

## GIVING TOGETHER

An ambitious young man told his pastor he promised God a tithe of his income. They prayed for God to bless his career. At that time, he was making \$40.00 per week and tithing \$4.00. God did just that and in a few years his income increased and he was tithing \$500.00 per week. He called the pastor to see if he could be released from his tithing promise because it was too costly now. The pastor replied, "I don't see how you can be released from your promise, but we can ask God to reduce your income to \$40.00 a week, then you'd have no problem tithing \$4.00."

Today we are concluding our series on community. The word for COMMUNITY in the Bible is the word FELLOWSHIP. It is from the Greek word KOINONIA. It comes from the Greek word meaning together or common. Part of being together and having things in common is the idea of giving or sharing with one another. The word KOINONIA is also the word used in the NT for share:

Heb 13:16 And do not forget to do good and to *share with others*, for with such sacrifices God is pleased

Phil 4:15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church *shared* with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only

If you and I are going to have fellowship together there's got to be a sense of community which involves contribution on my part. You cannot have community without generosity. Generosity includes our time, our energy and also our money.

1 Tim 6: 17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth ... 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and *willing to share*

Karl Menninger, the famous psychiatrist who founded the Menninger Psychiatric clinic said that "Generosity is one of the essential components of mental health." Today is Thanksgiving, a time for remembering all that God has provided for us in the last year. God has been so generous with us. Part of giving thanks is expressing our thanks to God through generosity to others. Generosity has many benefits. Let me list 4 benefits to your life when you are generous with what you have:

### 1. Generosity Creates Community

2 Cor 9:11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Paul writes here that the generosity of the Corinthian church was resulting in many expressions of thanksgiving. When we're generous with each other we thank God for each other and we're drawn closer to each other. Generosity brings people into deeper friendship and fellowship.

Randy Frazee learned about the connection between generosity and community from his unchurched neighbor "My neighbor asked if he could borrow my ladder. I said of course. I later learned that he already had one of his own. He didn't need to borrow my ladder. He just wanted the connection.

He just used it as a way to build our relationship. When he borrowed my stuff, it made me feel that I was needed and I liked that feeling. I've now learned to do the same thing with my other neighbors. My other neighbor has a shop vac and I borrow it every Friday night to clean my car with my son. In fact, now Roger leaves it out for me. I told Roger recently that I could afford to buy my own. Roger asked me to please not buy one for myself. He could now see the connection between generosity and community."

Matt 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also

Wherever I invest myself that's what's going to attract me. My money tends to be a magnet. If you want to get a heart for Microsoft, buy some stock in it. The moment you buy them you'll be very interested in that company. Wherever you put your time and money, that's where your heart is. For some this means fixing up your house or a specific hobby or your work. Wherever your treasure is your heart's going to be there.

Anytime I am generous with someone (with the poor or unreached or even God) that's where my heart tends to go. Every time I give to God it draws my heart closer to Him. The first Christians were very famous for their generosity. They shared everything. When the people around them saw this love and generosity it says that the Lord added to their number daily those being saved.

## 2. Generosity Strengthens my Faith

2 Cor 9:13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Giving strengthens our faith. It is the one area where we are allowed to test God. He tells us "Do this and this is what is going to happen". When we try it we see that it works. Sooner or later we all have to decide if we really believe all those promises in the Bible.

2 Cor 9:6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

You know this principle because it's true in every area of life. Whatever you sow you eventually reap. If you judge you will be judged. If you are critical of others, they will be critical of you. If you gossip about others, they will gossip about you. Whatever you give out you're going to get back.

On the other hand, if you're constantly giving out encouragement you will get encouragement back. If you sow love people are going to give love back to you. Whatever you give out in life, you're going to get back. But remember that you get back more than you give. If I take a kernel of corn and I plant it in the ground, I'm not going to get one kernel back, I'm going to get a stalk with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of kernels.

Do you believe God when He says that He will take care of all your needs if you'll just be generous? There are two kinds of people in life. There are givers and there are takers. Takers are always the unhappy ones. It's not by accident the word "miser" and "miserable" come from the same Greek word. When I am miser, I will be miserable. The most generous people in life are always giving their time, energy, resources, helping other people. They're the happiest people on the planet.

Bob McKuen tells of a time he took his son over to McDonalds and he bought him super-size French fries. He said driving back home those things smelled so good in the car. He reached over and took one little French fry out of his son's French fries and I ate it. The son got upset. He said, "Dad you can't have any. These are my fries!" Immediately he had three thoughts.

First, he thought this child has forgotten that I am the source of all fries. I brought him here, I made the order, I paid for the order, I handed them to him, I'm driving him back home. He wouldn't have any fries if it weren't for me.

The second thing he thought was that his child did not realize that he could take them away in a second if he wanted to. On the other hand, he could buy him an entire truckload of fries if he wanted to because he had the power to do either.

The third thing he realized is that he didn't need his son's fries. He could easily have got some for himself. He just wanted his son to learn to be unselfish.

Those three lessons are how God wants you to learn to be generous with other people. God says I want you to remember that I am the source of everything you've got. You would have nothing without Me. Two, God could take everything away from us in a second or He could double it just like that because He has the power. Three, God says, I don't need your fries. I don't need your money. I'm not poor. I just want you to learn to be unselfish. I want you to learn to be generous. I want you to learn and I want to develop your faith.

### 3. Generosity is an Investment for Eternity

Luke 16:9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings

You can't take anything to heaven with you except your friends. You will never see a hearse pulling a U-haul behind it. Did you know that mortuaries sell these things called burial suits? They're suits for people who don't have a suit they want to be buried in. You know what the difference between a burial suit? No pockets in them! It's true! You don't need them. You can't take it with you.

Mat 6:19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

A man who was going to die asked 3 friends to do him a favor. He had sold all his worldly possessions and had \$300,000 with him. He said he didn't want anyone to take his money but he wanted to take it with him so he gave each of his friends an envelope with \$100,000 and asked them to place the envelope in his casket at his funeral. The man died and the three friends came up during the funeral and each placed their envelope in the casket. Afterward they were talking. The first man admitted that he needed some money so he had only put \$90,000 in the casket. The second admitted that he had been tempted and had only put \$80,000 in the casket. The third friend said he had met his obligation fully. He kept his envelope, had taken the other 2 envelopes from the casket and had thrown in a cheque for \$300,000.

You send it ahead by investing in people who are going there.

Every time you are generous with others you are sending in on ahead. Your time on earth is only about eighty, maybe at the most a hundred years. You'll spend trillions of years in eternity. Where do you need to have the biggest account? Where are you going to spend the most time?

1 Tim 6:18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

There's no greater investment than the kingdom of God. When you help other people with your time, with your money, with your resources whatever you have God counts it as an investment in heaven. You're not going to get that kind of investment anywhere else. You make a living by what you get. But you make a life by what you give.

#### 4. Generosity Blesses Me in Return

Generosity not only blesses me in eternity it also blesses me right now. I don't have to wait till heaven. God blesses those who are generous now. There are many places in the Bible where it says this.

Deut 15:10 Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to

Do you want God to bless everything you put your hand to? Become a generous person. We say we believe God's word but often show by what we do that we really do not believe it. What is amazing to me that some people can trust God for their eternal salvation but don't trust God with their finances? I can trust God to secure my eternity in heaven. But I don't trust Him to keep His promise about money. As a result, they miss out on so many blessings.

Acts 20:35 ... the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Have you ever seen those people on TV, those giving-a-thons, or whatever? They say, "Give till it hurts!" I don't agree with that at all. You give until it feels good. Because giving makes me happy. Takers are not happy. They're scared to death that they're going to lose what they've got. God says, I want to produce happiness in your life because the happiest people are the most generous.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God is a giver. When we give we become more like Him. You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. It is the essence of love and it's the essence of fellowship. The word BELIEVE is used 272 times in the Bible because God wants us to believe. The word PRAY is used 371 times in the Bible because God wants us to pray. The word LOVE is used 714 times in the Bible because God wants us to love. However, the word GIVE is used 2162 times because God wants us to learn to be generous.

1 Chr 29:12 Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all... 14 "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

Generosity does not mean giving a specific amount. The amount makes no difference at all. What God looks at is the attitude. Remember God's got all the French fries He wants. He doesn't need yours. What He wants is He wants you to be unselfish.

2 Cor 8:12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

What attitudes of the heart does God look for?

2 Cor 9:7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

a. Give thoughtfully

Don't give impulsively. Think about it and you pray about it. Some people think that the most spiritual kind of giving is when you give just impulsively, spontaneously. God says He wants us to think about it and pray about it. Why? Because we plan things that are important in our lives. He wants giving to be important and meaningful. Don't just give what you have on you.

Some may be thinking then why Matt 6:3 says that when we are giving "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing". The issue there is not that you do not know but that others do not know as it says in verse 4 "so that your giving may be in secret". Plan your giving.

b. Give enthusiastically

You do not give just out of guilt motivation. You don't give because you think God is going to hit you with lightning or because you want something from Him so you had better give. You give because of what you have been given and because you know what God's going to do for your heart. The more you give the more enthusiastic you become.

c. Give voluntarily

You do not give because of pressure. I really do not like it when people put a sermon before the offering. If you ever feel pressured to give, don't give. Some of you are thinking, "I feel pressured right now after what Pastor Steve has said." My intent is not to pressure you. God does not bless gifts that are given under pressure so why would we pressure you to give?

It just might be that He's tugging on your heart. E.g. a doctor poking might hurt because there is a problem or just that he is poking too hard! Here's a basic rule of thumb: anytime you're pressured by a person to give, don't give. God's not going to bless it anyway. But every time you feel challenged by God to give, you'd better give. Only He knows what He's going to do in my heart and through that gift when I decide to give. So, you give voluntarily because of what God's doing in your life.

d. Give cheerfully

God loves a person who gives cheerfully. One of the Greek words for offering is the word HILARIOUS. I love to laugh in church because church is supposed to be a happy place.

Sometimes it's a challenge to be cheerful when you give. Sometimes I want to hang on to it. There was a church up in Idaho that needed to build a new building because the building was getting filled up. One of the lay leaders got up and said, "I've got some good news and some bad news. The good news is we already have enough money to build a new building. The bad news is it's still in your bank accounts."

One survey taken some years ago, that is still relatively valid today, showed that in one year Americans spent 16 billion dollars for amusements, 10.5 billion for alcohol, 5 billion for tobacco, 2 billion for travel, 325 million for cat and dog food, 304 million for chewing gum, and 76 million for lipstick. During the same period, the total given for foreign missions by all Protestant churches of the United States was said to be only 145 million dollars -- less than half of what Americans spent on chewing gum. If these figures are only reasonably accurate, isn't it evident to you and me now that people are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God?