6:17-19) You make a life by giving.

Someone gave this definition of materialism: *Materialism is buying things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people that don't matter.*

Giving is an antidote to materialism. It teaches us to give away.

BLESSING #4. GIVING STRENGTHENS MY FAITH

You know, God uses dollars to test our faith and to strengthen our faith. God says in Malachi, *"Test me, try me, prove me. I dare you! You give and see if I won't bless you more in return."* That's the RSE version. Those are my initials.

If you want to prove there is a God, there is only one way. That verse says you can prove God and that's through giving. There is only one argument for God in the Bible. It says, You give and see if He won't bless you back. This is what God actually says in Mal. 3:10, *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.’”* (Mal. 3:10)

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. 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.

How many of you use Colgate or you have used Colgate? In the Philippines, we don't use Colgate. We use salt. But, actually, when I was growing up, Colgate was another name for toothpaste. That's how popular it was. Last week, I talked about toothbrush. Now, I'm going to talk about toothpaste.

Anyway, many of us, if not all of us, have used Colgate. William Colgate is the man who started this toothpaste business. Before toothpaste, he manufactured soap and starch.

Let me tell you his story. At the age of 16 William Colgate left England because his father was too poor to keep him. He met an old canal boat captain who was a believer and prayed for the boy. The captain then said: "Someone will soon be the leading soap maker in New York. You can be that person. But you must never lose sight of the fact that the soap you make has been given to you by God. Honor Him by sharing what you earn. Begin by tithing all you receive."

After entering the city of New York he remembered the captain's words and soon became a member of the First Baptist Church in New York. Then, he became a soap-maker. Out of the first dollar he earned, he gave 1/10 to God. As time went by, he gave not merely one-tenth of the earnings of Colgate's soap products; but he gave two-tenths, then three-tenths, and finally five-tenths of all his income to the work of God in the world. William Colgate became a millionaire and gave millions to God. All this because he was a tither throughout his long and successful business career. William Colgate felt the urge to tithe because he recognized that God was the giver of all that he possessed, not only of opportunity, but even of the elements which were used in the manufacture of his products.

Proverbs 3 *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding... Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing."* That's a promise from God. And the premise is: if you give him the first part of all your income.

BLESSING #5: GIVING IS AN INVESTMENT FOR ETERNITY.

You can't take your treasure with you when leave this planet. 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."* (1 Tim. 6:18-19 LB) It's a protected investment and it gets great rates. God says every time I give, it's an investment into the future.

BLESSING #6: GIVING BLESSES ME IN RETURN.

It means 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? Calvin Coolidge said, *"No man is ever honored for what he received in life. He's only honored for what he gave."* A lot of people amass a big fortune. But we're not honored for what we get out of life. We're honored for what we give. 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." (Prov. 11:25) 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.

It makes us like God and it draws us closer to God. It's the antidote to materialism. It helps us focus our priorities and put first things first. It blesses me in return. And finally,

BLESSING #7: GIVING MAKES ME HAPPY

Say that to the person next to you with a smile, "Giving makes me happy". If you're saying that to your wife, I'm sure she'll be happier.

It is the source of joy. Do you know that Acts 20:35 can also be translated, *"There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."*? (GNT) The Greek word used for blessed is the same word for happy.

There are only two types of people in life: takers and givers. The happy people in life are people that are generous with their lives. Jesus says, "Lose your life to find it. Give it away." The word miserable comes from the root word "miser". The more I hold on to what I've got, the more miserable I become. It's the person who is generous in his lifestyle that is happy.

Karl Menninger, a famous psychiatrist, said, "Giving is a good criterion of mental health. Generous people are rarely mentally ill."

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. Those who serve you – the directors, especially Kuya Rey – are happy because you're all generous. Do you know that as a result of your giving, this church is returning back to financial health at this time? It's not that we're in debt or something it's just that since the middle of last year when some people left our finances were jeopardized. And so in the beginning of this year we projected a budget that was quite lower than that of last year's. But by the help of God we're slowly climbing up again and, in fact, our monthly giving has exceeded our expectations. Praise God! People in the church have just been giving generously. Those who are not, you know who you are. ☺

Folks, what I shared with you are the blessings of giving. Are you enjoying the blessings of giving? Or are you missing out on one or two or three of them? Some people are going to miss out because they don't know how to get the right attitude. So I want to talk with you about how to get the most out of giving. I've subtitled it **"How to Enjoy Giving"**.

1 Chronicles 29: 1-20 I think is an appropriate passage. We're not going to read it but it's the passage about how the ancient Israelites gave sacrificially to an offering to build the temple in Jerusalem. It gives us a model. Especially as we endeavor to purchase a building for this church.

You know, God couldn't care less about the amount you give. What He's interested in is your attitude, not the amount. It's your attitude. God doesn't want your money as much as what it represents. He wants you. It's your attitude that makes a difference, not the amount.

Now, let me share with you the three ways to enjoy an offering – to get the most out of giving:

1. GIVE WILLINGLY

David says in verse 2 that he has provided all the resources for the temple and he asks in verse 5, *“Now who is willing to consecrate himself to the Lord today?”* The people responded enthusiastically and so in v. 17, David speaks again, *“I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity and all these things I've given willingly and with honest intent and I have seen how, with joy, how **willingly** (and there's the word, willingly) your people here have given to you.”*

Giving is a matter of willingness not wealth. It's attitude, not amount.

2 Corinthians 8:12 “It doesn't matter how much you have. What matters is how much you are willing to give from what you have.”

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 compulsion.**” (2 Cor. 9:7a)*

God does not believe in pressure giving and I don't either. We don't talk about giving here in this church often.

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. In v. 2 David says *"With all my resources I've provided for the temple."* He said he's not held anything back. Then in v. 3 he says *"I've given over and above all of these other things."* And in v. 14 he says, *"Who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give this generously?"*

Paul talks about the generous attitude of the Macedonians in 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 even begging Paul to take an offering.

3. GIVE JOYFULLY

If you can't give joyfully, don't give. God is interested in your attitude. Are you excited when it's time to give our tithes and offerings in the service? I am. I'm sure many of you are, too. If you're excited, Kuya Rey will be more excited.

2 Corinthians 9:7 "For God loves a cheerful giver." But I understand if some cannot give cheerfully. As I said already, it's the hardest thing to do. Preaching on giving is not an easy thing to do as well. It can ruffle some feathers. It can turn off some people. But like giving I have to do it because the Bible tells me to.

In New Testament times, they got excited when they had an offering. In our services today in America, that's the low point in the service. But it says the early Christians were cheerful when they gave. They were joyful givers because they wanted to be like Jesus.

There's a bumper sticker that reads: *"Tithe if you love Jesus, anybody can honk!"* That's a good one.

Before I close, let me just share with you a story I heard on a Christian radio about a couple who were struggling with their finances. The day before church they found out that the money they were giving to the church as tithe was what they needed to buy gas for their car to last the whole week.

Needless to say, they struggled about it but in the end just trusted the Lord. And so they gave the money to God.

And you know what, they found out that their car lasted the whole week without being refueled. One thing they noticed was that the gas needle stayed where it was throughout the week. It's a true story.

Folks, God is faithful. Are we faithful to him? But what's the starting point?

2 Corinthians 8:5 *"They first gave themselves to the Lord."*

God doesn't need money. He wants what it represents. He wants you. But He doesn't have you unless you give him your heart, 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.

Have you given your all to Jesus? Have you turned over your life to him? Jesus gave his life for you. He died for you on the cross because he loves you so much. He doesn't want you to go to eternity without him. He wants you to enjoy heaven and while on earth, he wants you to enjoy the benefits of his love and salvation. Surely, there will still be sufferings and hardships in life on earth but Jesus promises "In this world you will have trouble but take heart I have overcome the world."

The best thing he ever gave to you is his life. He went to the cross so that you will not be lost forever. Then he was buried and rose again from the dead and now rules in the heavens as one who has conquered sin and death forever. Jesus died for you because of your sins.