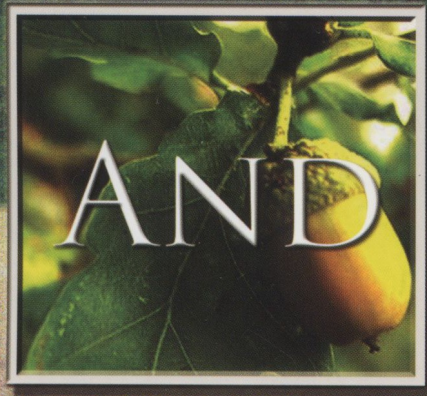


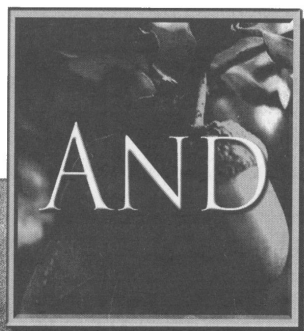
GIVING



RECEIVING

Morris Cerullo

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All scriptures are from the King James Version of the Bible
unless otherwise indicated.

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2nd printing 2006
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Morris Cerullo World Evangelism
Printed in the United States of America

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Foreword

This is a simple book, written in plain English, for ordinary people. I have written it for three main reasons:

1. To provide some teaching on what is one of the most crucial issues of our day.
2. To respond to some of those critics who have suggested that I place too great a stress on giving.
3. To allow my partners to receive the joy and blessings that come from giving in God's way.

The work that I've done in over 100 countries, preaching to millions of people, and training hundreds of thousands of national leaders, has only been possible because of the committed, sacrificial giving by the believers who stand in partnership with me. Their giving has borne enormous fruit all around the world. Most of these givers will not see this fruit before they reach heaven. I hope that this book will help them to appreciate the deep spiritual significance of their giving and that it will give them a small insight into the fabulous rewards which await them in heaven.

I am sure you already know that God loves cheerful givers, and most of my partners know that God blesses givers. This book should help you to understand *why* He loves them so much and what you can do to become one.

This is an intensely practical book, because I don't want you merely to know *about* giving and receiving—I want you to *become* a joyful, generous giver. You had better not start reading this book if you want to hang on to all of your earthly wealth. But, if you'd like to join the

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blessed and cheerful company of givers like Zacchaeus, then this is undoubtedly the book for you!

Please join me now, as we examine the words of the Bible. Put aside your preconceived ideas about giving. Move away from the shifting sands of your tradition and personal experience. Prepare to excavate the solid rock of scripture. Get ready to become a cheerful giver and to start receiving God's special blessings.

Morris Cerullo

Introduction

Many different controversies have swept through the Church during the 60 years that I have been ministering. There have been disputes about miracles, debates on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, arguments over the end times, disagreements about shepherding, and discussions regarding the place of ordinary people in ministry. However, the current controversy is all about giving. I know that critics have always accused the Church of being too interested in money; but, right now, wherever I go in the world, people pump me with questions about financial principles—especially giving. That is exactly as it should be, for the Bible records Jesus teaching more about money than any other topic—even more than about prayer.

We live in an age of tremendous financial instability—with rising debts, regular economic crises, and a worldwide increase in unemployment, homelessness, and begging. Quite naturally, people wonder how it can be right or wise to give money away in times like these. Sometimes it seems that debt grips the entire world. Massive international debts have paralyzed whole nations in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. Easy credit, expensive house purchases, and long-lasting recessions have pushed large numbers of North American and Western European families into a form of financial imprisonment.

These national and personal debts may seem inescapable. Giving does not appear to be the obvious way out. Many wonder whether God is relevant to their financial needs. Some, in desperation, do pray for divine

help; however, nearly all neglect to search the Bible for a solution to their problems. Yet the answers are there—plain for all to read.

International financial crises seem to influence our affairs more than ever. Despite all the talk, the problems only get worse. Inflation is out of control in too many countries. Worldwide unemployment is at record levels. Unfair competition cripples Third World nations, and some large corporations exploit the poor to make extortionate profits.

DIFFICULT TIMES

Faced with times like these, it is little wonder that most people prefer to keep what money they have, rather than give it away to others. Yet, that is what I urge people to do, for I earnestly believe that giving is vital to our spiritual health. If we are children of the God Who “... *so loved the world that He gave....*” (John 3:16), surely His sacrificial giving should be central to our lives.

Some people are always looking for excuses to dilute God's Word or to explain away Jesus' teaching. They wonder how relevant His financial instructions can be today. They ask if it is really wise to give to everyone who asks when there are so many con artists after our money. Yet, Jesus taught in difficult times. He lived when taxes were at record levels, multitudes begged by the roadside, and people were regularly cheated by government officials.

Today, however, on top of these sorts of personal demands, we also receive many impersonal requests for donations from charities and Christian ministries. They appeal for funds in letters, over the phone, and on television; but though we may face more claims on our

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giving than earlier generations, the basic divine principle still remains the same. God really does love a cheerful giver.

In the last 30 years, Christian arguments about giving have focused on three main issues:

1. People have wondered whether they should tithe their income. (*Tithe* is an old word for 10%.) Some teachers maintain that the Old Testament practice of tithing is not God's pattern for today. They argue that tithing is rarely mentioned in the New Testament and is too legalistic for the Age of Grace. Other ministers insist that tithing is a basic biblical practice – like prayer and fasting – which is right at all times. They say that it develops self-discipline and faith, and it is vital for the financial health of the Church. In this book, I am going to set out all of the Bible's teaching on tithing. By the end, we should be able to make up our own mind about this issue.
2. People have argued about who should receive the tithe or main gift. Most pastors say that believers should give the tithe or largest portion to their local church. A few leaders insist that *all of* their members' giving should go to the local church. Many Christian societies argue that believers should listen to God and give as He directs, and then there are those who believe that Christian giving should be directed mainly toward the poor and needy. I am going to show what the Bible teaches on this important issue. When we reach the last page, we'll know what God wants us to do with our money.
3. People have debated the issue of prosperity. This is

the controversy about what happens to givers after they have given. Some teachers argue that God automatically blesses all of those who give in a way which brings health and wealth in proportion to the size of their gift. Other church leaders challenge this idea. They say that truly biblical giving is sacrificial and that this means givers will usually have less after giving. These leaders agree that God blesses givers spiritually; however, they reject the idea that God always rewards givers with material prosperity. In this book, I'll point out what the Bible teaches about receiving, so that we can know what blessings to expect in our earthly lives as a result of our generous giving.

THE BASIC QUESTION

Although many ministers are fascinated by these three issues, most ordinary believers are concerned with a more basic question. They want to know why they should give. Questions regarding how much, to whom, and what will happen will only seriously interest us when we are convinced that we should give or, better still, when we are consumed with a love that compels us to give.

As we go through the biblical teaching on giving, I will point out why people gave in the scriptures. We will see a variety of reasons—some good, some bad, some selfish, some selfless. Among these we will find God's reason for giving, which surely is the motive for which we should aim ourselves. Although we will learn from generous people, we will look more closely at our giving God. As forgiven believers, we are God's children. We know that we should be like God, and day by day, the Holy Spirit is making us more like Him. This means that we should want God's pattern of giving, not human ideas, to shape

our giving.

SPIRITUAL AND FINANCIAL GIFTS

In the last 40 years, there has been a tremendous growth in spiritual gifts. Most Christian groups have received and developed different gifts of the Spirit. Countless books and conferences have focused on "the gifts." Yet, few leaders have integrated their understanding of spiritual gifts with their thinking about financial giving. Our God is the all-giving God, and it is foolish to divide His gifts into different boxes. So it is with our theology of giving. Christian leaders—especially those, like me, who are Pentecostal and charismatic—ought to realize that their ideas about the gifts should relate to their teaching on giving.

We emphasize the need to receive spiritual gifts from God. We urge people to use these gifts to benefit others and build up the Church. So surely it makes sense also to encourage people to receive material gifts from God and to use them to assist others and advance the Church. This is a book about being greatly blessed and very cheerful givers. In it I try to set out the biblical teaching on giving and receiving. I deal mainly with the way that we give financially; however, please remember that giving is a much bigger topic than money alone.

MORE THAN MONEY

Page by page, I will show that God wants us to give like Him. He does not want us to give just our money. He wants generosity to dominate every area of our life. We are supposed to be all-giving Christians—people who are ready to give spiritual help to everyone, believers who are keen to share the Good News with people around us,

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disciples who are eager to pass on God's words and God's gifts to build Christ's Church and extend God's kingdom.

We know that we are called to develop our skills and abilities, not to bury them. These natural talents from God are meant to be used—to be given away to benefit others. We recognize that the Bible urges us to practice hospitality. A Christian home should be a welcoming oasis, not a closed castle. It should be used for others—especially the poor and strangers. Our home, our food, our furniture, our clothes, our cars, our possessions—all these have been given to us by our heavenly Father, and we are called to use them as generously as God.

Sometimes it seems easier to give a small sum of "conscience money," than to make time to help a needy person; but God wants us to be people who delight to give the precious gift of our time and attention. Kind words and deeds are often more valuable than hard cash, so the gift of time is as important as the gift of money. Most of all, God wants us to give our love. He gave His Son because He "*... so loved the world....*" (John 3:16). His gift of Jesus was not only motivated by love, it was itself a gift of love. We, being made in God's image, are called to give our love to the world with equal generosity—even to our enemies.

We are about to go on a journey together through the scriptures. We are going to gaze at the all-giving God and learn from Him how we should give. We will study stories in the lives of some scriptural heroes—plus one or two rogues—to benefit from their examples. We will carefully examine Jesus' words about giving and receiving. Our intention is to obey them, because we know that they are truth and the way to abundant life.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GIVING GOD

When we think about God and try to find a word to describe Him, we do not often come up with giving. We are more familiar with God being called *loving, forgiving, just, gracious, merciful*, and so on. It is time to realize that *giving* is at the heart of all of these divine characteristics. *Love* is something that we give to others—we cannot keep it back for ourselves. *Grace* is the technical word for God's freely given, undeserved favor. The link between *forgiveness* and *giving* is obvious, though often overlooked. *Justice* and *mercy*, like *love*, can only be given freely. Please remember that if a condition could be attached to grace, it would no longer be essentially gracious. Wherever justice and love are "for sale," they are corrupt and false. It is the same with forgiveness and mercy. When they are not given freely, they are not genuine.

Our God is a genuine giver, through and through. Everything we know about Him reveals His lavish, divine generosity. Examples of His giving surround us all. Our home, our family, our abilities, our life, our world—these all reveal the generous nature of our all-giving God.

When Jesus was talking to the people in Matthew 7:11, He said this: "*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*" Jesus reminded the people that God was their Father. Like all fathers, He said, God loves to bless His children with gifts. Then Jesus pointed out that, unlike human fathers, God is not evil. God's generosity to His children is far greater than that

which we see in ourselves or in our parents.

The Bible describes God in two important ways which summarize His generosity. It names Him as *Creator* and as *Redeemer*. God is the One Who gives us material life, and the One Who gives us spiritual life! These titles reveal the essence of God, and throughout the Bible He is worshiped in both of these roles. In Revelation 4:11, the elders sang, *"Thou art worthy, O LORD, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."* A few verses later, in Revelation 5:9, they sang: *"... Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation"*

The Bible celebrates God's twin gifts of creation and redemption—His material giving and His spiritual giving. The scriptures don't suggest that His spiritual gifts are more important than His material gifts, or vice versa. Both are appreciated with equal enthusiasm. We see this clearly in Colossians 1:15-20. This is a short hymn which praises Christ as the Head of creation. Verse 16 acclaims Him because *"... by him all things were created...."* and verse 20 for *"... having made peace through the blood of his cross...."*

THE CREATOR'S GIFT

The Bible begins with God's gift of creation. Genesis 1:1 opens with a marvelous description of our world's origin. Timeless words introduce us to our God: *"IN the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* He is the Creator. Christians may disagree over some of the details about creation, but the basic principle is plain. One God existed before the world, and everything came forth from nothing at His command. However, it is important to realize that creation was not a divine whim; it was the first gift.

THE GIFT OF LIFE

Genesis 1:29 records God's first words to men and women: "... Behold I have given you...." These words are often overlooked, but they reveal God's nature at the outset of His relationship with humanity. He is a giver, and creation is His gift to us, to all people everywhere. Most of the time, we take our life and environment for granted. We may value life when we have a near miss in a car or have just recovered from a serious illness, but we rarely give thanks to God for His gift of life. However, the Book of Psalms is packed with songs which express the Jews' gratitude for God's gift of creation. Psalm 19 begins with: "*THE heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*"

Universal Life

Psalm 104 is perhaps the greatest Jewish celebration of God's gift of life. Read it now, and see how it takes us on a wonderful, guided tour of creation. Truly, as verse 24 states, "*O LORD, how manifold are thy works!*"

Hundreds of millions of people now live in cities and, as a result, have little personal contact with creation. They rarely see creatures and countryside, mountains and oceans. Instead of being able to enjoy God's free gifts, city dwellers often have to spend their time and money on costly man-made amusements. Television documentaries have introduced us to far more of the world's wonders than our ancestors ever knew; and, although our experience is usually secondhand, people are increasingly concerned with the environment.

The New Age movement loves the Creator's gift but rejects the Creator. Science and astronomy have opened our eyes to the vastness and complexity of creation. Most

people now value life, while they disregard the Giver of life. Isn't it time for us, believing children of the Creator, to set an example for the world? Shouldn't we give more time to enjoying His gift of life and expressing our gratitude in praise, worship, and daily adoration?

The world's selfish materialism will seem the best way to behave when nearly all of our activities cost money, when we are charged for virtually everything we do. If we are familiar with paying for things, it will seem right to us to charge rather than to give—or to expect some sort of return when we do give. However, our attitude will start to change when we soak ourselves in the gift of creation. God's amazing generosity will begin to infect us when we finally grasp the truth that the world's natural beauty is an amazing free gift to us all. Giving soon becomes second nature to those who live in an environment of endless generosity, which, of course, is exactly where we Christians do live all the time!

Personal Life

God created everything in the world and gave it to us all for our enjoyment and care, but He also made us unique individuals. He made you, and He made me. He has personally given us our very own existence. The Psalms include many hymns, which praise God for this gift of personal life. Psalm 139 is well known, especially verses 13-14:

For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

Sometimes we are pleased with our own achievements. We boast of what we have done. Occasionally, we might remember to thank our parents for

their contribution to our existence, but how often do we acknowledge that the hand of God is directly behind them? Our mind and body, our size and intellect, our family and race, even our breath—all of these are personal gifts. Remember, God does not love us because we are part of the world. He loves the world because it is full of people like us, whom He loves personally, passionately, and uniquely.

EXTRAVAGANT GIVING

When we think about God as Creator, we quickly see the extravagance of His giving: a universe which is immeasurably large, with gigantic galaxies spiralling out of sight; a lush planet which is teeming with life, packed with an enormous variety of plants and creatures. Time and again, God's people have had to admit the impossibility of counting the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore.

Enormous Variety

The story of Noah's Ark highlights the diversity typical of the Creator's giving. A massive ocean liner was needed to preserve a sample of all the known species. Whenever God gives, whatever He gives, there is a seemingly endless variety—animals, plants, climate, scenery, and so on. Why are there so many species of birds and insects? Why is every snowflake and fingerprint unique? Why are there so many differences between individuals? It is because God is such an incredibly extravagant Giver!

Psalms 104 and 148 describe the variety of creation, and naturally climax in pleas to praise the Lord. The extraordinary variety of creation shouts a message about God. His handiwork tells us something about Himself. It is not only that He is a generous Giver, it is also that His

giving is creative and varied. That is a vital lesson for us today!

Non-Stop Extravagance

When people think about God as Creator, they can fall into the trap of assuming that His creative work ended in Eden, but God's extravagant giving in creation is continuous. Lamentations 3:22-23 promises that,

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

Psalm 104 moves between what God did at creation and what He still does for creation. Verses 27-29 show that creation's continued existence depends on the Creator's extravagant, nonstop giving. Verse 30 makes it clear that God's creative giving is still relevant: *"Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created...."* We are drawing very near to God's final creative act. Every day brings Revelation 21:5 closer, when God has promised, *"... Behold, I make all things new"* It is revealing that in Revelation 21:6, God then says, *" ... I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."* We have already seen that the Bible begins with God promising men and women what He is giving them. Here, we see that the scriptures end with God guaranteeing yet another free gift. Truly, our Creator is the Great Nonstop Giver.

RISKY GIVING

All true giving must carry some sort of risk. In fact, if there is no risk, there is no gift. A gift cannot be considered a real gift if it is given with strict conditions which must be obeyed, or the gift will be snatched back by the giver.

Equally, a gift is not genuine if the giver is entirely uninterested in what happens to it. When we give a present to a friend, we have no control over what they do with it. We may hope that our present will be valued and useful, but we know there is a chance that it could be misused, ignored, forgotten, or broken. That is the risk we take in giving. Even if we include clear instructions with our gift, we know that these, and the present itself, can be casually disregarded.

Taken for Granted

So it is with God's gift to us of creation. There was always a risk that humanity would take it for granted, and that is exactly what has happened. Millions, perhaps billions, of people do not think of creation as a gift and do not give a moment's thought to the Giver. How does God feel about this? How do we feel when our carefully chosen gifts are ignored by someone we love? Does it cause God's love to decrease? Has He stopped giving, out of irritation and anger? Of course not! True giving does not think about the response and is not motivated solely by the hope of getting something in return. If God gave just to get some sort of response from us, it would not be selfless giving. He would not be all-loving!

Corrupted

When God made the world and gave it to humanity, there was a risk that His gift would be abused, spoiled, broken, polluted, and/or corrupted, and that is precisely what happened. In Romans 8:18-22, Paul makes it clear that creation is not to blame for its corruption. Like us, it longs for divine transformation, for redemption:

... the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the children of God.

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For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain until now (Romans 8:21-22).

It gets easier every day for us to see the way that men and women have spoiled God's gift of creation. Pollution has highlighted humanity's selfish wickedness. It is our fault that this precious, awesome gift is being ruined. We *and the gift* need the Giver to save us and to renew the gift.

THE REDEEMER'S GIFT

Many Christians think more about God as our Redeemer than as our Creator, but remember, He is only the Redeemer because He is the Creator, Who gave extravagant gifts which have been misused *and* corrupted. The Bible's passages explore worship of God equally as Creator and Redeemer – and *giving* is basic to both.

In this chapter, I will show that giving is fundamental to the character of God. I want us to grasp that God gives and gives, and we continue receiving! All of Christianity's great doctrines are based on some aspect of God's giving, but we will not understand why and how we should give until we know for certain that we serve and follow the all-giving *God*. The gift of creation may be incredibly wonderful, but we know that God's greatest gift of all is His only Son – especially the *death* of His Son.

THE GIFT OF SALVATION

The New Testament explains Jesus' death in several different ways, using a variety of expressions. That is because one figure of speech cannot provide a total understanding of what His death means. In this section, I will not be examining every detailed accomplishment of His glorious death. Instead, I will show how the key phrases illustrate God's generosity.

Sacrifice

The New Testament writers often use sacrificial language to describe Jesus' death. They do this to show three things:

1. That Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Testament rituals, which God provided to help people approach Him;
2. That all of the Jewish ritual sacrifices had ended;
3. That Jesus was the final sacrifice for our sins.

We will inspect the rituals later to see what they teach us about our giving, but here we are going to survey the biblical language which describes the greatest sacrifice of all. Jesus is repeatedly referred to as the slain Lamb of God, Whose precious blood takes away the sins of the world. We can read about this in John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:18-19; and Revelation 5:6-10, 13:8.

Paul describes Jesus as the true Passover Lamb in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, and as a sin offering in Romans 8:3. Ephesians 5:2 is probably his clearest description of sacrifice:

And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.

This important verse reveals much about Paul's understanding of sacrifice. It offers no hint of sacrifice being a means of placating an angry God. Instead, it shows that true sacrifice is always rooted in love and can never be reversed—because it is a complete giving up, a total release, of whatever is given.

Ephesians 5:2 brings out the idea that sacrifice, when it is the highest expression of love, is immensely pleasing to God. It shows that Jesus' selfless giving should have a profound effect on the way *we* live. In this verse, Paul tells

us to walk in love because Christ loved us. He goes on to say that the best expression of this love is that He gave Himself up for us as a sacrifice to God. This is precisely why we are starting our study of giving by gazing at God. We are called to live as He lived, to love as He loved, and to give as He gave. We will not know how to give until we have grasped the extent of God's giving.

The Book of Hebrews is the New Testament textbook on the doctrine of Jesus' sacrifice. I reiterate that in this book I will not be examining the accomplishments of His death; I will be showing what they teach about God's giving. Hebrews stresses the voluntary nature of Jesus' sacrifice, contrasting it with the helpless victims of the Old Testament ritual. It emphasizes that a sacrifice must be God's will if it is to be acceptable and pleasing to Him.

Hebrews ends with some practical conclusions based in sacrifice and with a prayer for sacrifice.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13:13, 15-16, 20-21).

These and other New Testament passages show conclusively that the sacrifice of Jesus' death was a voluntary gift of great love, at immense personal cost. It permanently dealt with our sin and made possible God's gift to us of forgiveness. The use of the word "sacrifice" dramatically underlined to the Jews living in the first

century the fact that God had given the best that He had and that His giving was irreversible.

Redemption

This was another New Testament word-picture which meant something special to people of the first century. Today, redemption is thought of as a religious word. Back then, it was the everyday word that was used to describe paying a price to obtain somebody's release from an evil. Prisoners of war might be released upon the payment of a fixed price called a "ransom." Slaves could be released by a ransom in one of two ways: either they paid their master for the price of their freedom, or they were purchased by a "god." In the second instance, a slave would pay his ransom money into the relevant idol's temple treasury, and then be ceremoniously sold to that god. Technically, he would always be the slave of that idol and would have occasional duties to perform at the god's temple. As far as people were concerned, he was a completely free man.

In both of these everyday usages of the word "redemption," it was the payment of the right price which mattered the most. Jesus taught that whoever sinned was the slave of sin. Paul often reminded his readers that they were, or had been, slaves of sin, under the sentence of death. Without redemption, their slavery would continue. The New Testament writers seized upon this word-picture as a wonderful description for Jesus' death, because it was packed with meaning for the people of their day. Jesus' death was called "a ransom for many," and redemption language is often used in the scripture.

Titus 2:14 describes Jesus as One Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. 1 Timothy 2:6 says that Jesus "... gave himself as a ransom for

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all...." 1 Corinthians 6:20 specifies that we were "... *bought with a price...."* Colossians 1:13-14 says that God:

... hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins....

Ephesians 1:7-8 uses similar words to underscore God's extreme generosity: In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence

There are many other verses in the New Testament which use the picture of redemption to describe the Father's gift of His Son and the Son's self-giving. However, it's not just a New Testament idea. Jews in the Old Testament also worshiped God as their Redeemer. Exodus 6:6 and Psalms 77:15 speak of God's redeeming His people with a stretched out arm. Because God loved His people, He redeemed them at cost to Himself. His great effort was regarded as "the price."

Just as we have seen that God's creating did not end in Eden, so the New Testament also shows that God's redeeming did not stop at Calvary. Ephesians 4:30 points us forward to a future day of redemption. The language of redemption is truly glorious! It makes plain that we have been redeemed from a great evil. We are slaves that have been set free and prisoners of war who have been released. More importantly for us in this book, it also reveals that God, in His generosity, was willing to pay an enormous price.

Payment is basic to the word-picture of redemption. Whenever God is worshiped as Redeemer, we must realize that His is being praised as a Great Purchaser. The price

He paid is the life, the blood, and the death of His only beloved Son. Do not forget that God was not forced to redeem us. He did so at immense personal cost. Why? Because of His great love, and because He is a generous giver by nature.

The New Testament also shows us that redemption, like sacrifice, should have a profound effect on the way we live. 1 Corinthians 6:20 states: *"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* Galatians goes further. In Galatians 3.13-14, we are told that *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law"* so that we might receive both *"... the blessing of Abraham ... and ... the promise of the Spirit...."* Then in 5:1, we are urged not to submit again to slavery because Christ has set us free so that we will remain free. This shows that when God gave for us in redemption, He did not give in order to receive anything for Himself in return. Instead, He gave so that He could give to us even more of His blessings. That is the sort of giver He is! That is the pattern of giving which we are called to follow as God's children.

Justification

The New Testament used this word-picture to describe the effects of Jesus' death. The words "sacrifice" and "redemption" reminded early believers of idolatrous temple worship and slave markets, but the word "justification" made them think of courts of law. The term "justify" is a legal expression which means the opposite of the word "condemn." When the Bible describes God justifying sinners, it means that we are not condemned. We are acquitted by the Judge of all the Earth.

True justice can never be purchased. Because all humanity has sinned, we deserve nothing but condemnation from the universal Judge. However, Paul

makes it clear in Romans 3:23-24 that even though "... *all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God....*" we are "... *justified freely by his grace....*" Once again, we see that it is all a free gift. There is nothing we can do to offset our sins. There is nothing we can do to earn our acquittal. The all-giving God acknowledges our guilt, but He pardons those who are united with Jesus as a free gift! Read Romans 5:15-21, and praise God!

The doctrine of justification is one of the most misunderstood Christian doctrines and is often confused with other ideas. However, I am not explaining the detailed achievements of Jesus' death in this chapter. I am merely pointing out that the Bible describes Calvary and its accomplishments in terms of a gift. As with all of God's giving, justification pertains to the future as well as to the past. We do not only look back at God's gifts, we also look forward to them. 1 Corinthians 6:11 reflects: "... *ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*" Romans 8:33 speaks of the present: "... *It is God that justifieth.*" Romans 5:19 looks to the future: "... *by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*" Justification means that the divine verdict of guilty but pardoned, rather than guilty and condemned, has been declared. It is this conviction of pardon which forms the basis of our assurance as Christians.

Those of us who have accepted this gift by faith can go on to make one of two responses. The most obvious response is to live a life of thanksgiving. We can be so grateful for God's gift that we allow it to change us. That is the point of this book, to make us start living and giving like Him, out of gratitude to Him. The second response is a casual attitude to sin. In Romans 6:1, Paul recognized that the assurance of acquittal may lead some people to be careless about sinning. He then quickly rejected this idea

as unthinkable. The current lack of giving in the Church surely suggests that many of today's Christians are not exactly overflowing with gratitude for their redemption—the greatest gift of all.

RECONCILIATION

For first-century people, this word-picture described the achievements of Jesus' death in terms of human relationships. It was the word they used for ending hostilities, for finally bridging the gap after a nasty, long-lasting quarrel, for making peace at the end of a war. Throughout the Bible, it is clear that sinners are the enemies of God. The New Testament makes it plain that God is vigorously opposed to everything evil. This means that it is impossible for people and God to have an intimate relationship without reconciliation.

We all know that the way to mend a broken human relationship is to take away the cause of the quarrel and offer forgiveness. We can apologize for something we have said or done, pay any money that might be due, make reparation or restitution as appropriate, and so on. In every case, the way to reconciliation lies through grappling effectively with the root cause of the enmity. The Son died to put away our sin. As a result, the Father now offers to forgive us. Together, They have made the way wide open for all people to come back to God. That is what is meant by reconciliation.

Romans 5:10 states that "*... when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son....*" Both Colossians 1:15-22 and Ephesians 2:1-22 make extensive use of the reconciliation picture. Read them now and notice how they do this in passages which present God as the Creator. Remember, it is the all-giving Creator Who

gives what is needed to make reconciliation possible. Ephesians 2:14 shows that Christ "... is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" Then, in verse 15, it goes on to state that Christ did this so that He could "... make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace ..." and in verse 16 "... that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

The word "reconciliation," like the other words we have looked at, should make a difference. In 2 Corinthians 5:18, we are told that: "... all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" We all know from everyday experience that gifts are a vital part of mending broken relationships. From a bunch of flowers after a domestic argument right up to reparations after a war, giving is the medicine which heals human enmity. Giving for human reconciliation works something like this. An offender offers a gift with sincere apologies to the person he has hurt. The one who has been hurt may then either accept the gift and offer sincere forgiveness, or turn their back on the offender and continue the enmity.

Jesus offered His life on our behalf to the One Who had been hurt by our sin. God has accepted Jesus' gift and has offered us the gift of forgiveness. It is the gift of Jesus' death which has made possible our reconciliation with God. Reconciliation without gifts is impossible because it is an action which must include giving. As God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, it is urgent that we start to become people who always give as generously and cheerfully as our God.

THE GIFT OF LOVE

Ephesians, Chapter 2, is a vital chapter for any study of

The Giving God

God's all-giving nature. Verses 4-10 summarize wonderfully the nature of the creating, redeeming God we worship:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

These verses define God as being rich in mercy. They show that He has great love for all of those who are dead through their trespasses and sins. They demonstrate that our redemption is given so that God can then give us even more from His immeasurable riches of grace. They prove that we have been redeemed with a purpose—for good works.

It is natural for people to give presents to those that they love. What is different about God is that His loving giving embraces all of humanity—even those who are His enemies. God does not restrict His love and giving to those who deserve it (none of us deserve it), to those who have earned it (none of us can earn it), or to those who might give something back in return (not one of us could ever repay enough to make it up). In fact, God is so rich in mercy that the Bible describes Him as merciful. Mercy dominates and characterizes all of God's activities.

Much Christian giving today is restricted and shaped by concerns which are absent in God's giving. People want to know whether the person or society is trustworthy,

whether they will make good use of the gift, or whether they have a good track record. Thank God that He does not act like that, or none of us would ever have received anything! God is rich in mercy. He gives freely to all without any conditions. He gives as generously to the undeserving as to the righteous, and He does this because He is filled by enormous love for His corrupt and fallen creation. Remember, God gives because He loves. No matter whether His gifts are spiritual or material, every one of them is an expression of His love. We will never begin to *give* like Him until we start to *love* like Him. We will not develop in our God-given ministry of reconciliation until selfless love is our strongest motive for giving anything and everything.

There is a job for us to do. We are to be reconcilers—ambassadors for Christ—urging people to be reconciled to God. We have seen that this involves giving like God. We are to do good by sharing what we have, and now we know that this means sacrifice. Most importantly of all, we are to walk in love because Jesus loved us. We are called to care so much for the physical and spiritual condition of others that we give, and give, and go on giving of ourselves and from our resources.

A few people have suggested that I over-emphasize giving, but the only question there should be about giving is why we give so little in response to God's enormous love. I think that those who urge caution in giving should join us in gazing at the Man on the Cross. Perhaps then they will start to express more gratitude for His extravagant love. God is our standard. Jesus is our example. Calvary is our pattern. Our Creator and Redeemer has given everything for us. Let us—in gratitude for what we have received from Him—now become givers like Him.

CHAPTER TWO

GIVING IN ISRAEL

In this chapter, I will show the level of giving that God demanded from Israel in the days of the Old Testament. If we are to appreciate the degree of generosity which God expects today in His Church, we must grasp the principles that He laid down so long ago. In the next chapter, we will learn from incidents in the lives of Old Testament people, but here we will be returning to God's first rules of giving. There were three areas of giving for the children of Israel:

1. They gave sacrifices to God.
2. They gave tithes to the poor and to religious leaders.
3. They gave free-will offerings for special projects.

We will look at these areas one at a time to discover the principles involved, but not to examine the details.

SACRIFICES

Sacrifices were gifts given directly to God. Cain's and Abel's gifts are the first sacrifices offered to God in the Bible. As we will see in the next chapter, patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also honored and thanked God with sacrifices; however, it was Moses who laid down God's laws about sacrifices for the Jews. These regulations are scattered throughout Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The first seven chapters of Leviticus are the most important sections on sacrifices of all. There were five types of sacrifices, all with different details and purposes. I am not going to describe them here, as we are

concerned only with the principles behind all sacrifices.

What Was Sacrificed

There were two basic principles guiding what could be sacrificed. First, every sacrifice had to come from the personal property of the worshiper—animals, crops, or produce were acceptable. People could catch fish and wild animals and eat these themselves, but they could not offer them to God. Wild animals were thought to belong to God already, whereas domestic animals were deemed to be the worshiper's personal property. The Jews could not offer to God anything in sacrifice which they had unlawfully obtained. Only goods which had been produced by the sweat of their brow were acceptable. The second principle was that only the best could be given to God. The offering had to be without blemish. Physically perfect, mature, male animals were the preferred sacrifices. The poor were allowed to offer God less valuable animals, like doves, but these still had to be the best available specimens. If even a dove was too expensive, they could make an offering of cereals, but it had to be the best they had. The people could not keep back the best of their property for themselves—offering God their cast-offs, leftovers, and rubbish. Instead, they willingly gave Him their best, and that is the principle we are called to follow.

When Sacrifices Were Made

The five types of ritual sacrifices laid down by Moses were all made on a wide variety of occasions. They were offered personally and nationally, privately and publicly, regularly and as special needs arose. Numbers, Chapters 28-29, gives a full list of the daily, weekly monthly, and annual public sacrifices. Exodus, Chapter 12, shows how the Passover was celebrated privately within the family unit.

In Israel, no matter what the reason, whenever the people turned to God, they worshiped Him by offering Him sacrifices. Sometimes we think today that the Jews only offered sacrifices to deal with their sin. The Bible shows that they gave sacrificially to God when they rejoiced, as well as when they wept. Sacrifices were offered to seal a vow (2 Samuel 15:7-9) and to release a man from a vow (Numbers, Chapter 6). They were spontaneous acts of worship (Judges 13:17-23). They marked the purification of a woman after childbirth and of lepers in the day of their healing (Leviticus, Chapters 12 and 14). They were featured at the ordination of a priest and at the offering of a Levite to God (Leviticus, Chapter 8, and Numbers, Chapter 8). They were offered at times of national repentance and imminent battle (1 Samuel, Chapter 7, and 13:8-12). They were central to royal coronations and the dedication of sanctuaries (1 Kings 1:9-12; 8:1-13). Two of the five types of sacrifices (the communion and the holocaust) were used for all of the purposes we have just seen but particularly for celebrating, thanking, and consecrating. The other three types (cereal, sin, and guilt offerings) had a different purpose. They temporarily covered the worshipers' sins and canceled their guilt.

Why Sacrifices Were Made

Holocaust and communion sacrifices helped people express their feelings of being creatures who belonged to God. The holocaust represented the dedication of everything that the worshiper had and was. The communion, which was eaten by the priest and the worshiper together, reminded people of the vital relationship between creature and Creator. The sin and guilt sacrifices enabled the Jews to display their human sense of separation from their holy God. As time went by,

People began abusing the sacrificial system laid down by Moses. The prophets started to plead for an extra type of sacrifice—for practical actions as well as symbolic gestures, for personal morality *and* legal ritual.

This maturing in Israel's knowledge of God is illustrated in Psalms 50:8-23, 51:16-19; Proverbs 15:8, 21:27; Isaiah 58:1-14, 66:1-4, 66:18-21; Jeremiah 6:20, 7:21-28; Hosea 8:11-13; Amos 5:21-24; and Micah 6:6-8. Isaiah 1:11-20 expresses it most clearly of all:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? Saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings... and I delight not in the blood of bullocks... When ye come to appear before me... Bring no more vain oblations ... I am weary to bear them ... when ye make many prayers, I will not hear... put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Gradually, the Jews came to understand sacrifice as both a ceremony to deal with personal sin and also a continuous holy way of life. This idea reaches its Old Testament climax in the four servant songs of Isaiah (42:1-9, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12). These prophetic songs present a person whose sacrificial death deals with the sins of others, and whose sacrificial life is characterized by love, justice, humility, and suffering. These extraordinary songs point to Jesus. In fact, the whole system of Jewish ritual sacrifices points to Him—for they express a need which only He fully satisfies, embody a faith that He alone can justify and, most importantly of all for this book, demand a lifestyle which only He makes possible.

In the ritual sacrifices, the victim was always a substitute, but the worshipers always had to deny themselves for God. Christ may have died in our place permanently to cover our sin, but self-denial is still the

ritual demanded by God of the lives that He rules. It is a mistake to think that the old sacrificial system has no relevance for our lives today except in revealing the meaning of Jesus' death. The Jews gave their best to God in thanksgiving, dedication, intercession, praise, and worship, as well as in repentance and pleas for forgiveness.

The prophets showed that sacrifice should mean more than a regular offering given out of habit. It should be a way of life which affects every thought and action. These sacrificial principles still stand. The Cross has not ended their relevance. We give only from our own property. We give only the best. We give whenever we approach God. If we want to become givers who please God, we would do well to implement these principles.

TITHES

Tithes were gifts given to provide income partly for the poor but mainly for religious leaders. In Israel, the people gave their sacrifices to God. Tithes were additional to sacrifices and went principally to the Levites. The Old Testament does not make clear the precise arrangements for the tithes, and the practice seems to have changed through the centuries. However, as with sacrifices, we are concerned here with general principles rather than fine details. We want to learn about God's broad pattern of giving from the way that the Israelites seem to have tithed.

What Was Tithed

Leviticus 27:30-32 makes it plain that all crops and animals had to be tithed. Whenever the people of Israel harvested their fields or their fruit trees, one-tenth of the cereals and fruit had to be given away. It was the same with their animals. Once a year, the owner counted the

animals as they walked to pasture. Every tenth one was given away. This was to insure that a fair selection was made. The owner could not use the tithe to get rid of all of his inferior animals. Equally, he did not have to choose only the best ones.

Crops and young animals were the people's income. They worked all year and harvested the result. If the harvest was large, so was the tithe. If the crops failed, the tithe was smaller. In practice, the tithe was one-tenth of each Jewish family's annual income. If anybody preferred to keep their own crops and pay the tithe in case, they could, but they had to add 20% to the tithe's value. They were not permitted to do this with their animal harvest. Flocks and herds had to be tithed in kind.

It is vital that we grasp the principle that tithes are *extra* to sacrifices. The value of what a Jewish family had offered in sacrifice during the year was not deducted from their tithe! Instead, they sacrificed from the nine-tenths of their income which was leftover after they had given their tithe.

Who Received the Tithe

The Bible always speaks of the tithe as belonging to God and being given to God. Leviticus 27:30 states: "*And all the tithe of the land... the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord.*" In Malachi 3:6-12, God explains that the people are robbing God by not bringing the full tithe. However, unlike sacrifices, tithes were God's special provision for particular groups of people. Families paid their tithe once a year. For two years out of three, they gave it to the Levites and priests in Jerusalem. In the third year, they gave it to the poor in their own immediate locality.

Numbers 18:21-32 explains why the Jews' tithes were given to the Levites. Verse 21 sums it up: "*... behold, I*

have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.” These officials—because of the nature of their religious status and duties—had no means of income, livelihood, or inheritance. The Levites were full-time auxiliary workers who supported the priests, cared for the fabric in the tabernacle and temple, and organized the feasts and festivals throughout the land. The priests, who were far fewer in number, also had no income. They were also provided for by the people's tithe, and they received a tenth of the Levites' share. Numbers 18:25-29 shows that when they had received the tithe, the Levites had to give the best tenth to the priests.

The Levites and priests were the church leaders of their day. The people's tithes, for two years out of three, were given to them to enable them to perform their God-given responsibilities. The Levites collected the tithes and then gave the best tenth of that to the priests. Both groups of leaders then stewarded what they had received so that it would last through the third year when they did not receive any tithes. In that third year, instead of being taken to Jerusalem, the tithes were stored in the local towns. Deuteronomy 14:29 shows that it was kept there so that:

... the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.

Why Tithes Were Given

People must have given their tithes for a mixture of reasons. Doubtless, some tithed eagerly because they recognized that everything belongs to God, and they were returning to Him what was only His to begin with. Surely,

some tithed unwillingly and did so only because Moses' law said that they must. They would have preferred to have kept their tithe, but they would not disobey the God of Israel. Some would have tithed joyfully because they wanted to provide for their religious leaders and for the poor. Others would have tithed only out of habit or peer-group pressure. Yet, whatever their different reasons were for giving, God promised to bless *all* who tithed *fully* and to curse those who did not tithe or who tithed less than the full amount. In Deuteronomy 14:29, Moses urges tithing:

... that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.

Despite this holy promise, many people abused God's system of tithing. God's Word records a time when the Levites were not making right offerings, and the people were oppressing the poor and thrusting aside foreigners:

... Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 3:7-12

Tithing Principles

It is obviously not appropriate for the Church today to

try to implement all of the details of Moses' law, but the principles behind the law are still highly relevant because they reveal so much of God's heart. For example: we are not meant to make ritual blood sacrifices anymore, but we are still called to give our best to God at every opportunity. So it is with tithing. We should not copy all of the details of the Jewish system, but we are foolish if we ignore the following four divine principles:

1. Tithing is only one part of our giving.
2. Tithing is God's pattern for providing for our church leaders and for the poor in our community.
3. A tithe is 10% of our annual income.
4. God materially blesses those who tithe fully.

There has been tremendous controversy in recent years about tithing, but virtually all of the disputes have been about modern details which ignore the four foregoing biblical principles. I believe that God expects all of His children today to tithe, but I think that He also wants us to sacrifice and to make free-will offerings on top of giving our tithe. I believe that tithing is meant specifically to provide income for our modern day priests and Levites *and* for the poor around us. I think that God wants us to use about two-thirds of our tithe to enable some church leaders to function in priestly ministry (pasturing and teaching) and others to work in Levitical ministry (administration and caretaking). I believe God wants us to make sure that the other one-third of our tithe is used to provide for the poor in our community.

In the Bible, tithes do *not* go toward buildings or special projects. As we will see, those things are to be financed out of the offerings or even special offerings. I believe that we should continue to follow this principle today. God's system of tithing is meant to provide income

for people—mostly for those in ministry and some for those who are poor. Just imagine. If we followed this principle today, we would be able to release about one-tenth of all believing families into some type of full-time ministry! It does not matter much how these principles are implemented. The details may vary slightly from place to place.

In Israel, the peoples tithes for the poor were all collected together. So it seems to make sense for our full tithes to go to our local church and for the leaders to use some of that to provide for the poor. Modern leaders should not forget God's warnings to the Levites in Malachi 3:3 for misusing the tithes! Whatever we do, we should never forget the principle that God materially blesses those who tithe fully. This should not mean limiting our giving to one-tenth of our income. Tithing fully means giving ten percent of our income to provide income for leaders, then starting to give sacrificially of our best to God, making our offerings for special needs and projects. This is the sort of tithing which God blesses! We see little evidence of divine blessing today because so few people follow His tithing principles.

FREE-WILL OFFERINGS

Free-will offerings formed the third aspect of Israel's giving. These were usually given for special projects, especially building. All gifts—whether sacrifices, tithes, or free-will offerings—were understood as being given to God. While sacrifices were offered directly to God, tithes were given to the religious leaders and the poor, while free-will offerings were made for special projects.

The Tabernacle Offering

God gave Moses clear instructions for collecting the

materials needed to build the Tabernacle. In Exodus 25:2-3, He says:

Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass

This was not a tithe. People did not have to give an equal percentage of their income. It was a free-will offering. They were not obligated to contribute. Those with willing hearts were asked to give as much or as little as they chose. Exodus 35:1-29 and 36:2-7 describe what happened when Moses obeyed God. Read these passages carefully, and catch the spirit of a genuine biblical free-will offering.

The offering was voluntary. The people did not have to contribute.

Take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the Lord

Exodus 35:5

The offering was specific. Everyone knew exactly what was needed.

... goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood, and oil for the light, and spices for anointing oil, and for the sweet incense, and onyx stones, and stones to be set for the ephod....

Exodus 35:6-9

The offering was purposeful. The Jews knew precisely how their gifts would be used.

The tabernacle, his tent, and his covering, his taches, and his boards, his bars, his pillars, and his sockets, the ark, and the staves thereof with the mercy seat, and the veil of the covering... to do service in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister

Giving and Receiving

in the priests' office.

Exodus 35:11-12, 19

The givers were divinely motivated. Only the people who were moved by God gave.

And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments. And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing hearted....

Exodus 35:21-22

The offering ended when enough had been given. The leaders did not try to collect more than was needed for the publicly declared purpose of the offering.

And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much.

Exodus 36:6-7

The First Temple Offering

The story of the free-will offering for Israel's first temple is recorded in 1 Chronicles, Chapters 28 and 29. Read these chapters and see how the principles we have noted were followed again. The people did not have to contribute. The money was not raised from tithes "*.... who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?*" (1 Chronicles 29:5). They knew what was needed and how their gifts would be used. Chapter 28:11-19 outlines Davids detailed plan of the work and materials required for the temple. "*All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern*" (1 Chronicles 28:19). All of the giving was

divinely motivated. *"Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord" (1 Chronicles 29:9).*

The Second Temple Offering

The story of the free-will offerings used to build Israel's second temple is scattered throughout the writings of Ezra and Nehemiah. It begins with Cyrus' decree in Ezra 1:4:

And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of this place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

The account continues through Ezra 1:5-6, 2:68-69, 3:5, and 7:16 and Nehemiah 7:70-72. They show again how free-will offerings were God's pattern of giving for providing the resources for special building projects in Israel.

Free-Will Offerings for the Poor

Although there were occasional gigantic free-will offerings for holy buildings, the Jews were also under a general duty to provide generously for the poor. Jews were often reminded by God to love strangers, not to oppress them. God gave them two reasons for this: God loved strangers, and Israel knew what it was like to be foreigners from their experiences in Egypt. Deuteronomy 10:17-19 states:

For the Lord your God... regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless, and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The Jews were also instructed to give freely to the poor. Deuteronomy 15:7-8,10 says:

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If there be a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him ... Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.

The same sort of generosity toward strangers and the poor is spelled out in Deuteronomy 24:19. Once again, there is a promise of blessing from God for those who give freely to the poor.

When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

It is important for us to recognize that God's promise of blessing here is for those who give generously to provide for those who are poor.

Read Isaiah 58:6-11 and see the amazing blessings for those who share their bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into their homes:

... if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Isaiah 58:10-11

God does not promise to bless those who give to building projects. The building is their blessing. They can always see it, enjoy it, and be blessed when they worship God within it. He does guarantee to bless those who give

generously to the poor and to bless those who follow His tithing principles. Remember, if we want to receive God's blessing, we have to give in God's way.

ISRAEL'S GIVING PRINCIPLES

We have seen that giving in Israel involved sacrifices, tithes, and free-will offerings. Each was for a different and definite purpose, *all* had distinctive principles, and every Jew was asked to give in all three ways. I have distilled the following five general giving principles from all of the details we have examined.

Summary of Principles:

1. We should give the best that we have to God every time we approach Him.
2. We should give a tenth of our income. The largest chunk should go toward providing income for Christians in full-time service, and the smaller part toward providing resources for the local poor.
3. We should give to capital projects only when we are moved by God and when we know exactly what is needed, why it is needed, and what it will be used for.
4. We should give in small, practical ways to the poor whenever possible.
5. We should expect our work to be greatly blessed by God.

When we add these Old Testament principles to our understanding of God as the all-giving, all-generous Creator and Redeemer, we will be well on the way to becoming givers after God's own heart, to becoming blessed and cheerful givers.

CHAPTER THREE

GIVERS IN ISRAEL

Giving began with God. In Genesis 3:16-21, God offered Adam and Eve replacement clothes. Animals died to provide the garments. Surely, it must have been God Who slew and skinned some of those perfect creatures, which only a short while before He had created, blessed, and described as "good." This incident teaches much about the best Old Testament giving, especially sacrifice. The gift was permanent. The cost to the Giver was considerable. Those who benefited were completely undeserving. The Givers loss was absolute. His gift was perfect. His only motives were grace, love, and mercy. Finally, those to whom the gift was offered had the freedom to accept or reject the present.

CAIN AND ABEL

The first mention of a human gift is found in Genesis 4:3-5. Both Cain and Abel offered gifts to God, but God looked favorably only on Abel's gift. Cain's gift was rejected. Hebrews 11:4 comments, *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts"* What was the difference between the gifts? Why did God accept one and reject the other? Abel gave *"... the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof...."* (Genesis 4:4). Cain only *"... brought of the fruit of the ground...."* (Genesis 4:3). Abel seems to have given the best that he had, which always takes faith. Cain appears to have offered a less costly gift. Neither gift was made to earn God's favor. Both

were natural attempts at expressing thanks. Cain did not risk giving God his best and was rejected. Abel gave with faith and made the astonishing discovery that gives something back to those who give their best.

Immediately, we now will begin looking at givers in Israel. We can learn three new things about giving to God:

1. Our gift should be so valuable or important to us personally that we need faith to give it.
2. Our gift may be rejected by God if it is less than our best.
3. God gives something back to those who give their best to Him in faith.

Please note that God's gift of righteous approval to Abel did not prevent Cain from killing him! In fact, this very gift triggered the jealous anger which made Cain become a murderer.

NOAH

Noah offered the next recorded gift to God. In Genesis 8:20, we read that after the flood had subsided, Noah built the first altar and offered God a great sacrifice. Noah gave the best that he had. He sacrificed “... of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl...” These were creatures that he had lovingly cared for throughout the flood, ones that he had planned to use to re-populate the Earth. He gave them up to God—with faith—in thanks for his family's safe deliverance. It was a spontaneous gesture of gratitude by Noah. God had not requested thanks. He did not need what was given. However, God was so pleased with Noah's spontaneous gift that He rewarded him with the promise of a fabulous future blessing.

Read these promises in Genesis 8:21-9:17. Pay special

attention to Genesis 9:3, where God promises Noah, *“Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.”* Underline Genesis 9:7, where God blesses him with these words: *“And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.”* These important verses show us that those who give their best to God are unexpectedly repaid in blessing.

Today, sadly, we often think that a spoken prayer of thanks is all that is appropriate after God has helped us in a special way. I promise that we will receive far more of God's blessings if we learn from men like Noah to express our gratitude with sacrificial giving, as well as with words.

ABRAHAM

Abraham teaches us much about giving. For example, he willingly gave Lot first choice of the land (Genesis 13:5-18). He gave a tithe of everything to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17-24). He gave hospitality to strangers (Genesis 18:1-15). It is Abraham's giving of his long-awaited son, Isaac, in Genesis, Chapter 22, which teaches us the most. For the first time, God asked a man for a gift, and He wanted the best. Abraham was asked to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah, site of the future Jerusalem temple.

Isaac, who by then was about 30 years old, was prepared to be the willing victim—to give himself. His elderly father was ready to give his only son, but how pointless the proposed death must have seemed to them both, especially after all of God's promises down through the years. By faith Abraham seized the knife and prepared to plunge it into his son. Human reasoning usually concludes that sacrificial giving is stupid, but Abraham believed that God knew best. He did not understand why God wanted him to give his son. He did not know that

nearly 2,000 years later God would go through similar agonies on exactly the same mountain with respect to the sacrifice of His only Son. Abraham simply acted in faith and prepared to obey his God and to give Him his best.

In Genesis 22:5, Abraham told his servants that he and Isaac were going to worship. This may seem a very strange word for what Abraham intended to do—but only to those people who do not realize that giving is the essence of worship. The Hebrew word for the English word "worship" is *shachah*. It means "to bow the self down." Many people today mistakenly understand worship to mean singing songs, saying prayers, and listening to sermons. In Israel, worship meant giving. God is worshiped when our self is bowed before God in recognition that His will is best and accepted with thanksgiving. Abraham put aside his plans for Isaac, his reputation with his servants, even his love for his wife. He bowed his self to God's will and prepared to give that which was most precious to him. When he raised the knife, he reached heights of worship unknown to most people today, who regularly raise their arms in praise and prayer. See how God responded to Abraham's faith-filled willingness to give his only son!

Read Genesis 22:15-18 and grasp the link between faith-filled giving and extravagant blessing. Abraham and his son had been ready for death without any hint of reward. They just wanted to please God. They knew that obedient giving pleased Him. Faithful, selfless, loving obedience was their sole motivation. God's grace rewarded man's sacrificial giving with a glorious promise of blessing.

This link between blessing and giving sacrificially to God is repeated in Genesis 46:1-4. Jacob's sacrifice at Beersheba was followed by the twin promises of God's

presence and considerable future reward.

RUTH

The Book of Ruth tells a story which is one of the best biblical examples of the way that God wants us to care for the poor and for foreigners passing through. We know that many times the people in Israel failed to keep God's law and fell far short of His perfect standards. In this small book we see one man, Boaz, living the Deuteronomy 24:10-22 rule and being blessed for it in quite an unexpected way. Ruth, a poor widow from the country of Moab, went into the Bethlehem fields at harvest to collect any barley which might have been missed by the harvesters. Not only did Boaz obey the law and allow Ruth to "glean," he also gave her far more than the law demanded. He provided her with food and refreshment and told his workers to make sure that they dropped extra barley for her to collect. The story ends with Boaz marrying Ruth and the startling revelation that David was their great-grandson. This means that Jesus Himself descended from this act of loving generosity. Truly, the Book of Ruth shows how God blesses those who give to the poor!

JOB

We have seen that God announced His blessing at moments in the lives of Old Testament characters when they were giving to Him or to the poor; however, it would be wrong to think that God only blessed people when they gave in these ways. Our gracious God blesses the sinful and the undeserving. Yet some people still think like Job's friends and assume that success and wealth are always the fruit of obedience, and that failure and poverty are always the result of sin. The Book of Job shoots down this false

idea.

Job was a wealthy man who was “... *perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.*” (Job 1:1) There is no embarrassment about his wealth, but it is not presented as a result of his virtue. In fact, Satan suggests in Job 1:6-12 that it is the other way around, that Job served God only because of his wealth. God allowed Satan to impoverish Job. He lost his wealth, his health, and his family, yet he did not turn away from God. Job refused to curse God or reject Him. The people around Job insisted that his misfortune must be the result of sin, but it simply was not true.

The book ends with Job's fortune being restored double (Job 42:10-17). Surely this book is proof that wealth and poverty are not necessarily the result of obedience or sin.

REUEL, MANOAH, AND THE OLD MAN OF GIBEAH

The Old Testament takes for granted the responsibility of providing and caring for travelers and visitors. We have already noted Abraham's hospitality. In Genesis, Chapter 18, he treated strangers as honored guests and made the best possible provision for them.

In Exodus 2:16-22, Reuel was surprised that his daughters could meet a stranger and not invite him to a meal. He ordered them to “... *call him, that he may eat bread*” (Exodus 2:20).

Judges 13:15 records how Manoah treated his unknown guest in the same generous way as Abraham. Whereas, the Ammonites and Moabites are condemned in Deuteronomy 23:3-6 for failing to treat the traveling Israelites hospitably.

We do not know the name of the old man of Gibeah in

Judges, Chapter 19, yet he stands out as one of the great biblical examples of giving to visitors. Not only did he receive a stranger into his home, he also refused to accept any contribution by his guest. Later, when his visitor was threatened by his neighbors, he tried to protect him. It is rather like the story of Lot in Sodom, when his duty as host was greater than his duty as father.

As well as this general responsibility of giving hospitality to strangers and visitors, the people of Israel also had a special duty of providing for God's servants, the prophets. We will see this soon in the lives of men like Elijah and Elisha.

DAVID

The Bible never hides the sins or character defects of God's children. If it did, we would despair of ever being useful to Him. Instead, the Bible constantly reveals how people sin, fall, and rise again to serve God. Nobody in the Old Testament shows this more clearly than David.

David teaches us a few truths about giving. In 1 Samuel, Chapter 25, he asks Nabal to provide for his men. Nabal refuses. In anger, David sets out to kill Nabal, only to be stopped by the generosity of Abigail, Nabal's wife. David then sees his error and is glad that he was been prevented from taking vengeance and killing without cause. It is easy to feel angry (like David) when our pleas for people to give are rejected, and it looks like our plans will fail. We must recognize that sometimes God uses people like Abigail to provide in an unexpected way.

David's burning ambition was to build a house for God in Jerusalem. He longed to do this more than anything else; yet, God made it clear to him, through Nathan, the prophet, that it was not God's will for him to

build the temple. Even though his hopes were dashed, David did not sulk or get angry. Instead, he made thorough preparations and gave as generously as he could so that another could have the fame and glory of building God a house. In 1 Chronicles 22:2-16 and 29:2-5, we see the extent of David's astonishing giving which enabled Solomon to build his father's dream project. This is a vital lesson for us today. We should learn to give with David's generosity so that others are enabled to accomplish what we had hoped to achieve ourselves.

SOLOMON

David's son built the temple. It took Solomon 20 years to complete. During that time, he became a byword for wealth. The Bible devotes much space to listing Solomon's riches and concludes that he "... exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom" (1 Kings 10:23).

The Queen of Sheba's famous visit highlights Solomon's affluence. In 1 Kings 10:7, she says, "*Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.*" There is no mystery about Solomon's wealth. 1 Kings 3:13 makes it clear that it was a gift from God.

And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

Sadly, the Bible does not record one instance of Solomon giving anything to anybody. His harsh policies insured that he lost the goodwill and loyalty of the Israelites, and his foreign wives led him to break his covenant with God. Despite all of his God-given wisdom and wealth, Solomon stands as an example of a man who

never learned to give.

ELIJAH AND ELISHA

A succession of incidents in the lives of Elijah and Elisha shows the importance of providing for God's servants, the prophets. After Elijah had announced the impending drought (1 Kings 17:1), he was sent to the brook Cherith, where God provided for him. Next, God sent Elijah to Zarephath, in the neighboring country of Zidon, where he met a very poor widow. Elijah asked her for food and drink, but she was at the end of her natural resources and expecting to die soon from hunger. Elijah told the widow to make a cake with the last of her flour and oil and give it to him. Afterwards, she could prepare food for her family. He promised that God would bless her by miraculously supplying her needs when she gave of her substance to God's servant. The woman did as requested and provided us with a wonderful example of faith-filled, sacrificial giving.

This is a very important story for us today, because it clearly shows how God blesses those people who give faithfully and sacrificially to God's servants. The widow was not a wealthy person. She had virtually nothing and no prospects of anything except death from starvation.

The prophet did not ask her for much in the world's eyes, only *"a little cake"*; yet, this was more than the woman could humanly afford. The prophet urged her to give by promising her that her *"... barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."* (1 Kings 17:14). This would have seemed a ridiculous promise to anybody listening. They would have thought that Elijah was tricking her into giving him her last piece of food; but Elijah was a prophet. He spoke at *God's* prompting, and

what he promised came true. When the woman acted in faith on his words, she discovered that his God was completely reliable. In fact, she was better off after giving than if she had not given!

In 1 Kings, Chapter 18, we learn about Obadiah, who –at enormous risk to himself–provided generously for 100 of God's prophets! The Bible records several similar incidents in Elisha's life. One of the most critical chapters about giving in the Old Testament is 2 Kings, Chapter 4. It records three stories which each teach us something vital about finances for today.

Verses 1-8 of 2 Kings, Chapter 4, show how God miraculously helps people to be released from debt. A widow turned to Elisha for advice and help. He had no money of his own with which to pay her debts. He instead gave her God's plan of action. It would have seemed foolish to her neighbors, but it was God's provision for her need. When she acted in faith on the prophet's instructions, she was able to do as Elisha had said: *"... Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest."* (2 Kings 4:7).

Verses 8-17 tell the story of a wealthy woman, who first regularly gave Elisha food and then built an extension on her home especially for him. Once more we read about how God blessed a woman for her generosity to one of God's servants. It is clear that God's gift to her (a barren woman) of a son was a personal reward for her giving. If she had not given, she would have remained childless. When her son died, his healing was clearly linked to her generosity. We should never let anyone persuade us that giving to God's servants, the prophets, cannot have wonderful consequences!

The third incident, in 2 Kings, Chapter 4, introduces a

man from Baal-shalisha. Verses 42-44 describe how the man thought that he was providing for one prophet and was amazed when God used his giving to provide for 100 prophets! When we give to God's servants today, we should expect God to use our gifts in a wonderful way, far beyond our wildest hopes and intentions. In God's miraculous hands, even the smallest gift makes an enormous difference.

Elijah and Elisha teach us two other principles about giving. One is reported in 1 Kings, Chapter 21. It is the sad story of Naboth. He owned a vineyard which was coveted by King Ahab. The king asked Naboth to sell him the vineyard and became very vexed and sullen when Naboth refused to do this. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, caused Naboth to be killed, so the king could take possession of the vineyard. God sent Elijah to announce an awesome judgment on Ahab and his wife. The terrible truth is that God curses those who *take*, as well as blessing those who *give*.

In 2 Kings, Chapter 5, we read the well-known story of Naaman's cure of leprosy. The postscript to the story, in verses 15-27, adds to our understanding of giving. Naaman wanted to reward God's prophet for the miracle, but Elisha refused: "*... As the Lord liveth, before whom stand, I will receive none*" (5:16). Elisha's assistant, Gehazi, was tempted by the offered gift. He went after Naaman, pretended that Elisha had changed his mind, and accepted an enormous sum of money, which he kept for himself. Gehazi lied when Elisha questioned him about this, and Elisha announced a fearsome judgment on his assistant. Truly, God curses those who mislead people to attract giving.

Many may wonder why it was right for the Shunammitess to give to Elisha but wrong for Naaman.

Giving and Receiving

The answer is supplied in 2 Kings 5:26: *"... Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?"* Naaman's gift was simply too large. Elisha did not need such a vast sum of money. A principle runs through the Old Testament that giving to people and projects should meet needs and no more. Giving should stop when the need has been met. We saw this in the tabernacle free-will offering, and we have seen that Jewish giving to people always matched their needs. Only sacrificial giving directly to God was allowed to be lavish.

NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah 5:14-19 shows a different aspect of giving and receiving but one that is dreadfully relevant today. Nehemiah here reports that he did not take advantage of his position to accept a high salary or excessive expenses. He did not ask for gifts from the people. He refrained from acquiring land, and he did not even eat the food allowance of the governor. Why? *"... because the bondage was heavy upon this people"* (Nehemiah 5:18). Too many leaders today take advantage of their position. They pay themselves high salaries and accept lavish gifts at a time when debt, unemployment, and inflation have placed another heavy servitude on most ordinary people. They would do well to learn from Nehemiah and Elisha.

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES

What can we learn from these Old Testament givers? I have extracted these principles from the details we have examined:

1. We shouldn't say just thank You to God. We should lavishly give Him our best in thanksgiving,

too.

2. We should remember to give to God's servants, the prophets, but only to meet their needs.
3. We should provide for the poor whenever we can.
4. We should give in a way which means we need faith.
5. We should make hospitality a special priority.
6. We should always remember that giving to God is the essence of worship.
7. We should expect God to bless us materially and spiritually when we give in the way that He wants.
8. We should expect God to curse us when we take what is not ours or if we mislead people to attract a gift.

Let us add these principles to what we have learned so far to insure that we benefit from what we have read about these Old Testament individuals. After all, their lives have been recorded in scripture so that we can profit from their examples.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SUPREME GIVER

Jesus spoke about money more often than any other subject, more than the kingdom of God. Even in His day, the subject of giving was controversial. Jesus dedicated an amazing amount of time to dealing with financial questions. We are even told that He “... *sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury*” (Mark 12:41). Jesus deliberately watched what people gave, discerned the spirit in which they gave, and then commented on it. First, we will examine Jesus' teaching about giving, then we will look at His encounters with people when He applied His principles about giving to their different real-life situations.

JESUS' TEACHING ON GIVING

In this chapter, I am going to point out God's Word. Jesus' teaching about giving is very clear and straightforward. I will not be inserting any qualifications. I will not be pretending that it cannot apply today. I will not be diluting it or explaining it away. I will simply be showing that His teaching is both frightening and exciting. We will see that His words are the opposite of modern-day wisdom. They will appear to contradict almost everything we have learned in society, with awesome implications. They only make sense when we grasp the fundamental biblical principle that money is not neutral; it is a power, with a life of its own. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus boldly states that we “... *cannot serve God and mammon.*” His use of the Aramaic word *mammon* personifies money

as a rival to God and makes it crystal clear that wealth is neither neutral nor impersonal. Mammon is a power which attempts to dominate and enslave us.

A POWERFUL FALSE GOD

This means that there are spiritual forces *behind* the material form of money. These forces have a seductive power which grips people's lives. They are the cause of our difficulties in giving money away. They explain why wealth seems to strip us of compassion and kindness, and they are the basic reason why so much of Jesus' teaching about money is given in an evangelistic setting.

Today, we often think of money as a topic for Christian discipleship, rather than as a part of the conversion process. That was not so with Jesus. Time after time He insists that a financial change is required if people are to follow Him, that wealth is an idol which has to be rejected and replaced with the living God, and that riches are the reason why so much spiritual fruit fails to mature. For Jesus, the power of money is a false god, from which people must be converted. The love of riches is a weed, which chokes many seedlings. The rejection of mammon is a basic requirement of being His disciple.

Wealth makes people feel secure. It seems to give freedom, power, and contentment. It can even make us feel guilty. People everywhere seek it furiously. God wants us to find our security, freedom, power, and contentment in Jesus alone and to seek Him with our whole heart. If we do not grasp this principle, we will not understand Jesus' teaching—He labels people who constantly strive to obtain riches "fools." He rejects decent, moral, spiritually interested rich people. It does not make sense until we realize that they are individuals who need

to be redeemed from their slavery to the false god, mammon. Only then can their wealth be used for the good of God's kingdom.

FRUITS OF REPENTANCE

God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, telling the crowds who came to him to *"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance ..."* (Luke 3:8).

Quite naturally, *"... the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise."* (Luke 3:10-11). John told tax collectors that their repentance needed to be evidenced by collecting no more than the appointed sums. He taught soldiers that their repentance should be seen in being content with their wages. How many modern-day preachers would give John's answer to the same question? How many teachers insist today that new converts should give as their basic response to the gospel?

John makes it plain that repentance should make a difference, a difference which is seen primarily in finances by both giving away and not demanding more than is right. John's teaching suddenly makes sense when we understand that money is a false god. Jesus' famous remark, in Matthew 19:24, that *"... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."* These words can only be true if there is a financial aspect to conversion, if giving is the vital evidence of genuine biblical repentance.

PART OF COMMITMENT

Jesus often asked the people to turn from their wealth,

to turn from their slavery to mammon and express their commitment to Him. Levi willingly left everything (Luke 5:27-28), but the rich young ruler found the demand too much (Luke 18:18-20). Jesus' principle was that those who wanted to be committed to Him had to understand that "*... Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head*" (Luke 9:58).

The calling of Simon, Andrew, James, and John in Luke 5:1-11 makes this principle particularly clear. Following Jesus' advice, the four men caught so large a haul of fish that their nets began to break, and their boats started to sink. In fact, Simon was so astonished by the miraculous catch that he fell at Jesus' knees in fear. The catch would have considerably boosted their income, but what did they do—keep it or give it away? The Bible says, "*And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him*" (Luke 5:11). Instead of benefiting personally from God's miraculous provision, they left the fish on the shore for others. This was their way of expressing their commitment to Jesus.

PART OF MINISTRY

Jesus continually urged His disciples to reject mammon. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus' instructions when He sent His disciples on their first ministry tour. Jesus told them:

And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

Matthew 10:7-10

Should we now pick and choose between these

instructions? Many leaders urge believers to preach, heal, and cast out demons, but then are silent about giving without pay. Surely, it would be better if they urged people to obey all of the Lord's commands.

The twelve were sent as givers. Every part of ministry is a gift. Just as they had received from Jesus without paying, so they were to give without charging others. This follows from the principles we saw with Elijah and Elisha. How were the disciples to survive? Matthew 10:11 gives the answer: through hospitality. They were not to charge, but they could accept gifts which related to their immediate needs. Jesus gave similar instructions to a much larger group of disciples in Luke 10:1-12. They were ordered not to take a purse or bag to collect gifts. They were told to accept whatever hospitality was offered to them.

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

At the end of His instructions to His disciples, in Matthew 10:40-42, Jesus makes it plain that people who provide hospitality for them will be rewarded by God. This repeats what we saw in the Old Testament. What are the rewards for giving God's servants hospitality? When will they be received? Jesus' words are plain and not easily misunderstood. In the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, that wonderful collection of kingdom principles, Jesus orders this:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

It is a straightforward choice: earthly or heavenly treasure. Only three verses later Jesus says: “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Matthew 6:24). When Jesus puts it like this, we know it makes sense to choose God, to choose heavenly treasure; yet the spiritual power of mammon makes it hard for us to resist the temptation to lay up earthly treasures.

In Luke 12:33-34, Jesus explains how we can defeat the devil with one blow. Giving is the spiritual weapon which, at the same time, both earns us heavenly treasure and breaks the power of mammon.

Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

It is impossible for it to be plainer that giving is God's way to earn heavenly treasure. Note that it is heavenly treasure. Jesus does not promise here that giving will earn us earthly treasure. Instead, He asks what we want— heavenly or earthly treasure. If we want earthly treasure, we should lock up our purses, keep a tight hold of our possessions, and never give alms. If we prefer heavenly treasure, we will give, and we will give, and we will keep on giving like God.

GIVE TO THE NEEDY

Jesus' famous parable of the sheep and the goats develops our understanding of blessing and heavenly treasure. In Matthew 25:34, the sheep are welcomed into heaven as the “... *blessed of my Father....*”, while in 25:41, the goats are banished into eternal fire as “... *ye cursed....*” The

blessed ones are rewarded with the gift of a kingdom. The cursed are punished with eternal fire. Why are some blessed and others cursed?

Jesus' parable is too clear to misunderstand. The sheep are blessed with a kingdom because the king,

... was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Matthew 25:35-36

This reward takes the sheep completely by surprise! They have no recollection of ever giving to the king in this way. They think there must be some sort of mistake. *"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."* (Matthew 25:40). It is the same for the goats. They are cursed because the king was hungry, and they did not feed him. He was thirsty, and they gave him no drink, and so on. The cursed are mystified! They are sure that they have never ignored the king in this way. They would have given to him if they thought that he needed their gifts. The terrible reply rings down through the centuries: *"... Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."* (Matthew 25:45).

Heavenly treasure, the promise of a kingdom, divine blessing, holy rewards—all of these depend on how we give to God. This is measured by our generosity to people. Is it little wonder that I stress giving so much. Surely, we can all see now that giving is vital for our spiritual health and absolutely essential for our spiritual wealth. In Luke 11:42, Jesus makes it clear that tithing is not enough.

But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love

Giving and Receiving

of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Although the Pharisees tithed carefully, they stopped there. That alone was not enough for Jesus. He wanted them to go further, to give more to the needy.

The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37 has inspired many people through the ages. Remember, it was told to an expert in Jewish law who would have tithed faithfully. He was told to give more, to stretch his understanding of neighbors to include despised, non-believing enemies, and to make practical provision for them. The Samaritan did not toss the victim a few shekels. He touched the wounded enemy, gave him first aid, took him to an inn, cared for him, gave two days' wages for his keep, and promised to return to pay any outstanding bill. He gave time, love, and energy, as well as money. Jesus tells us to “... *Go, and do thou likewise*” (Luke 10:37).

Jesus ties some of these principles together in Luke, Chapter 16. He instructs us to:

... Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Luke 16:9

Jesus explains that: “*If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?*” (Luke 16:11). He repeats His principle that “... *Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Luke 16:13). Jesus then illustrates all of this with His parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 6:19-31). People like the rich man are hardhearted toward people like Lazarus because whether they realize it or not, they serve the false god mammon. Such people will not enter Heaven.

People who serve the true God have been released by

Him from their slavery to mammon. They show this by giving with God's generosity and compassion. They will have much treasure in heaven. Remember, generous giving does not save us; it shows that we have been saved.

GIVE TO ALL WHO ASK

Jesus starkest teaching on giving was issued in His Sermon on the Mount. *"Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away"* (Matthew 5:42). Is there another verse in the Bible so opposed to the spirit of our age? I doubt it. How many believers are there in our churches who think that these words of Jesus are a good idea? Nothing shows people's slavery to mammon more clearly than their reaction to this statement.

Jesus' words are even stronger in Luke 6:30: *"Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again."* Why should we give like this? Why does Jesus not allow us some exceptions? Why should there be no limit to our giving? Jesus has two answers. We should be able to guess them by now. One is that this is precisely how God gives. The other is that there are fantastic blessings for giving like this.

Jesus said:

... love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

Luke 6:35

Three verses later there is a more popular verse: *"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom"* (Luke 6:38). This saying should not be lifted out

of context. The great rewards Jesus lists in Luke 6:38 relate to the giving He has just described in verse 30. This means that it is not only our giving to friends which attracts this wonderful blessing, it is also our giving to beggars, enemies, and ungrateful sinners. We should realize that we can only claim the Luke 6:38 blessing when we give like God and are giving to everyone who asks us.

GIVE PRIVATELY

In Matthew 6:1-4, Jesus describes how we should give:

TAKE heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

Jesus' principle is simple. We forfeit our heavenly reward whenever we publicize our generosity. The human acclaim that we are bound to receive for our giving is deemed to be enough. This is a vital principle now that so many people want their giving to be acknowledged in a public way. Jesus does not condemn those who broadcast their giving on television, in brochures, or on wooden panels. He just says that their fame is their reward. They will not receive a second blessing from God.

GIVE HOSPITALITY

We have seen that the Old Testament takes for granted the responsibility of providing and caring for visitors. Jesus also seems to assume that hospitality is so basic a human duty that He does not need to emphasize it. When

He sent His disciples to minister, He presumed that they would be provided with hospitality. The gospels record many occasions when Jesus accepted meals and rest from different people. Jesus gave His only teaching on hospitality at one such meal:

... When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

Luke 14:12-14

The two principles we have seen running through Jesus' teaching about giving are that giving to the needy should be a priority (for giving to the poor is giving to God), and we should give in a way which earns heavenly treasure rather than an earthly reward. Jesus offers us a choice. We can restrict our gift of hospitality to those people who will probably give us something in return on Earth, and subsequently will receive no reward from God, or we can open our home to the poor and needy and have a substantial reward in heaven. Our actions will reveal where our treasure is, where our heart is.

GIVE TO GOVERNMENTS

Jesus taught the people to give their taxes to the relevant authorities. Matthew 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, and Luke 20:20-26 all report Jesus' well-known principle, ... *"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's"* (Luke 20:25). The Jews, like all people in their situation, resented giving their money to the occupying power. Jesus settled the tax question for all time. We must pay up but without any

hint of a heavenly reward. Matthew 17:24-27 records God's miraculous provision to Jesus and Peter for their annual half-shekel tax payment. This was levied on all Jews for the upkeep of the temple. This shows three things – that tithes were not used to maintain the temple, that Jesus did not shirk His financial responsibilities, and that God provides money miraculously.

GIVE DEBT RELEASE

Debt is a form of slavery which imprisons millions of people. Jesus shows His understanding of this by placing debt release in the middle of the Lord's Prayer. Would He ask us to pray for this if there was no chance of God answering our prayer? Elisha has already shown us how important this is to God. Two phrases in the prayer are basic to giving: *"Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"* (Matthew 6:11-12).

God wants us to ask Him for two things vital to our well-being: basic food and debt release. If we can expect God to provide us with food, we can also expect Him to release us from debt. There is only one condition—we must forgive those who are in debt to us. It should be obvious why we are called to behave like this. It is how God acts. Jesus illustrates this with a parable in Matthew 18:23-35. Although it is a story about general forgiveness, it shows that we should release people from any indebtedness they have to us. We are to forgive their debt because God has forgiven our debt. Matthew 18:35 contains a warning for those who do not offer this gift:

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

JESUS' GIVING ENCOUNTERS

The four gospels record many instances when men and women gave to Jesus, when He urged people to give, and when He commented on their giving. We are going to examine these encounters to see what principles they teach us about our giving today.

The Wise Men

The Christmas carol "We Three Kings" has popularized many wrong ideas about the men who visited Jesus in Matthew 2:9-12. The Bible does not state how many there were or what their status was. All we know for certain is that an unknown number of wise men or astrologers brought treasure chests from their country in the east. Upon arriving to where Jesus was, they *"... fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."* (Matthew 2:11). How did they worship Jesus? By singing a hymn? Praying a prayer? Listening to a sermon? No! They gave Him a generous offering! That was their way of worshiping.

Read the passage, and notice that they gave their very best and thought hard about what to give. They had been convinced in advance that the infant was a king, so they had brought gifts with them worthy of His royal status. They gave gold, then the most valuable substance on Earth. Gold had been used in the tabernacle to represent God's heavenly glory and His Presence on Earth. Its use by the men indicated that they thought the child would bring God's glory to Earth. They picked out sweet frankincense to show that the child was a man whose life would ascend, like a ritual sacrifice, as a sweet-smelling incense to God. Finally, they were inspired to give bitter myrrh—

universally recognized as a symbol of suffering—to suggest that the child would suffer in life and die a terrible death.

This was not casual giving. This was sacrifice. This was faith-filled worship. Clearly, they had thought long and hard about what they should bring on their journey, and they were inspired to select the best and most appropriate gifts. There are few better examples of giving in the Bible for us to follow than the example of these pagan astrologers.

The Anointing Women

Each of the four gospels reports a story of a woman who worshiped Jesus by anointing Him. It is difficult to know whether they are recording the same event or different ones. It does not matter for us in our study of giving, because they all illustrate similar principles.

Luke 7:36-50 describes Jesus' encounter with a woman who was a sinner with a very bad reputation in her town. She interrupted a meal to wash Jesus' feet with her tears, dry them with her hair, and anoint them with ointment from an alabaster flask. It is obvious from this parable Jesus told that this woman's motive for giving was a great love which stemmed from her acceptance of God's forgiveness. Although Luke does not use the word "worship," that is clearly what she was doing. The people who saw her giving were outraged. They did not think that Jesus should accept a gift from someone like her. Jesus commended her faith-filled giving, "*... Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace*" (Luke 7:50).

Matthew and Mark tell a slightly different story, and John adds a few extra details. Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-11 all describe an anointing at Bethany. Mary anointed Jesus with an incredibly expensive

ointment. It was worth 300 pence, which was almost a year's wages for a laborer! This act of worship was probably a thank You for her brother's raising from the dead, yet it caused an outrage. People thought that her extravagant gift was a waste of money and should have been used for the poor. Jesus disagreed:

And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.

Mark 14:6-8

There will always be criticism when people worship Jesus with extravagant gifts. There will always be critics who think that money could have been better spent on the poor. This passage reminds us of the Old Testament principle that we should give lavish sacrificial gifts to God and practical gifts to the poor that are appropriate to their needs. This woman was inspired to offer a gift which had a prophetic meaning far beyond her dreams. Let her worship inspire us. When we are prompted to give a big gift to God, let us do it. It will be our beautiful action for Jesus.

The Generous Women

How did Jesus survive financially? He traveled constantly in Israel after He stopped working as a carpenter, much of the time with the twelve apostles. They needed food to eat and somewhere to sleep. Who gave so that Jesus could train His apostles, teach the crowds, and heal the sick? The gospels are full of instances when people provided Jesus and the twelve with hospitality. It seems likely that Jesus stayed with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus when He was visiting Jerusalem. We read about

them in Luke 19:38-42 and in John 11:1-45 and 12:1-12. This must have been a very wealthy family to have been able to offer hospitality to such a large group of men so frequently, and for Mary to afford such a generous thank offering when she anointed Jesus with ointment. These three were not condemned in any way for their wealth—in fact, they were commended for using it wisely. They did not serve mammon. They had conquered mammon and used their money to serve God.

Luke 8:1-3 lists some people who financed Jesus' activities. Mary, Joanna, Susanna, "*... and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.*" Remember, these were Jews who paid their tithes and made their sacrifices. Their giving to Jesus was extra. It was additional to their taxes, tithes, free-will offerings, and ritual sacrifices. It was giving which followed the Elijah and Elisha principle and made special provision for God's servants.

A Rich Man

We have seen that Jesus told His disciples it was hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom. He did not say it was impossible. Matthew 27:57 introduces us to "*... a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple.*" Mark 15:42-47 and Luke 23:50-54 describe Joseph's visit to Pilate, his courageous request for Jesus' body, and his gift to Jesus of his very own tomb. John 19:38-40 shows that he was helped by Nicodemus, who gave 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes to embalm Jesus with. This may seem a strange gift, but we saw earlier that God's giving is creative and varied, and this is an example of the human equivalent.

Our giving should not be stereotyped. It should be specific, God-directed, and for a clear purpose. Here we

have two rich men giving exactly what was needed because they were devoted to Jesus. The gospels suggest that Nicodemus and Joseph were secret disciples, but that did not invalidate their giving. We have seen that Jesus received gifts from a mixture of givers – pagan astrologers, dreadful sinners, wealthy families, committed followers, and now secret admirers. They all have two things in common. They gave their best because of their love, and they took considerable risks in their giving, which means that they gave in faith.

A Confused Pair

Luke 24:13-35 tells the story of Cleopas and his companion, who gave hospitality to Jesus without realizing who He was. It is a perfect example of the principle which Jesus outlines in Matthew 10:40, 25:31-46, and Mark 9:41. They willingly gave hospitality to a stranger and discovered that they had actually offered it to the King! The pair were confused and disappointed. Their hopes had been dashed by Jesus' crucifixion, and now they could not understand what had happened to His body. They chatted with a stranger on their journey and offered Him a bed for the night. They did not think that they were doing anything unusual. They simply opened their home to a stranger and offered Him food. That is all hospitality is. As Cleopas discovered, when we entertain strangers, we are really giving to our King.

A Rich Aristocrat

Jesus' encounter with this rich young man is one of the saddest stories in the Bible. Matthew 19:16-22, Mark 10:17-22, and Luke 18:18-23 describe what happened. A ruler asked Jesus, "... Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). It is a question which is still put to thousands of teachers today. How many give the same

answer as Jesus? Jesus told the ruler to keep the commandments. The man replied that he had observed them all from his youth.

Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

Mark 10:21

The man was good. The man wanted to follow Jesus. The man was loved by Jesus, but Jesus could not let him come without rejecting the false god mammon. *“And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions”* (Mark 10:22). The man tithed, he made his sacrifices, and he probably gave to the poor. Those things were not enough for Jesus. The man had to choose either God or his possessions. He had to choose Earth or Heaven. When Jesus put it like that, the man found that he preferred his earthly possessions to the thought of treasure in Heaven. Jesus did not chase after the man. He did not say that a tithe would be enough. He let him walk away because the man would not reject mammon and would not become a faith-filled, cheerful giver.

Jesus did not say this to everybody He met. We do not all have to give everything away before we can follow Jesus, but some people do. This rich man shows us that Jesus is deadly serious about giving. It is not a small matter to Him. It is fundamental to His kingdom. If we cannot give generously, if we will not give generously, if we do not give generously, then we need to ask ourselves whether we are closer to mammon than God.

A Joyful Man

Luke takes us straight from this rich man to Zacchaeus. It is a deliberate contrast. First, we meet a wealthy ruler who

The Supreme Giver

will not give and walks sadly away. We next meet another wealthy man, but this time one who will give. The pages of the gospel almost explode with joy! Zacchaeus:

... was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

Luke 19:2-6

Again the crowd complained because Jesus was receiving from a sinner. But Zacchaeus gave a wonderful response: “... Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Luke 19:8). Jesus had not asked the tax collector to give his goods away. He had not made giving a condition. Instead, extravagant generosity was Zacchaeus' natural response to Jesus. Faith-filled giving was the fruit of his turning to Jesus. Jesus' delight jumps out of the pages of the gospel!

... This day is salvation come to this house forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke 19:9-10

In this wonderful story, we see a rich man breaking free from the grip of mammon. He gives to Jesus. He gives to the poor. He gives to all he has defrauded. Most people today would be terrified to do what Zacchaeus did. Imagine the commotion that might occur if I asked people to act like this! Yet, what was the outcome? Joy and salvation! Zacchaeus is a wonderful example of a blessed and very cheerful giver.

The Betrayer

The story of Judas should be enough to convince remaining skeptics of mammon's power. Who betrayed Jesus? What prompted him to betray Him? Why did he betray Him? Judas was the treasurer. He was in charge of their money. Greed caused him to do it. Greed for money. It was mammon at work.

John 12:4-6 explains that Judas Iscariot had been given responsibility of the common fund by Jesus. Judas had been called by Jesus. He was one of those who had left everything to follow Him. He had seen Jesus work miracles. God had even worked miracles through Judas on the ministry tour. He had heard Jesus' teaching. He had been blessed and used by God, but the struggle between the true God and the lust for the false god mammon ended with Judas betraying Jesus for money.

John 12:6 is a terrible epitaph for any disciple with its comments that Judas did not care for the poor and took from the money box. The betrayer was a taker, not a giver. The sum offered by the priests was five months' wages for a laborer—in modern terms around \$12,000. For someone like Judas, who would have been living on next to nothing for the previous almost three years, it must have seemed a considerable sum for one kiss. He betrayed his Lord, his calling, and himself for money.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus taught that some *"...are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection"* (Luke 8:14). Judas was one of those who was choked with spectacular results. Sadly, many today show that Jesus' words are still true. The love of riches—the opposite of generosity—chokes the life out of too many believers. They remain alive, but are without fruit.

A Small Boy

The small boy of John 6:9 is a startling contrast to Judas. We do not know his name. As far as we know, this is his only appearance on the pages of scripture, but what an example he is to us all! The boy is one in a crowd of thousands listening to Jesus when suddenly there is a need. Philip estimates that more than 200 pennyworth will be required (at least \$18,000) to feed all of the hungry people there. It is a massive need, and this small boy offers his packed lunch as a contribution! Andrew comments, “... *but what are they among so many?*” (John 6:9). Isn't this precisely what we think when we know that a large sum of money is needed, and we can make only a tiny contribution? Mammon tells us that our gift is too small to make any difference. Mammon presses us to hang on to our money because it tells us it is of no consequence compared to the largeness of the need. Mammon will do anything to stop our giving!

The boy gave the best that he had. He gave all that he had. It did not seem like much to Andrew, but it was a pretty big sacrifice for the boy. He would go without lunch for Jesus. Jesus used the gift in a way which became so famous that it has continued to be told and retold throughout the centuries. This packed lunch stands as a rebuke to all of those people who think that their gift is too small to make any difference. We never know what Jesus will do with our gifts. Like the man in 2 Kings 4:42-44, we would be amazed if we could see the miracles that God achieves through our sacrificial giving.

A Poor Widow

This lady is one of the greatest biblical givers! We do not know her name, but her story (in Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4) teaches us a vital lesson about giving. Jesus

Giving and Receiving

was doing something we would not admit to doing. He was watching what people were putting in the offering and was carefully assessing the spirit in which they gave.

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

Mark 12:41-44

Jesus was saying that this woman's two small coins – the least valuable coins of her day – were worth more than all of the contributions of all of the other people added together! How can that be? It is simple. God does not measure what we give. He measures what we keep back for ourselves. To put it another way, God looks at the percentage we give rather than at the actual amount we contribute. This is a revolutionary truth that begins to explain the miracle of the loaves.

The boy's gift had looked small on Earth, but because he had given all he had, it was enormous in Heaven. Jesus made the lunch appear as large on Earth as it really was in Heaven. He enabled the people to see and benefit from the real size of the boy's gift. This story should change the way we treat people in meetings and revolutionize the way we count offerings! People who seem to be giving little may actually be giving the most! Those who appear to donate large gifts may really be giving only a tiny amount. We have no need to worry about contributing a small sum of money if it is all we have. God will use it and bless us in quite an awesome way!

The Leper

We have noted that Jesus accepted gifts and asked for hospitality. We have seen Him commend people who give and reject those who refuse to give. We have read His promises of heavenly treasure for those who give generously. However, the gospels introduce only one person whom Jesus actually *ordered* to make a gift. Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-44, and Luke 5:12-14 report Jesus' encounter with a man who was full of leprosy. Jesus healed the man without any conditions. After the miracle, He ordered the man to give. Jesus did not promise to heal the man if he gave. He healed him—end of statement.

He then ordered him to make the appropriate offering. Jesus told him to “... go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them” (Luke 5:14). The offering Jesus referred to is described in Leviticus 14:1-32. It was a considerable size. Verses 1-20 list what had to be given by most people, and verses 21-32 record the special arrangements for the poor. There were two reasons for making the offering—to thank God for the healing and to show people that the sufferer had been healed. It is part of the biblical principle that saying thank You to God is not enough. Gratitude needs to be expressed with gifts as well.

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES

So, what have we learned about giving and receiving from Jesus' teaching and from His encounters with people? By now we should have grasped hold of giving's vital importance and be able to see its strategic place in our spiritual battle with the power of the enemy.

Mammon (money, wealth, riches) is an evil spiritual power which is always attempting to enslave us.

Giving and Receiving

Here are 15 more principles to help us remember what we have learned in this chapter:

1. Giving is the basic fruit of repentance.
2. Giving is part of beginning to follow Jesus.
3. We should never charge for ministry.
4. Giving to people is giving to God.
5. Ignoring the needy is ignoring God.
6. Our giving breaks the power of mammon and earns us heavenly treasure.
7. We should expect to receive astonishing blessing from God when we give to everyone who asks us – especially the selfish and ungrateful.
8. We should give secretly if we want a heavenly reward.
9. We should give hospitality to God's servants and the needy.
10. We should release people from their debts to us before asking God to release us from our financial debts.
11. We should expect to receive basic food and debt release from God.
12. Giving is the essence of worship.
13. God measures what we keep, not what we give.
14. God can use sacrificial small gifts to achieve far more than we ever dream possible.
15. We should always thank God with a gift, as well as with words.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GIVING EARLY CHURCH

When we think of the Early Church, we tend to remember the astonishing growth, the people's boldness, the awesome miracles, and the terrible opposition. We think of Peter in prison, Stephen being stoned, Paul on trial, Ananias being brave, and the crowds who flocked to touch an apostles apron. We do not often think about the human giving which financed this great move of God's Spirit. That is what we are going to do now.

We are going to comb through the Book of Acts for examples of giving. We are going to examine the biblical record of those first 30 years of the Church to see what we can learn about giving. We will look for Christian people who gave, and we will try to grasp why and what they gave. We will see how they implemented the principles we have discovered, and we will be on the lookout for any results of their giving. Of course, we will not be able to see their *heavenly* treasure, but there might be some interesting *earthly* consequences.

The story of the Early Church begins with Jesus' last instructions to His disciples just before His triumphant return to Heaven. Matthew 28:18-20 records His Great Commission:

... All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

The eleven apostles were told to teach the new disciples to observe all of Jesus' instructions—not to obey only some of them, but to keep *all* of them. As Jesus taught more about money than anything other than the kingdom, we must realize that Jesus meant for His financial teachings to apply to all future disciples, to us. In Acts 1:8, Jesus' last words were the promise that the apostles would be His witnesses to the ends of the Earth. This meant that they had a duty to bear witness, by their words and actions, to the whole of Jesus' teaching and life.

They could not possibly witness accurately if they ignored or misrepresented Jesus' teaching about money. As we have seen, Jesus' teaching about mammon and giving was simply too large a part of His ministry, too high on the divine list of priorities, for the Early Church to distort it or downgrade it.

THE GIFT THEY RECEIVED

We have seen that the Bible starts and finishes with a fantastic gift from God to men and women. It should not surprise us to find that the Bible's account of the Early Church also begins with a great gift from God. Once again, our study of giving opens with the all-giving God showing His generosity. Acts 2:4 describes God's gift of His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost: *"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."*

God gave them Himself. He gave them His Spirit. He blessed them with power. He blessed them with the gift of the ability to express themselves clearly and authoritatively. He blessed them with the gift of speaking in languages which they had not learned. He blessed them with the gift of prophecy. He gave all these blessings freely, without any pre-conditions, to people who had

deserted and denied His Son only a few weeks before.

THE FIRST RESULTS

Peter preached to the crowd to explain what had happened. When he had revealed the truth about Jesus, Peter's listeners were cut to the heart. They asked,... What shall we do? Peter said to them, "... *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:37-38).

Peter went on to testify: "... *saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation*" (Acts 2:40). He told them to repent. John the Baptist showed us what it meant to repent. Peter told them to get free from a generation that was crooked. In light of all of Jesus' teaching, Peter probably spelled out some of Jesus' financial principles to the people. It is likely that he clarified what he had meant by "repent" and "crooked." Surely, he explained the practical differences that salvation would mean to their lives. We do not know exactly what Peter said, but he spoke in the power of the Spirit, and about 3,000 people received his words and were baptized that day. This was the direct consequence of God's gift.

What happened at Pentecost is the first hint of a new giving principle that we will see throughout the Book of Acts. Gifts mean growth. Giving means growth. God gave His gift. Thousands of people who saw it turned to the Giver. It is obvious that most people are attracted to generous people and are repelled by misers and cheapskates. Therefore, it is likely that people will be drawn to us when we give generously, like God. This means that giving is not just a spiritual weapon which breaks the power of mammon. It is also a spiritual magnet which attracts people to Christ.

THE GIVING COMMUNITY

Acts 2:42-47 describes what happened to these new converts. The verses prove that their repentance was evidenced by a change in their financial behavior and that giving was central to the lives that had been saved from a crooked generation. *“And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need”* (Acts 2:44-45). The power of mammon had been broken in their lives, so their attitude toward their possessions had changed. They had moved from thinking that they owned their wealth to believing that they were stewards of their wealth. When they saw needs, they used their wealth to meet them. Notice that they gave *“... as every man had need.”*

They did not give foolishly, lavishly, or excessively. They simply met the needs. Did this make them unhappy? No! The Bible reports that,

... they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Acts 2:46-47

Their newly-found generosity made them cheerful, and it greatly impressed other people.

In Acts 2:47, we see a second example of the principle that giving means growth: *... And the LORD added to the church daily such as should be saved.* Only a dishonest person can read these verses and say that the people's giving was irrelevant to the Church's growth. Throughout Acts, the believers' generosity is inseparable from the Church's increase and from mighty, God-given miracles.

GENEROUS LEADERS

Acts 2:43 is the verse which introduces us to all of the astonishing miracles recorded in Acts. We know the wonderful stories so well that sometimes we do not read all of the details. In this chapter, I want to show how the gift of miracles is often set in the context of believers' generosity.

Acts 3:1-9 describes a healing miracle in detail. We are not going to examine the story for healing principles, rather we are looking for anything that it teaches about giving. As Peter and John were going into the temple to pray, a man—who had been lame from birth—was begging from people who were also entering. The man asked them for money. Peter's reply should transfix us: *".... Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk"* (Acts 3:6).

There are three important giving principles here:

1. Peter and John did not ignore the beggar. They did not walk past him like so many believers would do today. They stopped, listened, loved, and acted.
2. Peter and John did not have any money! They were not lying, or surely God would not have honored their words as He did. The most probable explanation is that they really did not have any money because they had given it all away in the generosity described by Acts 2:43-47.
3. Peter and John were prepared to give the beggar *all* that they had *"... such as I have give I thee."* What a statement! Do not stare only at the miracle of healing. Concentrate also on this wonderful generosity. Recognize that it was Peter's readiness

to give what he had to a beggar that God honored in this life-changing miracle.

I have often wondered what would have happened if Peter and John had had some cash in their pockets. Because they had given everything, they were able to give even more!

GENEROUS PEOPLE

Acts 4:32-35 describes the believers' generous spirit:

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

We should not lift the apostles' powerful testimony out of the context of this amazing generosity. This giving was part of their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. People could only give like this because of Jesus! Their generosity was part of the proof that Jesus was alive. There is a principle here that we have seen before – giving to people should meet their needs but not anything more.

The first Christians still had control over the possessions which God had given to them, but now they had a quite different attitude toward them. The apostles did not take over the peoples' wealth. The believers did not give all of their goods away. They stewarded them to God, using them to meet needs. They decided what to sell and when to sell it. There is an important "giving" development in these verses.

For the first time, Christians organized their giving so that their gifts were used more efficiently. Instead of giving only to the poor personally, believers also gave to a central fund, which directed their giving to the most needy. This insured that some people did not get too much and that others were not overlooked. In the Old Testament, the people's tithes in every third year were collected together in each town to create a common store from which the poor could be fed. The Early Church followed this pattern. The people gave their gifts into a common fund, which was administered by the leaders so that distribution was made "*... unto every man according as he had need.*"

Obviously, this fund was used to provide for those who had no income because they were ministering, as well as for widows, the elderly, and other people who were unable to work. This development is crucial because it helps us begin to relate the principles we see in scripture to our complex lives today.

A GIVING CONTRAST

Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, makes many deliberate "giving" contrasts throughout Luke and Acts. We have seen him take us straight from the rich, young ruler to Zacchaeus in Luke. In Acts, he compares Barnabas with Ananias and Sapphira. Barnabas sold one of his fields and gave the proceeds to the apostles for the common fund.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 5:1-2

Ananias was still in the grip of mammon. He wanted the esteem of giving generously, but he could not bear to part with all of the proceeds of his property.

In Acts 5:4, Peter made it plain that Ananias was under no obligation to sell the property. It would have been entirely fine for him to give only part of the proceeds, but he lied. He wanted earthly acclaim and earthly treasure. Ananias could not admit that he would not give all. The subsequent immediate deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (noted in Acts 5:5-11) are a fearsome warning to all who want their giving publicized and to all who give for selfish motives.

Just as Israel's story begins with God's rejection of Cain for giving less than his best, so the Church's history begins with God's rejection of a couple whose giving was unacceptable. This story shows that God takes our giving *very* seriously. He is watching us, like Jesus watched the widow at the treasury. It may have seemed to Ananias that he gave a large amount, but God was counting what he held back!

MIRACULOUS BLESSING

Acts 5:12-16 describes some miraculous blessings which, again, are set in a context of generosity, as well as against a backdrop of prayer and unity.

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round

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about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

Isn't that wonderful? We all ache to experience something like this in our own localities, but we need to recognize that God gave miracles and growth to the Church at a time when believers were giving so much to others.

GIVING PROBLEMS

The Bible does not hide the problems of the people it describes. We all know how difficult it is to allocate funds fairly. There are always people who want us to meet different needs from the ones that we have chosen. Acts 6:1-7 describes the Early Church's problem. Their numbers had grown so much that despite the common fund, one group of widows was being overlooked in the daily food distribution. There was simply too much for the apostles to do. They could not preach and distribute the resources fairly, so the apostles decided to delegate.

AND in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of

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God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

They solved their problem by organizing themselves in a godly fashion. They chose seven men to be jointly responsible for the finances. These were not men who necessarily had financial experience, rather they were men who were full of the Spirit and wisdom. These seven deacons had the task of ensuring that the people's giving was properly administered. We should expect what happened next: *"... the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly...."* God blesses with growth when we give generously and when giving is administered in a godly way.

FREE GIFTS

A persecution began, and the Jerusalem believers were scattered. One of the deacons, Philip, escaped north to Samaria, where vast numbers of people were converted by his preaching and by the miracles God worked through him. Simon, a local sorcerer and magician, believed and was baptized. However, he did not understand God's principles. Acts 8:14-24 describes his encounter with Peter:

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

Acts 8:18-19

Peter replied with fury, *"... Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money"* (Acts 8:20). Read Acts 8:21-23, and see the strong language Peter used to rebuke Simon. Clearly, he thought it awful that someone should try to buy God's gift.

Simon was a new believer. He did not realize that he was doing anything wrong. What he was suggesting was normal in the crooked world they lived in. Today, there are always believers who might suggest sensible financial practices which are opposed to God's giving principles. They mean well, but they are as wrong as Simon was.

GENEROUS SAINTS

Luke viewed generosity as the key test of a person's spirituality. In his gospel, the only personal information he gave about the people he was describing was whether or not they were generous. John the Baptist (Luke 3:10-11), the Capernaum centurion (Luke 7:5-6), Joanna and Susanna (Luke 8:1-3), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8-10), the treasury widow (Luke 21:1-4), and Joseph (Luke 23:50-54) all illustrate how Luke consistently commended those believers who gave generously.

It is the same in Acts. Luke constantly put God's spotlight on a person's generosity. He knew that God is watching our giving to see what we keep back for ourselves. In Acts 9:36-39, he describes Dorcas as *"... full of good works and almsdeeds ... When Peter arrived, ... all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them."* There is no suggestion that Dorcas was wealthy. She does not appear to have owned a house, but she was generous with the little she had.

Cornelius was introduced in Acts 10:1-2. He was *"... a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."* Cornelius was a wealthy person with an important position in society. He was commended because he gave generously. In fact, Cornelius was told that his prayers and alms had *"... come*

up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4).

We must never forget that prayer is vital. Equally, we must realize that there is no integrity in asking God to meet needs when He has already given us the resources to meet them ourselves! God wants us to pray and give like Cornelius. Both of these spiritual disciplines are required. We should not choose between them.

THE HOSPITALITY ISSUE

Cornelius was used by God to bring about two fundamental changes in the Early Church. Despite God's pleas for Jews to treat strangers well, none of them would enter a non-Jew's home. They believed it would make them unclean. This idea had been absorbed into the Church, which was comprised only of Jews. There was no mixing with Gentiles (non-Jews). The tensions about the daily food distribution had been between the Hebrew-speaking Jewish believers and the Greek-speaking Jewish believers. Nobody in the Early Church thought that a Gentile could be a disciple.

In Acts 10:1-8, God spoke to Cornelius through an angel, and told him to invite Simon Peter to his home! Cornelius knew that this would breach Jewish practice, yet he preferred to obey God. Meanwhile, in Acts 10:9-29, God was speaking to Peter through a puzzling vision which he could not understand. It seemed to Peter that God was telling him to change his views about food. Three times a voice said to him, "*... What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common*" (Acts 10:15). While Peter was considering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "*Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them*" (Acts 10:19-20).

Peter went with them to Cornelius's house and

explained that God had shown him not to call anybody common or unclean. Peter spoke about Jesus and was amazed when the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles while they were listening to him (Acts 10:34-48). They all spoke in tongues and praised God! This news soon reached the believers in Jerusalem, who asked Peter, "*Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them*" (Acts 11:3). When the disciples heard of Peter's report, "*... they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*" (Acts 11:18).

This was a decisive moment in the Church's life. Since Peter's visit to Cornelius, there have been no excuses for placing limits on our hospitality. We should be eager to eat and mix with those who are outside our racial or social group and with those outside the Church. Sadly, there are many believers today who act like the believers initially did toward Cornelius. They never eat with anyone outside their own group.

GIVING TO THOSE FAR AWAY

Acts 11:27-30 records another important development in giving. Barnabas and Saul were teaching Gentile believers in Syrian Antioch, almost 400 miles north of Jerusalem. Some prophets visited them.

And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth [famine] throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Acts 11:27-28

The prophets did not tell the Antioch believers what to do; they simply acquainted them with a forthcoming need. The disciples decided for themselves to meet this need. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability,

determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 11:29-30

Until this point, giving had been designated for local needs. Tithes, sacrifices, and offerings had all been for local leaders and nearby needy. The believers now accepted that they had a responsibility for the needy far away—that they should also give to those whom they could not see and had never met. This is a vitally important principle for us today. We know about so many needs overseas and in parts of our own countries which we choose not to visit. Most of us have the resources to help meet some of these needs, but do we? How much do we keep back for ourselves? Interestingly, it is these Antioch givers who were the first time called "Christians." If we want to wear their label, perhaps we should give like them, too.

PROFITING FROM MINISTRY

After Paul (Saul) and Barnabas had returned from delivering the offering to Jerusalem, the Antioch Christians sent them on a ministry tour. From this point, Acts follows Saul and records his journeys and adventures, as God used him to spread the good news throughout the known world.

We saw that Jesus' travels were financed both by a group of committed supporters (who gave generously out of their own resources) and by people who provided hospitality when it was needed or requested. Paul does not appear to have always followed Jesus' example. Rather than always staying with believers, he often paid for

lodging in the towns he visited. Instead of receiving gifts of money from the churches he was visiting, he preferred to depend on a group of committed partners in Macedonia.

Acts 16:15 describes Paul and Silas accepting hospitality from Lydia in Philippi, but that was an exception. Lydia would not take no for an answer. She seems to have become one of his partners, among those who were mainly based in Philippi. The riot in Philippi provides us with the context which explains Paul's reluctance to benefit personally from his ministry.

Acts 16:16-24 describes his encounter with a slave girl who *"... brought her masters much gain by soothsaying"* (Acts 16:16). At that time, and still today, many people made their fortunes from religion, so the girl's owners were furious when Paul cast the evil spirit of divination (fortune-telling) out of her. *"And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace...."* (Acts 16:19).

Paul did not want anyone to be able to say that he was preaching for money. He did want people to have a chance to think that he was benefiting from his ministry. He knew that Jesus had sent the twelve out to preach, to heal, and to give without payment. Paul did everything possible to insure that this was how he lived and ministered. He did not want to give anyone a reason for rejecting the Good News. It was much too important for that!

UNRIGHTEOUS MAMMON

Acts 19:11-20 records a remarkable story which reminds us of the spiritual power behind money. Paul had been in Ephesus for over two years, and God had blessed

his work greatly with many miracles. A group of traveling exorcists tried to cast an evil spirit out of a sufferer and were badly mauled by the demon-possessed man. The news got out: *“And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified”* (Acts 19:17). Clearly, this dramatic incident caused the believers to talk about demon possession and to discuss God's way of releasing people.

Acts 19:18-20 describes what happened:

And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

There must have been terrible needs in that area. There would have been countless people who were hungry and homeless. The work of spreading the gospel needed to be financed. Fifty thousand pieces of silver was a vast fortune. Think about what a large sum like that could have been used to accomplish! Why were the books burned and not sold?

We saw in the Old Testament that Jews could not sacrifice anything which had been unlawfully obtained. We noted that, as part of their commitment to Jesus, the first four disciples chose not to benefit from a bumper catch of fish. We learned from Jesus that there is a spiritual force behind wealth and that objects bearing Caesar's mark must be given to Caesar.

When we add these principles together, we can see that these evil books belonged to Satan. They had his mark on them. He was the force behind them. They could not be

used as an offering for God.

It is blasphemous even to suggest such a terrible thing. Today, there would be those who would argue that the books should be sold and the money given away. Such people are blind to spiritual forces. They do not recognize that there are evil spirits behind evil objects. Jesus told us that He would come back to destroy the works of the enemy and that we were to trample the enemy underfoot. We must not use the proceeds of evil to support the work of the kingdom nor to help feed and clothe the poor.

Giving to the poor is giving to God. Would God want money which had been tainted by Satan? We should remember what happened to Cain and to Ananias when they offered God unacceptable gifts! Acts 19:20 tells us what happened after the bonfire: *"So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."*

MONEY TROUBLE

I am sure that most readers have thought of Paul's famous principle: *"For the love of money is the root of all evil"* (1 Timothy 6:10). We have not reached Paul's letters yet, but some of the incidents we are examining in Acts must have contributed to Paul's feelings about the grip that money has on people.

Luke introduces the worst New Testament riot with this understatement in Acts 19:23: *"And the same time there arose no small stir about that way."* Money was behind the fight. A silversmith named Demetrius thought that the gospel was losing him income. Fewer people were buying the trinkets he made of the false god Diana. He told his colleagues:

*... Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.
Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but*

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almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised....

Acts 19:25-27

Demetrius was enslaved to mammon. He did not want to lose any of his income, so he instigated a riot, which meant that Paul had to leave town. The gospel always puts some people out of business, and I guarantee that there will always be trouble over money and giving. This means we must always be careful that we are thinking about money in God's way. We need to double-check that our motives for asking and for giving are pleasing to God.

PAUL'S FAREWELL

The trouble at Ephesus convinced Paul that terrible afflictions and persecution lay ahead of him. When he was traveling to Jerusalem, he had to summon the leaders of the Ephesian Christians to meet him in Miletus because it was too dangerous for him to enter Ephesus.

Acts 20:17-37 records Paul's farewell sermon to the Ephesians, whom he had served for over two years. His closing remarks were about money:

I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yeah, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

Acts 20:33-36

Of all the topics he could have spoken about in his farewell address, he chose giving. Instead of urging them

to preach the gospel, he reminded them not to covet wealth but to work hard so that they could give to the weak. Giving was so high on Paul's list of priorities for Christian believers that he made it the last thing he said to his disciples. Whenever they remembered Paul in the future, they would recall this farewell sermon on giving. From all of the sayings of Jesus that he could have left with them, he chose, " ... *It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35).

This saying of Jesus does not appear in the gospels, but it wonderfully encapsulates the teachings of Jesus and Paul and the life of the Early Church. They knew that giving brought far more happiness than receiving and that it meant great blessing would be the giver's reward. They understood that giving caused growth and was God's way for His children. They had grasped the truth that generous giving broke the power of the enemy and was the best way to live. The members of the Early Church were generous givers like their all-giving God. It was one of the secrets of their astonishing success.

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES

Again, I have summarized what we have seen in the Acts into the following key principles. They will help us to remember the important truths we have learned in this chapter.

1. Giving is part of our witness to the truth about Jesus.
2. Giving communities are blessed with church growth because generosity attracts people to Jesus.
3. God works miracles through giving communities.
4. Our giving needs to be organized effectively by Spirit-filled leaders.

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5. God's way of giving does not make any sense to the world and vice versa.
6. We should put no limits on our hospitality.
7. We have a responsibility for the needy far away.
8. We should not profit from Christian ministry.
9. Money causes problems.
10. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

CHAPTER SIX

NEW TESTAMENT GIVING PRINCIPLES

We began this book by gazing at our all-giving God. We thought about Him as Creator and Redeemer and realized that giving is at the root of His divine character. However, we have been looking at human giving for the last four chapters, and it is easy to forget basic principles.

When we search the rest of the New Testament for teaching about giving, we see that most of the related passages are about God and His gifts. The pages from Romans to Revelation are peppered with descriptions of God's generous giving, lists of His gifts, and reminders of His grace and mercy. We give because that is what God does. We are generous because He has given us everything we are and everything we have. Human giving, even at its best, can be only the palest reflection of God's giving.

Before we continue with more teaching about our giving, let us remind ourselves about His giving. If God's loving actions are not the basis for our behavior, we might drift into lifeless legalism. Here are five important passages about God's blessings to launch us into the New Testament teaching about giving.

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory ...

Romans 9:22-23

So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the

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end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ...

1 Corinthians 1:7-8

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power...

Ephesians 1:17-19

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God...

Ephesians 2:4-8

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

2 Peter 1:3-4

These verses are just the smallest mouthful of the mighty feast of God's generosity described in the letters of the New Testament. Unless we are gripped by God's amazing giving, and unless we are dazzled by His grace and mercy, we will never begin to understand why loving, grateful generosity should be the dominant feature of our lives.

HARDSHIPS AND JOY

The repeated descriptions of the believers hardships and sufferings stand out when we scan the pages of the New Testament letters for examples of human giving. The Early Church's extraordinary giving may have contributed to their fantastic growth. Their generosity may have been blessed by God with mighty miracles, but they did not have an easy life. Poverty, persecution, opposition, imprisonment, exile, and martyrdom were their lot and also their deep, deep joy! The giving of the first Christians may have earned them unlimited heavenly treasure and wonderful spiritual blessings on Earth, but it did not bring them material riches. It did, however, make them cheerful, contented, and incredibly fulfilled.

Mammon always insists that giving will make us miserable. We must never believe it. It is a lie! It is acting like a miser, which makes us miserable! There is a deep biblical principle that God's glory is only ever seen at a place of sacrifice. If we want to taste His glory, we have to live sacrificially. Before we examine closely the New Testament teaching about giving, here are five passages to remind us of the circumstances that the first Christians faced and in which they lived so generously.

Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

1 Corinthians 4:11-13

But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge,

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by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

2 Corinthians 6:4-10

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

James 1:2-4

We will not grasp the significance of the New Testament teaching about generosity until we appreciate this background of hardships and difficulties. Biblical giving principles are not a recipe for instant earthly prosperity, but they are God's way to blessing and joy. When we give in His way, we are on a certain path to peace and maturity. We are following His route to righteousness. Never forget: Giving is the highway to heavenly treasures.

GOOD WORKS

There is a relentless New Testament emphasis on the importance of good works. Far too many evangelical believers are so busy insisting that good works cannot save us that they overlook all of the verses which insist that we have been saved to do good works. Paul's teaching

in Romans 2:6-10 (and in many of Jesus' parables) shows that our heavenly reward is related to the good works we have performed. In 1 John 3:16-18, it is clearly demonstrated that good works are an aspect of giving.

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3:16-18

These words are pointed at us. We live in an age when most North American and Western European believers are well aware of their Third World brothers' and sisters' acute needs. We are those who have the world's goods. Do we love our poor Third World brothers in *word* or in *deed*? Have we closed our heart to them? Does God's love abide in us? Has the lie of mammon tricked us into thinking that our gift would be too small to make any difference? Jesus' parable about the Last Judgment, in Matthew 25:31-46, makes it unavoidably clear that our love for God is measured by our practical caring for the poor. If we are believers, good works must be a key feature of our lives.

GODLY THINKING

Paul reminds us in Romans 12:2 that God's way of living is far removed from the world's normal practices. It says, "*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*" This verse shows that a change of thinking must come before a change in behavior. Our behavior will be transformed only by a revolution in our thinking. Our giving will be

changed only when we start to think like God about wealth and financial principles. That is precisely why I have gone to such lengths in this book to explain *why* we should give.

If we only give to get something back for ourselves on this Earth, then we are still thinking according to the world's way, not God's. Once we grasp the godly principles involved, we will persist in giving generously for right reasons and pure motives. Remember, the world's ideas about giving are the exact opposite of God's ideas, so there must be a total transformation in our thinking—a complete mental revolution—before we can start giving like God. That is why it is important that we read and re-read this book and that we check all of the references and fully understand God's giving principles. I cannot think of anything which is more urgent for the kingdom of God in these days than that God's people start to think God's thoughts about giving.

PAUL'S PRINCIPLES

The apostle Paul dominates our knowledge of the Early Church. He is the man whom God used to plant so many churches and evangelize so much of the Roman Empire in the 30 years after Jesus' return to heaven. His letters are a major part of the New Testament (though Luke actually contributed more words than Paul), and his ideas must shape our thinking about gifts and giving. Paul sets out his principles for accepting gifts in three main chapters: 1 Corinthians, Chapter 9; in 1 Corinthians 9:14, he makes it clear that *"... the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."* From 1 Corinthians 9:3 to 9:14, he uses multiple examples to convince his readers that those who serve the Church should have their needs met by the Church. This follows

the Old Testament practice of providing for priests and Levites by the people's tithes. Paul refused to live like that: "... Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:12).

... I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

1 Corinthians 9:15

Preaching the gospel was Paul's one and only priority. If receiving financial gifts meant that some people would not listen to him, he would not accept the gifts. If others would not listen because Timothy was uncircumcised, then Timothy had to be circumcised. In 1 Corinthians 11:7-11, Paul explained that he had accepted support from his Macedonian partners in order to serve the Corinthian church, but 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 reveals his normal practice of refusing to accept gifts from churches where he was ministering.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought [without paying for it]; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort you by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

Paul knew that he set an example everywhere he went. More than that, he urged people to imitate him and set a pattern for ministry which is vital for us today. Too many people think that the full-time, fully-paid ministry is the only way forward. Paul stands out as a shining example of part-time ministry. Paul financed his ministry by making tents. He did not depend on the giving of local people. He did not demand that anyone support his apostolic ministry. Instead, he worked when necessary and accepted gifts when they came.

I must have said a thousand times that we are not going to reach the world for Jesus through full-time ministers alone. We need them, and we should all give our tithes to release many more people into ministry, but we also need an army of people who will minister like Paul, who will work to support themselves and never cut short the amount of serving and preaching. Paul proves that to be a part-time minister is not necessarily to be a second-rate minister or second best! His principles of financing ministry are still relevant today.

PAUL'S OFFERINGS

If Paul was reluctant to ask for gifts for himself, he was incredibly zealous in collecting gifts of money for others. Paul is the Church's first great fund-raiser. We saw in the Book of Acts that he was at Antioch when they gave so generously for famine relief and that he and Barnabas took the money to Jerusalem. Two other passages describe different occasions when Paul asked for gifts for needy Jewish believers that were far away in Israel.

Romans 15:26-28, Paul explained that fund-raising for Jewish believers was the reason he had not been able to

visit the Romans:

For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain.

Although Paul was primarily a preacher and teacher, he spent much of his time urging people to give. It is important to see that his fund-raising was always for the Jews. Paul argued that the Gentile believers owed an eternal spiritual debt to the Jews and should give gifts to them in repayment. It is for this reason that I also believe that giving to the Jews should be the highest priority today for us all.

We must understand the distinction that Paul made. He believed that he had a right to be supported by those to whom he ministered, but he refused to exercise that right. He frequently asked people to give to the Jews. Their needs mattered to him more than his own. As well as asking people to give to special large offerings for the Jews, Paul often urged believers to make generous giving a central part of their lives. For example, in Romans, Chapter 12, he writes: *“Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness”* (12:8). *“Distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality”* (12:13). *“Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head”* (12:20).

GIVE HOSPITALITY

In particular, Paul urged his readers to make

hospitality a special priority. In Romans 12:13, he told the people that he had just met to practice hospitality. In Romans, Chapter 14, he explained that they were even to invite into their home those difficult people who have strong views about what they should or should not eat. The writer to the Hebrews also reminded his readers to: *“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares”* (Hebrews 13:2). Peter encouraged believers to: *“Use hospitality one to another without grudging”* (1 Peter 4:9).

In an age when there are an ever increasing number of homeless people, and when most Christian homes have a spare room or some empty space, the plea for believers to give hospitality surely needs to be made all over again. Sometimes it is easy to give money to the needy far away, although God watches what we hold back. Yet the lies of mammon always make it hard for us to open our homes to strangers. What a chance to witness, especially when our deeds are louder than our words.

GIVE WITH FAITH

You cannot look at New Testament giving principles without reading Hebrews, Chapter 11, or it will not be a complete study. This is the most famous chapter in the Bible about faith, and because we know that our giving is meant to be filled with faith, it helps us to grasp some important truths about faith-filled giving. This chapter reminds us that: *“... without faith it is impossible to please him ...”* (Hebrews 11:6).

It teaches us that God: *“... is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”* (Hebrews 11:6). It shows us that faith *“... is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1).

The writer of Hebrews catalogs the heroes of the Old Testament, offering many examples of what he calls "faith." His pen-portraits have three things in common:

1. They all involve some element of personal sacrifice, either in giving something up or in performing a dangerous task at considerable personal risk.
2. They all carried out their God-given tasks to please God and to obtain a promised reward.
3. None of them received their reward on Earth.

This helps us to see the importance of heavenly rewards. Here are three excerpts which show that these heroes all thought the promise of God's blessing was so real and so wonderful that it more than made their sacrifice worthwhile.

But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Hebrews 11:16

Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

Hebrews 11:26

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.

Hebrews 11:39

We continue to return to the questions: Do we desire Heaven more than Earth? Do we believe that the rewards for giving God's way are better than having cash in our pockets? There is never any faith involved in keeping the possessions we can see or touch. Faith is the conviction of things not seen. There is very little faith in giving 10% or mere token offerings.

Faith is only needed when our giving becomes sacrificial. God smiles with pleasure at what we do not hold back from Him, when our love of heavenly rewards and holy promises is much greater than our love of money. Faith is present when our giving shows that our security is in God alone and not in maintaining a healthy bank balance.

Hebrews 10:34-35 describes the godly attitude toward possessions which all believers should aspire toward:

For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

The first Christians could accept the theft of their property with joy because they knew that they had something eternally better which could not be stolen. How much more should we be willing to give our property away! That takes faith, and faith pleases God.

GIVE RESPECT TO THE POOR

For some people, giving is a way of expressing their feelings of control or superiority. Their charity is a statement of power, rather than a gift of love and thankfulness. They are not thinking about a heavenly reward. They are instead pointing out their status to those they consider inferior. The New Testament emphasizes that we are to give our respect to the poor. We are to consider them as equals. We are not to patronize them when we meet them. Paul tell us to:

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Romans 12:16

James makes the principle plain:

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

James 2:1-9

It is one thing to make an offering for the poor in Africa. It is quite another matter to treat rough, unwashed, unkempt visitors to our services as honored guests. Yet that is what James calls us to do. Why should we behave like this? The first reason is that this is how God behaves. He does not judge people by their appearance. He looks on the inside, not the outside. He treats all people equally. He does not give special seats to the rich or privileges to a favored few. The second reason is that Jesus taught that the way we treat the *least of these* is the way we treat Him. If we ignore the poor, we are ignoring God. If we look down on the lowly, we are looking down on God. When we treat the poor with great respect, we are being respectful to God.

We must never forget that Christ *"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God"* (Philippians 2:6). Christ is our example in this matter. If He took the form of a servant, we should surely respect those who share that chosen form. Paul insists that *"... in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves"* (Philippians 2:3). When we genuinely think like this, we will give the poor the respect they deserve, and that is a gift which is more valuable than money.

The first Christians still paid their tithes to the Jewish religious leaders and made their sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple. They did this because they were Jews. However, when Gentiles were welcomed as believers, there was some dispute as to which Jewish regulations the Gentiles should keep. Should they be circumcised? Should they pay tithes? Were they bound by all the Jewish laws, none of them, or just a few of them?

After a conference at Jerusalem, the apostles decided that the Gentile believers needed to abstain only from: illicit marriages, anything polluted by idols, and the meat of strangled animals. They did not need to tithe or be circumcised. We have seen that the Jewish system of tithing was God's way of providing an income for religious leaders and for the poor. Even though we have not seen the tithing system in the New Testament, we have seen the principle behind the system. Christian believers should give to the poor and to religious leaders.

Paul may not have always claimed that right for himself, but he recognized that those who minister the gospel should receive income for their work. He makes this especially clear in 1 Timothy 5:17: *"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine."* Somehow, we have got to find a way of applying these principles to our

circumstances today. It is not good enough for modern church leaders to insist that their members tithe, because it is biblical, and then to use those tithes for an unbiblical purpose, like erecting and furnishing buildings!

The tithing principle is clear. It is God's way of providing income for men and women who are involved in the different aspects of ministry. It is people first. Anything else is an extra and voluntary offering.

SACRIFICES

The Gentile believers had a similar problem with sacrifices. Clearly they did not need to offer sacrifices for their sins any more. How were they to express their thanks to God? How could they give Him a love gift? How could they offer God sacrifices? Several important New Testament passages answer this question. It is vital that we grasp the principles involved, for far too many believers today offer God thankspeaking and thanksinging instead of thanksgiving.

Paul urges us: *"... by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service"* (Romans 12:1). He pleads: *"Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children: And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour"* (Ephesians 5:1-2). These verses are general teachings about modern sacrifices, but in Philippians, Chapter 4, Paul explains that a financial gift to him from his partners is actually a sacrifice to God. This is one of the most revolutionary and important passages about giving in the entire New Testament. In fact, it is so crucial to our understanding that I am going to quote it in its entirety.

Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of

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the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Philippians 4:15-20

God had used Paul to bring the believers in Philippi to Christ. As an expression of their thanks to God for His gift of salvation, these Macedonian believers became partners with Paul in the work the gospel. They remained behind in Philippi as witnesses to the resurrection, but they sent regular financial gifts to Paul which supported his ministry. Paul classified these gifts as sacrifices to God, which were *acceptable* and *pleasing* to God. More than that, though, Paul promised his partners that because of their generosity, God would supply every need that they had!

This is what I do today. I encourage those people who have been spiritually blessed by God's ministry in my life to become partners in the work. My partners stay at home as witnesses to the risen Lord, but send regular financial gifts which enable the gospel to be preached around the world. The gifts my partners send, like Paul's, are sacrifices that delight God. Following Paul's example, I stand upon the promise of God that He will supply my partners' every need.

Paul never promised that his partners would become prosperous. He did promise that God would supply their every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Every need means EVERY need. It includes health needs,

financial needs (like debts), employment needs, family needs, and so on. In the final chapter, some of my partners testify about how God has blessed them greatly and met their deep needs as they have given sacrificially to this ministry.

Of course, Paul is not saying that the *only* way to offer God sacrifices is to send Him money. He is simply making it clear that his partners' committed, regular, loving, faithful, thankful giving to him was the same as a sacrifice to God. Hebrews 13:16 repeats this idea: "*But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*" Giving, when sacrificial, is a sacrifice to God personally, which brings Him great pleasure.

FALSE TEACHERS

There is obviously a danger that some leaders will abuse this teaching and pressure people to give to them. The New Testament points this out and names such men as false teachers. In 2 Peter 2:3, it says that: "*... through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you ...*" In every age, there have always been those who have used religion to make themselves rich. These men are servants of mammon rather than servants of God.

In 1 Timothy 6:6-13, Paul contrasts true and false teaching. He makes it clear that a teacher's attitude toward money is a test of their truth or falsehood:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many

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sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.

Here, Paul urges those of us who would be men and women of God to shun the desire for riches and to embrace godly contentment. Men and women who want to become rich will not want to be generous givers. Some people pretend to themselves that they want to be rich only so that they can become givers, but they should start giving immediately and remember Jesus' principles.

In one incident, at the treasury, a widow gave more than all the rich men added together. They gave out of their abundance, but she gave all that she had. In another instance, a small boy's lunch was enough to feed thousands of people. Jesus taught, in Matthew 7:15-20, that we should avoid false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. Jesus promises that we will know them by their fruits. He spoke those words in the context of urging His disciples to be contented, to be generous givers, and to be servants of God rather than servants of mammon. False teachers and false prophets are to be avoided, and one of the ways we can recognize them is by their attitude toward money. Do they seek it? Do they keep it? Are they givers, like God, like the apostles of old?

RICH CHRISTIANS

There are some believers who—like Barnabas, Zacchaeus, Mary, and Martha—are very affluent. God has blessed them financially in the same way that He has

blessed other people with great intellect or outstanding musical ability. In 1 Timothy 6:17-19, Paul gives these wealthy Christians their personal instructions:

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Paul does not order them to give all their money away and become poor. Instead, he reminds them about their special responsibility to be generous and warns them about the danger of depending on the wrong sort of riches. The Bible does not condemn the rich for being rich. Rather, it condemns people who will not give generously. This is a disease which afflicts the rich and poor alike.

The church at Laodicea was prosperous, but it was condemned for trusting in the wrong sort of riches, not for being wealthy:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame,

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and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 3:15-22

As we have seen throughout the Bible, God wants us to desire heavenly treasure more than earthly wealth. It does not matter how much earthly wealth we have, so long as we know that it is all dust and ashes compared to the solid gold of heaven and that we give it away generously.

GIVING TO JEWISH BELIEVERS

Chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians are packed with more teachings about giving than any other part of the New Testament. In them, Paul urges the Corinthian believers to join his Philippian partners in giving as generously as possible to Jewish believers. Please read these two awesome chapters now. Read them slowly and carefully. There is not space to print them in full in this book, but I am going to pick out some of the highlights they illustrate and apply all of the principles we have been examining in this section.

Here is Paul's description of his partners' generosity to the Jews. He is not praising them for giving to his ministry. Rather, he is complimenting them for giving to Jewish believers.

How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

2 Corinthians 8:2-4

Paul does not mince his words in urging the Corinthians to give.

New Testament Giving Principles

... Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

2 Corinthians 8:7

Paul lists three reasons the Corinthians should give generously to the Jewish believers:

1. To prove that their love was genuine;
2. To follow the example of Jesus, because though He was rich, He became poor for their sake; and
3. To bring equality between the saints, so that their abundance would supply the needs of those less fortunate.

These three reasons still exist. I believe it is imperative that we take these words to heart and give to the Jews as generously as Paul's partners. This is precisely why helping Jews is such a high priority in this ministry. Is there really any excuse for not giving to the spiritually needy in Israel?

In these chapters, Paul takes pains to explain how he is administering the gift. *"Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but in the sight of men"* (2 Corinthians 8:21). It is vital that our finances are administered carefully today, so nobody can point a finger of accusation at God's people. Paul closes these two chapters on giving to the Jews with a series of pleas and promises. There is no better way of dealing with any controversy about giving than by letting these words sink deep into our mind. There has never been a better fund-raising letter for the Jews than this! Paul's words are still God's principles for us today.

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God

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loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God; Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.

2 Corinthians 6:9-14

It is easy to be carried away with these great promises. We must not forget that these blessings are promised to those who will give to the Jews. We should not take these words and apply them to every aspect of giving. Paul ends his fund-raising letter with a great shout of praise. Our giving will only become the delightful, joyful privilege we have been reading about in the New Testament when the words of his 2 Corinthians 9:15 shout are the main reason for all of our giving: *“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”*

CHAPTER SEVEN

GIVING TODAY

Jesus began and ended His public ministry by cleansing the Jerusalem temple. This was a deeply symbolic action which showed that the Messiah had come to purge Israel from its worship of mammon. John 2:15 describes what happened:

And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables

The temple trade was a good business. It provided the people with a useful service. The prices were rather high, but the people could afford them. Jesus saw through the excuses and recognized the idolatry. The Jerusalem temple was meant to have been a place of sacrifice and prayer. It still was meant for that in Jesus' day, but the worship had been tainted by mammon.

The Church today should also be characterized by a life of sacrifice and prayer. On the whole, it is, but we have always been polluted by the power of mammon. The love of money has stolen our compassion, stifled our worship, and paralyzed our giving. I believe that it is time for another cleansing. It is time for the Church in North America, Western Europe, and the world to be released from its bondage to mammon and to enter into the generosity of the all-giving God. It is time for us to conquer our fears of not having enough and to take hold of the giving hand of Jesus. He will gently guide us into the joyful delights of earthly generosity and toward the

heavenly blessing of true riches.

PREPARING TO GIVE

In this chapter, I want to make some practical suggestions which should help us begin to translate our new biblical ideas into giving lives which are deeply pleasing to God.

FACE UP TO OUR FEARS

The biggest problem for most of us is getting in touch with our feelings about money. We know what Jesus taught, but we still have deep fears and insecurities. Many of us are threatened by Jesus' words. We are afraid that following Him will leave us destitute, that we will be cheated by dishonest people, or that our families might suffer some hardships. We find it difficult to believe that we will find joy in giving, that heavenly treasure is genuine, or that all of our earthly needs will be supplied. Some people are convinced that they have too little money. A few feel guilty that they have too much. Others are terrified that friends might over-estimate their wealth and think them greedy. These sorts of fears often come from our childhood. If our parents were poor, we may find the thought of giving our possessions away terribly frightening. If our parents were prosperous, we may feel that frugality is a vice rather than a virtue.

It is important that we identify our fears about money. We should ask ourselves what we are afraid of and discuss the answers with our pastor. Then we can try to find out why we are fearful. Most people find that naming their fears is the first step on the road to defeating them.

STOP DENYING OUR WEALTH

Most North American and Western European Christians have problems balancing their budget. We tend to compare ourselves with our neighbors or employers and often end up feeling poor in comparison. It might help us if we start to examine ourselves in relation to all of Earth's humanity. We should face up to the undeniable fact that we are among the wealthiest people alive on this planet.

If we own a car or a home, we are in First Class. If we have fresh water coming from our sink faucets, installed electricity, and food on the shelves, we belong to the planet's privileged few. In global terms, the mere fact that we can read this book means that we are extremely fortunate. We should not feel guilty about this. For some reason, God has chosen to bless us greatly, but this blessing means that we have a special responsibility toward those who have less than we do.

START ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S GRACE

Many of us are quick to announce that we have been saved *spiritually* by grace, but some of us are slow to grasp that we still live *materially* by grace. Nearly everyone reading this book is surrounded by signs of God's grace. God has given us a beautiful planet to enjoy, and most of us live in its more comfortable parts. Our surroundings, our bodies, our families, all of these are gifts from God. We have done nothing to earn them.

God promised the children of Israel that He would give them

... great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggest not, vineyard and olive trees, which thou plantest not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full....

Isn't that our experience? Like the farmers of Israel, we can work hard and skillfully only to see our businesses affected by factors outside our control. They could sow, weed, and harvest, only for drought, fire, disease, or war to destroy them.

Many today have seen their income collapse because of recession, depression, interest rate rises, international trade wars, redundancy, or accident. Just as much as a harvest of ancient times, our personal income still depends on the gracious provision of the all-giving God. We need to acknowledge these truths. We must confess with our mouth that we are not self-sufficient people. Rather, we only live by the grace of God. Surely our lives will be filled with joy, celebration, and thanksgiving when we grasp the truth that our income is a gift of grace from God. The general acceptance of this truth was one of the key reasons why most Jewish festivals centered on thanksgiving.

TALK ABOUT MONEY HONESTLY

If we are freed from the power of mammon to become cheerful givers, who are like God, we need to be able to speak freely and honestly about our wealth and possessions. Most people are more secretive about their income and more sensitive about their assets than anything else. We are often convinced that people—even Christian friends—value us according to our wealth. We worry that they will look down on us if they learn we earn too little or despise us if we earn too much.

We need Christian teaching which helps us relate to money more biblically. Many people spend so much time worrying about money and think that they are the only ones who lose sleep over this subject. It is not true, but

they will not realize it until they hear others talk about their financial concerns, too. Churches today need to foster an atmosphere of acceptance in which Christian people can confess their financial fears and temptations. We need small groups where people can find answers to their problems with money. We need cheerfully to offer each other mutual support in the pilgrimage to generosity.

Many, many believers fail God over money. If we are to defeat mammon, we need churches where sinners can find financial forgiveness and healing. This will only happen when we take the lid off this subject and start to talk about our reluctance to give. We need to take responsibility for our problem with trusting Jesus' words and admit our fears about acknowledging our wealth.

KNOW THE POOR

We have seen that God urges believers to give to the poor and needy, yet many Christians today have lost touch with the poor. We tend to live in the more affluent neighborhoods and are often frightened to mix with the poor, who usually live in the dangerous parts of our towns. When we cannot see the poor, we form judgments about them which are based on media comment rather than firsthand knowledge. If we do not listen to the poor, we cannot hear their pain. If we never eat with the poor, then we live in a make-believe world which prevents us from loving our neighbors in the way that Jesus intended. If we refuse to worship with them, we deny the reality of Christ's united body in our town. We can visit the poor, not to preach or to patronize them but to learn from them. Some of us can live among them, as Jesus did. All of us can stop watching television programs which concentrate on the affluent and insulate us from the pain of the vast majority.

When we are traveling overseas, we can visit the homes of national pastors and missionaries to learn from them firsthand about life among the world's poorest people. Even better, we can spend a month volunteering for an aid or missionary agency. Nothing changes the way that Western Christians give like a short period of actually living in the Third World! No matter how many books we read, videos/DVDs we watch, or missionaries we listen to, we will only know the needs of the poor when we have eaten their food, walked with them to collect water, slept in their dirt-floor shacks, cuddled their children, and worshipped with them in their church buildings.

Close contact with the poor is the best way that I know of to loosen tight wallets! Mammon tries to keep us far away from the needy because he knows what God's love will do to our purses when we meet them.

TRUST GOD

If we want to be blessed and cheerful givers, then we have to trust God. Jesus encouraged His disciples to stop worrying and start trusting. His message is still the same today. Too many believers allow money to make their decisions for them. They ask if they can afford this or that, but the question they should ask is what does God want? What happens when God suggests an action which we do not have enough money to carry out? Do we trust God, or do we allow money to make the decision for us?

When God fed the Jews in the wilderness, they were allowed to collect enough manna only for that immediate day's needs. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus encourages us to ask God for food for just that day. Throughout the Bible, people are urged to meet the immediate needs of the poor. We have seen Paul promise that God will supply all of his

partners' needs. Sadly, enough for today just is not enough for too many modern-day believers. They want extra for tomorrow, too. They might be able to trust God for the present, but they find it hard to trust Him for next week as well, but they do not need to. We are not called to trust God for tomorrow. We are called to trust Him today, each day. Christians are always worrying about the future, despite the fact that the Bible forbids this. It calls us to be different from pagans and to live one day at a time.

Generosity is easier when we realize that we do not need to worry about tomorrow. It is helpful to cultivate the daily habit of asking ourselves whether God can provide for that day's needs. I guarantee our answer will always be yes. After a few months of this, people will begin to realize that trusting God to provide enough for today is all the trust they will ever need for their life. This discovery will release us from mammon's hoarding spirit, which always quenches giving. We will become free to experience the godly joy of generosity.

RECOGNIZE GOD'S OWNERSHIP

The Bible makes it clear that God owns everything. The whole world belongs to Him. God, the Owner, laid down clear financial rules for Israel which determined the way that they could use His land and treat His children. The land had to lie fallow in every seventh year. Whatever harvest came up then could be eaten only by the poor. In every fiftieth year, all slaves had to be set free, all debts canceled, and all land returned to its original owner. The Jews obeyed these rules because they recognized that God was the ultimate Owner of all things. He had the right to decide what happened to His property.

Our attitude toward our possessions changes when we

deeply acknowledge this truth. We will not become careless with things. Who would dare to be casual with something which had been loaned to us by Almighty God? Instead, we will find it far easier to let go. We will thank God for lending one of His precious possessions to us for a short while, and we will be glad that He is now lending it to someone else!

Most importantly of all, our acknowledgement of God's ownership will transform the way we think about giving. Instead of wondering how much of our money we should give to God, we should ask how much of God's money should we keep for ourselves! When we catch ourselves asking the second question, we can be sure that we are well on the way to becoming generous givers, givers who bring immense pleasure to God.

ACKNOWLEDGE OUR STEWARDSHIP

Some people may be called to give all of their money away as part of their conversion from mammon to Christ. Believers are not told, as a general rule, to give all of their money away. Instead, we are expected to steward it carefully on the real Owner's behalf.

Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew, Chapter 25, is clearly about finances. We are meant to make our money grow, not for ourselves but as stewards for God and His kingdom. We are responsible for developing the possessions and wealth which God has entrusted to us. We can use them to make our own lives on Earth more comfortable, or we can use them to earn ourselves heavenly treasure. It is up to us how we use our money. We decide. We are the stewards.

Some ministers encourage their members to delegate their decisions about giving to the leaders. They ask their

members to direct all of their giving to the local church and leave it to the leaders to decide how it is used. I do not think that we are to abdicate from our giving decisions. The Early Church gave gifts to the apostles only so that needy believers could be helped more effectively. They still personally gave their tithes, sacrifices, and offerings when and how they chose.

As stewards, we are called to make our money grow by hard work and careful investment. We should manage our money following the biblical principles we have found. We support as partners those ministries which God has used to bless us the most. We start to repay our eternal debt to the Jews. We provide hospitality. We live in equality with our brothers and sisters overseas. We give a tenth of our income to provide for local Christian leaders and the poor in our neighborhood. We help the needy. We give to express thanks to God. We control and direct our giving while we live and also after our death through a generous Will. We do all of this gladly and cheerfully, certain of a heavenly reward and confident that God will supply all of our earthly needs.

PRINCIPLES OF GIVING

There are four basic questions about Christian giving and receiving which need answers:

1. Why should we give?
2. How should we give?
3. To whom should we give?
4. What do we receive when we have given?

By now, we should all be able to give biblical answers to each of these four questions. Please pause now and write a brief answer to each question on a separate piece of

paper. We can check our answers as we read further.

WHY SHOULD WE GIVE?

There seem to be seven main reasons we should give our money, our wealth, and our possessions away. At various times, a different one of these reasons will be uppermost in our mind; but over a period of time, they should all feature into our thinking and motive our giving.

1. *God gives.* We have seen that God is introduced throughout the Bible as One Who gives lavishly. Everything we know about God reveals Him as the all-giving Creator and Redeemer. God gives to all humanity—to His friends and enemies—without expecting anything in return. We want to be like Him. We want to be more like Jesus. We want to think like Him and act like Him. This means that we will give generously because we know that this is the God-like, Christ-like way to behave.
2. *God commands us to give.* We have read God's commands to the Jews in the Old Testament and have noted that He ordered them to make giving central in their personal, family, and national lives. We have examined Jesus' instructions to His disciples and have gazed at His encounters with different men and women. We have studied the rest of the New Testament teaching, and now we should know for certain—beyond any shadow of a doubt—that Almighty God commands us to give. From now on, we know that we will be disobeying God each time we fail to give when asked and when we neglect to help a person whose needs we can see.
3. *We love with God's love.* We understand that God so

loved the world that He gave and are convinced that God gives because He loves, not for any self-serving reason. We recognize that it is a natural human instinct to give to those we love, and we know that God expects us to love as He loves us, even our enemies. Therefore, we will give because we are filled with God's love and because we know that our giving will help God's type of love to grow within us.

4. ***We are thankful.*** We have noticed that the Bible speaks repeatedly of *thanksgiving* rather than of *thanksspeaking*. We have seen that the Jews gave sacrificial gifts to God as one means of expressing their gratitude for the way He provided for all their needs. Now we recognize that we should begin to show our thanks to God by giving to Him. However, to have real meaning, this must be a special *extra* gift in thanks for something particular. Our weekly regular contribution at church cannot be considered a special thanksgiving gift.

The Bible teaches that we give to God either by giving generously to a poor person or to a Christian ministry which has blessed us. We should give a special love gift to God in one of these ways whenever we want to thank Him for a birth, a job promotion, or anything that means a lot to us.

5. ***We want to create equality.*** We have seen how the believer's circle of giving responsibility gradually grew through the Bible. To begin with, Jewish people gave to help those nearest to them, to their families and needy people whom they could see and touch. By the end of the scripture, the first Christians had accepted that they had a duty to

give to people whom they could *not* see, to traveling ministries, to believers in Israel, and to needy people far away overseas. We noted that the New Testament teaches that this sort of giving creates equality among the brethren.

Today, we are all aware of the massive variations in wealth around the world. We know that some of our brothers and sisters in the Third World struggle to survive in appalling conditions, while we live in relative ease and luxury. We give to them in an attempt to create some sort of equality between us and because we recognize the essential unity of Christ's Body. We know that John taught that we cannot have God's love within us if we ignore our brothers' needs. This means that we will give with generosity because we cannot do anything else while some of our Third World sisters sleep by the roadside.

6. *We want heavenly treasure.* We have read all about God's wonderful promises of divine blessing, great rewards, heavenly treasure, even the inheritance of a kingdom. We will give because we want to earn as much heavenly treasure as we can.

We hope to be among those favored believers who receive the awesome blessing which God has promised for those who give generously in the way He prescribes. We long for that treasure. We know that it is infinitely preferable to anything available on Earth. We are certain that it is worth any amount of sacrifice, so we will give because we want to receive the best possible heavenly reward and commendation from the all-giving God.

7. *We want our needs supplied.* We have read God's

awesome promises which guarantee that all of our needs will be met when we give God's way. Many people spend years clinging to their money in a vain attempt to meet their own needs, only to see God provide miraculously as soon as they start to give. Sadly, many never learn to give and stay in need to the end. Some of us have serious needs in our lives, but none of us has needs which are too great for the all-giving God!

No matter whether we have enormous debts or very poor health, whether we have difficulties in our homes or families, God promises to supply all our needs out of His infinite riches when we give His way. We will have no shame in giving to have our needs met. We tithe for our leaders' salaries. We give to the Jews and a ministry partner. We provide hospitality for strangers and care for the poor. We do all this because we know that our generous God will honor our sacrificial giving by supplying every need that we have.

HOW SHOULD WE GIVE?

Some people today view their giving rather like their taxes; it is all duty and no joy. They get it out of the way by sending a check for a certain percentage of their income to their local church or to some charitable organization. They have eased their conscience. The church allocates the donation, but this is not the best way to give. We will never find deep joy this way. Based on the biblical principles we have examined, here are five suggestions for a giving pattern which is relevant to modern society:

1. *Give generously.* We now know that we are called by God to be generous. We cannot avoid this basic

truth.

There are many different ways open to us of showing our generosity. For example, we are not really generous if we place an extra 10% in the Sunday collection but ignore beggars in the street and letters from charities. We are not biblically generous if we persist in measuring our giving by what we donate, rather than what we retain.

"Generosity" means "giving widely," rather than restricting our giving to one or two favored causes. It means giving to all of the different types of people and projects we have considered for all of the different reasons we have seen. God's giving is generous because it embraces friends and enemies. It encompasses all of humanity. We should follow Him by ensuring that we give widely in His way.

2. *Give appropriately.* Because we are stewards of God's money, we should give in the way that He wants. This means that supporting people in ministry will be the focus of our giving. Throughout the Bible, we have seen that the purpose of giving is essentially to meet the needs of people. We will do well to check that most of our giving goes to supporting people, especially *people in ministry*.

When we give to an organization—no matter whether a church, a television ministry, or overseas mission—we should follow the Old Testament free-will offering principle. The Jews knew exactly what was needed, what their gifts would be used for, and how much was required. Their giving was carefully targeted to meet clearly defined needs.

For example, in our ministry, we try to be as

specific as possible. Our monthly donor-letter ministry always directs our partners and friends to precise needs in our evangelistic missions, in our training of nationals to reach their nations for Christ, in our worldwide Jewish outreach, and so on. They always know exactly what the free-will gifts they send will accomplish.

I think that we would do well to insure that we give to reputable organizations which always explain what they need our gifts for and which always report back so that we know our gifts have been used properly.

3. *Give personally.* During the last few years, most modern giving has become very impersonal. We usually give by bank transfers or a check through the mail. It is hard to find joy in this sort of impersonal giving when we do not actually hand over our gifts in person or see the individual we are helping. Face-to-face giving stretches our generosity and greatly increases our joy. Obviously, it is not always feasible to give in cash and in person, but we can insure that at least some aspects of our giving are made in person (for example, at crusades, seminars, and meetings).

A few of us could make an annual visit to the local office of a ministry or charity we support to hand over our gift in small denomination notes. This would be much more meaningful to us than impersonal bank transfers.

4. *Give creatively.* We have seen that God gives in a wide variety of ways and have noted that Old and New Testament giving was broad and varied. It included tithes, sacrifices, free-will offerings,

gleanings, hospitality, funds for widows, collections for famine relief, expensive jars of oil, even a new tomb. Somehow, we need to recapture both the ceremony and the enormous variety of biblical giving. For the Jews, worship was giving, and gifts were a major part of all their religious ceremonies and celebrations. Far too often today, the collection of money at church is an embarrassing ritual hidden in a brisk hymn. We will only restore giving to its rightful place by making much more time for offerings in our services. We must find more creative ways for people to give than merely putting coins in a bag to be spent on heating bills by the treasurer.

We can use offerings to inform people about needs and to teach about rewards. We can invite the homeless to special meals, hold auctions for Third World projects, and give our gifts in small coins so that we get back in touch with our giving. We must develop creative ways of making *people* central to our giving so that our tithes really do release many more families into ministry.

5. *Give thoughtfully.* While we should aim to be believers who are characterized by God's cheerful generosity, we do not want to be people who give casually or thoughtlessly. We do want to give at every opportunity and to all who ask, but we do not want to give without thinking about what we are doing. We should ask ourselves why we are giving or why we are not giving. We can check our reasons and learn whether they match with biblical principles. We can make an effort to discover how much a person or organization needs and establish whether our gift is too much, too little, or just right

for that need. We can learn whether it would be more helpful to give a small amount regularly or a large sum occasionally. We should always know how much of God's money we are keeping back for ourselves.

These questions are not to make us introspective. They are to help us become responsible givers who recognize that Western Christians have an enormous financial responsibility for the Body of Christ around the world.

TO WHOM SHOULD WE GIVE?

This is probably the most important question for nearly all modern believers. We see massive needs in our cities and on our television screens. We hear frequent financial appeals in our churches and receive regular letters from large numbers of ministries and charities. We often feel swamped by the demands placed on our giving. Which ones should we respond to? Whom should we ignore?

It is too easy to opt out from the struggle by giving to only one cause or a token amount to every society that has purchased our address from a mailing list seller. However, the Bible contains giving principles which can help us through the maze of requests into the place of cheerful, generous joy. Here are seven principles which I have extracted from the different materials we have examined in the scripture:

1. *Give to local priests and Levites.* The first priority in our giving should be to allocate a tenth of our income to supporting people in our own locality. Local churches often encourage their members to give tithes and offerings. This biblical principle

means that the first 10% of the family income goes to the Church, plus a generous amount above that. In my opinion, the offerings should be used to cover the overhead expenses of the Church, while the tithes should be used only to support people. Somehow we need to do our best to insure that the bulk of our tithes are used to finance the modern equivalents of priests and Levites. That is, all of the people who are involved in some form of full-or part-time Christian work: secretaries, musicians, youth workers, counselors, caretakers, pastors, missionaries, and so on.

Most churches have a missionary overseas. These can be fully supported through tithes. Instead of being spent mostly on themselves, two-thirds of the members' tithes from a church with 100 members would easily support four families. If our churches would only return to the biblical tithes for people principle, we could release a massive number of people into the work of the gospel.

2. *Give to local needy.* One of the great works of the Holy Spirit in recent years has been teaching evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic churches that good works should go alongside the proclamation of the gospel. These works are beginning to complement our preaching.

More and more churches are starting orphanages, taking clothes and food to the homeless, organizing play groups for the children of single parents, running job centers for the unemployed, and delivering meals to the elderly and housebound. They are doing this as an expression of God's love, which speaks as loudly as the gospel they preach.

In this ministry, we have poured financial resources into an orphanage just across the border in Mexico. At some of our North American missions, we now are providing work, clothing, and food for the homeless, as well as providing special transportation to our meetings. When we are overseas, we always do our best to feed the vast crowds who come for training.

In the Old Testament, one-third of the peoples' tithes provided food stores which were used to feed the needy in that area. A similar proportion of our tithes could go into a fund today so that churches could use it to help their local poor.

If churches kept their members' tithes separate from other funds, it would be easy to insure that the tithes were used in this biblical way—exclusively for people. Just think of the good that one-third of the members' tithes could accomplish in our neighborhoods! An awesome work of caring for the destitute could be carried out by churches if our tithes were used in this scriptural way.

3. ***Give to God's ministry for you.*** After our tithe, our second priority should be to support—with regular, committed, sacrificial gifts—the ministry which God has used to bless us the most. We noted in the New Testament that Macedonian believers were committed, long-term partners of Paul. They could not travel with him, but they could pray for him, and they could give to support his work. We saw that Paul considered their gifts to be on a par with the Old Testament sacrifices which were offered directly to God.

These givers were people who had been brought to

faith in Christ by Paul. As well as supporting their local church leaders, they also supported his traveling ministry *and* his special appeals for funds for work among the Jews. That same pattern continues today. Most teachers are called to local ministry. A few are sent out by God in traveling ministries across the world. If we have been brought to faith by one of these ministers or blessed through their CDs, DVDs, and books, we should consider standing with them as committed partners.

I depend on my partners. Without their prayers and financial support, I would not be able to preach to vast crowds in distant lands. Without their sacrificial donations, I would not have been able to train hundreds of thousands of national leaders around the world. Without their constant support and encouragement, I would despair at the enormity of the task which God has given me.

4. *Give hospitality to visitors.* We have seen the vital place of hospitality in various examples throughout the Bible. We have noted that we are charged with a special responsibility of giving hospitality to God's servants. We have read all of the New Testament orders to make hospitality a priority. We remember that whenever we welcome a visitor, we are actually welcoming God. We have been gripped by Jesus' pleas to invite social outcasts into our homes.

More than any other aspect of our giving, hospitality involves our time, our love, our home, and ourselves. We can send money through the mail to anyone, but we have to provide hospitality in person. It is one thing to toss some money into a

homeless persons can but quite another matter to invite them into our home. Surely, this is what we are called to do and what will draw people to Christ.

As our communities disintegrate, families break up, and the number of elderly people multiplies, hospitality becomes ever more urgent. Our towns are increasingly filled with lonely people who would value a meal in another person's home. Many elderly believers live alone and/or are a long distance from their family. Most of them have empty rooms that they could use for the kingdom but only if they can break free from mammon's protective spirit toward property. Over one-third of the people in most Western churches are now single. It is a crazy waste of kingdom resources for them to live and eat alone all of the time. Hospitality needs to be taught, encouraged, modeled, and demonstrated in every church in our land.

5. ***Give to the poor.*** All believers have a general duty to be generous to the poor. We should consider that the wealth we are stewarding for God is always available to them, but we are not called to give everything to the needy as our main financial priority. As well as the lesser part of their tithe, Old Testament Jews also had to treat the poor fairly and provide for them creatively through practices like gleaning. In the New Testament, we saw that Jesus treated the poor with respect and encouraged His disciples to give generously.

Our attitude toward ethnic minorities and social outcasts is a key test of our love. Do we respect them? Do we value and welcome them? Do we

look down on them and think of them as inferior? Many churches have lost touch with the poor. Somehow, we need to re-integrate ourselves with them, especially with those who have moved here from far away and may not know many people or have much money. As we mix with them, we will naturally give to them in creative and practical ways.

We also have a duty to the poor in the Third World. We know something of their desperate needs from the media and missionaries. Like the Early Church, we can only give to them through an organized fund. There has to be trust in this. The first believers trusted Paul to pass on the money they gave, and they trusted the poor to spend it wisely. They did not issue a list of instructions. Their giving was not conditional.

We should give to organizations we trust, to groups with Spirit-filled people who are responsible for the finances received and ministries which do not impose their will on the poor but empower them instead. The poor in the Third World may need our financial giving, but they do not need our financial control. All of our giving should liberate, not enslave. It should equip, not control. It should build up, not bind or humiliate.

6. *Give to Israel.* Paul made it clear that we have an eternal spiritual debt to the Jews. Where would we be without them? Sometimes we forget that Jesus was a Jew, that all of the first Christians were Jews, and that almost all of the Bible was written by Jews. Jewish believers brought the gospel to the Gentiles and first spread the Good News across the world. Instead of expressing gratitude, for

centuries the Church persecuted the Jews or turned a blind eye when others persecuted them. It is time to listen to Paul and start repaying our debt. I strongly believe that giving to the Jews and to the work in Israel should be on our list of giving priorities.

7. ***Give to God.*** I am sure that there is not one of us who does not long to give to God. Even before we started reading this book, we knew that we would not hold anything back from Him. Now we know how we can give to Him—directly and personally! We have read Jesus' words and have finally understood that giving to a needy person is giving to God. We have grasped Paul's teaching that sacrificial giving to an anointed ministry is personally offering God a sacrifice which brings Him great pleasure!

We must never forget these simple truths or let anyone make us doubt them or be tricked into adding to them. Remember, God is personal, so we give to Him by giving to a person, either by helping somebody in need or by supporting someone in a ministry or a church. Whenever we want to express *thanksgiving* to God, we should give to Him in one of the ways described in the scriptures.

WHAT DO WE RECEIVE WHEN WE HAVE GIVEN?

Some teachers do not think that this is a question we should ever ask, yet it is a question which the Bible keeps answering. We have seen that many clear promises are made but only to those who give consistently in the way that God prescribes.

1. **Heavenly treasure.** Imagine that Britain decided to change its currency to U.S. dollars and that when it did, all British pounds would be worthless. Suppose also that nobody knew when this monetary conversion would take place. Surely, wise British families would turn most of their pounds into American dollars, keeping back just enough pounds to live on day to day until the conversion actually happened. That is the biblical picture. We cannot take our wealth with us when we die, and we do not know when that will take place, but we can turn our income and assets into something far more valuable—eternal riches.

We convert our earthly wealth into heavenly treasure by giving it God's way, by investing it in people. Please do not forget all of the eternal blessings we have read about, the heavenly treasure and eternal kingdom which the New Testament promises for those believers who give God's way. Read again those glorious passages and underline both the promises *and* the conditions: Matthew 10:40-42, 25:31-40; Luke 6:30-38, 12:33-34, 14:12-14; 2 Corinthians 9:6-14; and Philippians 4:15-20. As you read these verses, note how the promises of heavenly blessings are for those who give to people—to the poor, to the Jews, to men and women in Christian ministry, and to the Church. Heavenly treasure and an eternal kingdom are our rewards when we give in faith to these groups of people.

2. **Earthly needs.** Some believers worry that their giving will make them worse off. They have no need to worry, for the Bible makes it plain that God will supply all our needs. Remember, He decides what

our needs are, not us! Mammon will try to deceive us into thinking that giving will impoverish us, but in Philippians 4:19, Paul promises those who have given that “ . . . *my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ.*” In Matthew 6:19-33, Jesus promises that God will provide us with everything we need when we put His mammon-rejecting kingdom first in our life. We have to decide whether we believe the Bible or mammon, but we cannot obey both of them!

In this book, we have seen that both the Old and New Testaments contain clear promises that God will bless us on Earth in a tangible way which will change our earthly resources. Please remember the special promises we have read for following God's tithing principles. In Deuteronomy 14:29, He promises to bless the work of those who tithe in His way. In Malachi 3:10, God promises overflowing blessing for those who tithe biblically.

These promises mean that we can expect God to more than meet our earthly needs when we tithe properly. If we are employers, we can expect our business to prosper. If we are employees, we can expect security and advancement. Deuteronomy 24:19 contains a similar special promise. When we give freely to the poor, we can expect God to bless whatever we do. This is not a spiritual blessing that is reserved for heaven. It is a clear promise that our work will prosper when we give in God's way. Isaiah 58:7-11 promises that we will receive incredible blessings when we give like God. He promises us health, guidance, and good things when we provide generous hospitality to both the homeless and the poor.

Let us never forget the promises Paul made to those who gave to the Jews. Every single one of our needs will be met: our debts, our family, our employment problems, our health, and so on. God personally guarantees to meet all of our earthly needs when we give cheerfully and generously to His chosen people.

3. ***Growth and miracles.*** The Book of Acts has shown us that God blesses givers in quite unexpected ways. The staggering growth of the Early Church of the first Christians is clearly related to their generosity. The miracles of healing and deliverance should not be separated from the sacrificial lifestyle of the disciples. When our churches give in God's way, we can expect to be blessed in equally wonderful ways. We can expect the gift of miracles. We can anticipate dynamic growth. We can look for stunning provision. God loves cheerful givers. He delights to bless them in the biblical ways we have seen.

Giving takes faith. We have a trustworthy God Who is not going to ask us to do something which will harm us. He is the all-giving God. We have learned from the scripture that He is asking us to follow Him along the pathway of generosity. I trust that we will join together in the great adventure of giving like God. When we do, I know that we will become cheerful and greatly blessed believers who will receive God's great rewards, both in this life and in the life to come.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GIVERS TODAY

Until now, this book has been mainly theoretical. I have tried to show what the Bible teaches about giving so that we can start to think about giving in God's way. I am sure that some readers want to know whether the theory actually works in practice today. There are always people who worry whether God can do in the present what He did in the past for the Early Church. In this final chapter, I am going to introduce a few of my partners. These are men and women from a wide variety of denominational and ethnic backgrounds who have been helped by this ministry. They pray for the work that I do, and they give to finance the work of the gospel around the world, but especially in Israel.

As we read their stories, we can see how God has supplied all of their needs as they have given sacrificially to this work. Some have been healed. Others have been released from the bondage of debt. A few unemployed have started working. Many of them gave generously when they themselves were in desperate financial need. We now know that God blesses exactly this sort of sacrificial giving. Some of them gave specifically to Israel. I hope that we now expect this sort of giving to be blessed by God.

As we see their testimonies, we should not concentrate on the sums they contributed. Remember, God measures what we keep back, not what we give. Instead, we should look at their circumstances and see how God changed them. Make ready to see the principles we have unearthed

by working in real-life situations. Prepare to praise God for His grace and goodness. Never forget: He DOES keep His promises!

MARY MONTGOMERY

"I had been without work for over two years. The only income I had was \$36 every two weeks. I was \$4,000 behind with my rent. Although I needed to keep the money, I gave \$30 to Morris Cerullo World Evangelism's Jewish World Outreach. The enemy spoke to me and asked me why I was sending money to reach the Jews when I had my own problems right here in the South Bronx of New York. He told me that I was crazy, but I knew that the Jews were God's chosen people, and if God wanted me to give to them—and would bless me for it—then I would do it. I surrendered everything to God, and in one month, a charity agency paid my entire back rent. I had struggled so much in my own strength, but God did it quickly and without a struggle.

"Later, God opened up jobs for me which provided financial blessings in my life. Eventually, He gave me the job that I really wanted in a hospital. This is amazing for someone like me, who was a drug addict for 20 years! I sold drugs and ran a crack house, [editor's note: A "crack house" is a place where drugs, particularly the drug called "crack," are manufactured and/or sold. Crack is a purified and potent form of cocaine that is smoked rather than snorted and is highly addictive.] God has changed my life and has done so much for me."

DENISE MURRAY

"I was a pastor's wife for 15 years. Because of church pressures, our marriage was breaking up. I wanted out of

everything. I even wanted a divorce. My husband and I had no jobs. There was nobody that I could trust. I knew Morris Cerullo's ministry would help me. I went to his meeting in Chicago, expecting total deliverance. At the service, I re-dedicated my life to God. During the offering, I gave \$100 for myself and \$100 for my husband. Two days after the meeting, my husband got the highest-paying job in his district as a manager in a grocery chain, and I received a job at the Marriott Hotel. That same week, my son quit taking drugs.

"The following year, I attended another Morris Cerullo meeting in Chicago. During the offering, he asked us to give \$100 to the Jews. We did, but my husband and I needed help. Due to a recent accident, we were \$10,000 in debt. When I went home, I went directly to the mailbox and found a check for exactly \$10,000. This was money we had been trying to get from his company because of the accident."

BENNY SMITH

"I was watching the *Victory!* television program when I heard Morris Cerullo prophesy that people who contributed to the work of the Lord would experience God's miracle of debt cancellation. I believed what I heard and felt that I should give \$100. I gave this and waited for the miracle of debt cancellation. At that point in my life, I was preparing to file for personal bankruptcy. I was \$100,000 in debt and was deeply concerned about my wife and our four children. It appeared that I was going to lose everything, including my home. The situation looked hopeless. My job would never provide enough money to pay back all the debts that my family had as a result of sickness.

"It began happening fast! The electric company called to say that the \$1,100 owed to them was canceled! They even told me they would re-establish my credit! Then, I received the news that \$6,000 had been cut off my car loan, and I no longer owed that money! Five other bills (totaling \$5,000!) were also canceled! Finally, my lawyer called me and told me that somehow it had been determined that I could keep my home!"

MR. AND MRS. DONALD WILSIE

"We first met Dr. Cerullo nearly 30 years ago in Casper, Wyoming, where we pastored a church before Donald was injured in a car wreck and disabled. Morris asked us to give \$300, and Donald pledged to do this. In the following months and years, we lost contact with the ministry of Dr. Cerullo. For 30 years we did not fulfill that pledge. Two months before the Chicago partners' seminar, some dear friends sent us information about Dr. Cerullo.

"Our financial situation was terrible. We had no money, but God provided finances for us to go to the seminar, and we took with us the \$300 to finally fulfill our pledge. We were giving all we had. Incredibly, our small business began to grow rapidly. We had been at a \$0 balance, but in seven weeks, we showed a \$200,000 balance. Donald was also healed of diabetes. He had been taking medication for years, but he was able to quit the medication. Donald knew that God had healed him.

"Three months after the Chicago meeting, we put \$17,000 in the offering. We had gone from barely being able to give a 28 years old \$300 pledge to being able to contribute \$17,000. We have a small business that is doing overwhelmingly well! When we went to Chicago, I began this business with one computer and a printer. I now have

ten computers and printers and am spread from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

"We have been faithful in giving to Morris Cerullo's ministry. God has blessed us with both a brand new van and a truck. We also bought a new home, even though the offer we made to the sellers was ridiculous."

JUAN AREVALO

"During the 40 days of fasting and prayer initiated by Morris Cerullo World Evangelism, I received the *Step One* letter from Morris Cerullo. God put on my heart to give \$80 in the offering. I did not know where I would get the money, but I took a step in faith. It was not easy to pay the pledge I had made. I had some obstacles. I had to obey God and put the problems aside! Two days after I sent the money, I received a letter from my employer saying that I was going to get a pay increase, retroactive for a year! Glory to God! Our wages were supposed to be frozen for five years because of the Social Contract Act for government employees, but the Pay Equity Management Board was giving raises only to people in my classification. My retroactive check was \$1,638.18! I cannot stop praising God! He is so good to us! He supplies all of our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus!"

RAEJEANNE MUELLER

"I became a Christian in 1977. For about ten years I fed on the Bible. I began to get a taste of what it was like to put God's Word to work in my life and to see the results and to understand what it is to walk in the Spirit.

"In 1987, my husband's health was taken so that he could no longer work at all. We lost our trucking business. Within two weeks, we had zero income. Under these

circumstances, I was put into a position where I could do nothing in my own strength or power. I had to trust in God to be my provider. God faithfully and miraculously provided for us. I was active in church during this time. However, after a church split and a very difficult time in relationships, I stopped going to church.

"During the next four years, I isolated myself in my home. It felt like God had abandoned me. I stopped hearing His voice. I began to listen to the lies and condemning thoughts of the enemy. I felt like I was losing my mind. I was filled with confusion and depression. I could not concentrate on anything or remember things. I paced around my house like a caged animal. I could not sleep at night. I was always physically tired and weak. I knew something was wrong but felt powerless to pray. I could not concentrate or comprehend when I tried to read God's Word.

"My daughter told me about MCWE's fast. She was so excited about taking part that I decided to join her. Together, we fasted one meal a day for 21 days. Toward the end of the fast, Morris Cerullo wrote, asking us to give something that was valuable to us to his ministry. I prayed and asked God what He wanted me to give. He said, 'The \$1,000 you pledged in 1992 but never gave.' God had to deal with my heart before I would give this. My heart had become hardened. I was not going to give it. God is more concerned about our heart—why we give and how we give—than in our giving. At the end of the fast, I cheerfully gave the \$1,000 to God through this ministry. My mind started clearing. The pressure in my head left, and I could sleep at night. I started to hear from God again. I began to read and understand His Word once more!

"However, a lien or charge for \$50,000 had been put

against our house by the State of California's Department of Industrial Relations. A friend had come into partnership with my husband to start a trucking business. He injured his back and claimed he was an employee and not a partner. He wanted compensation. When we went to court, we lost the case. With interest, this lien had risen to \$90,000. It could rise again. I wrote a letter to the State of California, explaining to them exactly what had happened in this case. They would not listen.

"At the next World Conference, I made another \$1,000 pledge to the Jewish World Outreach. When I heard about Morris Cerullo World Evangelism's 40-day fast, I decided to participate and wrote to Morris Cerullo, asking him to pray for us to receive a debt cancellation of the lien. I also wrote another letter to the State of California, explaining a second time what had happened in the case against us. This letter was identical to the first letter, which had been declined. On April 6, I sent my check for \$1,000 to MCWE to pay my pledge. On April 11, I received a Notice of Debt Cancellation of the lien, totaling \$90,277.84.

"I give God the glory for all the good things He has done for me and my family. I believe this is all due to the change of my heart in giving cheerfully. My husband, who had been disabled since 1986, has also recently returned to work."

MARVIN AND MARGIE RUDOLPH

"Morris Cerullo came to Birmingham, Alabama, and ministered in the Parliament House Hotel. At that time, we ran a little newspaper called *The Jewish Star*. (We are "completed" Jews.) The paper was about to go under. We wanted God to prosper it, and we had been asking Him to save our business. We decided to ask Morris Cerullo to

pray with us for it. He put the newspaper under his arm and carried it to his hotel room.

"God answered this prayer 17 years ago, and today we have a strong newspaper business which has taken us around the world twice."

JOHN BELL

"Because of what happened to me in Vietnam, I had a sickness called 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.' I was in Vietnam from July 1968 to July 1969. It was some of the hardest times in my life. When I came out of Vietnam, I had no money and no benefits. I was destitute, homeless, on the street. I could not hold down a job. I had been a drug addict and alcoholic for years. Although I was born again in 1978, I was still taking drugs. I began taking drugs when I went to Vietnam. I got into smoking marijuana, then harder stuff, like heroin and opium. When I came out of the service, I started taking cocaine. I really tried hard to stop, but circumstances would happen in my life, and I would go back to drugs. I was walking around being defeated, like some Christians. I kept crying out to God: When is my life going to change? Then, it started.

"One day, I was walking down the street in San Jose, California. I was depressed and discouraged because I was having trouble on my job and was going through a divorce. Suddenly, I saw a piece of colorful paper on the ground. I picked it up and found that it was a brochure, telling me about a crusade with Morris Cerullo. Two years later, I went to one of Dr. Cerullo's meetings in San Jose. During the service, he looked out at me in the audience and said, 'Watch that man in the green shirt.' Then he asked me if I was ready. I started to tremble. I nodded my head. He put out his hand and said, 'Take it!'

"Rivers of God's love hit me like a freight train. I lay praying in tongues and was just lost in love. It was like God came down and put His arms around me. I felt God moving through me! Suddenly, my ear popped. Ten years earlier, I had lost all but 20% of my hearing after an accident. The doctor said nothing could be done, but that night in San Jose, God touched me, and I could hear perfectly. I went back to the doctor, and he said that I had what looked like a brand new eardrum with no hole.

"God has brought me from nothing to 100% income. I didn't have anything. I got 10% from my V.A. [Veteran's Administration] pension, which is only \$86 a month. On top of that, I received only \$30 from social security. At the San Jose crusade, Morris Cerullo gave a prophecy. He said, 'If you will dig down and plant a seed into this ministry, God will give it back.' I didn't have any money, so I went around and begged for money. I think I raised \$40. Instead of putting it in my pocket because I didn't have any food or anything at that time, I said, 'Father, I am going to give this to You.' I put it in the offering. God richly blessed me.

"Right after that, my V.A. pension went from 10% to 50%. My V.A. income increased from \$86 to \$550. I also began to receive full benefits from S.S.D. [Social Security Disability], plus \$9,000 in back benefits. On top of this, I was given a check from the V.A. for \$15,000 back benefits. My income had increased to over \$ 1,000 a month. Every time I would get a lump of income, I would plant a seed into the Kingdom of God. God has made me a cheerful giver. God said, 'If you will step out in faith and support Dr. Cerullo's ministry, I will bless you mightily.'

"At the beginning of the year, I pledged \$1,000 to Operation Israel. This was a step of faith because I had only \$48 in my pocket. I emptied out my bank account to give. Six months later, I received a 100% increase in my

V.A. pension. My monthly V.A. income rose to \$1,849 a month for life. With the S.S.D., I get a total of \$2,833 a month for life. God has supplied my needs."

DR. TRESIATY POHE

Tresiaty leads a clinic in Jakarta, Indonesia. She attended the Morris Cerullo World Evangelism World Conference in January with only \$100 in her pocket. At that time, money was not coming into her clinic. She had no money in the bank and a \$7,000 debt. At the conference, Tresiaty pledged \$15,000 to the Jewish World Outreach. When she returned to Indonesia, Tresiaty prayed: *God, give me money so that I can pay my pledge.* It was due on March 1.

During the last week of February, Tresiaty was unexpectedly given \$25,000. She was able to pay her pledge and repay her debt. Then her clinic income for March rose to \$85,000. People were fighting to get into the clinic. There were not enough rooms for all the people. Many of them became Christians. Tresiaty was given \$50,000 to install exercise equipment in the clinic.

DALE PFEIL

"I went to Morris Cerullo's Chicago Partners' Seminar. I gave about \$1,500 in offerings, paid for three other people to go to the seminar, and also gave my meal tickets away. The only money that I had left was for fuel to drive home. I also attended MCWE's World Conference a few months later. I gave about \$1,500 in offerings, even though I was in financial trouble. I took seven people with me to that conference and paid for everything. God has called me to take evangelists—and people who want to serve God fully—to places where they can receive good teaching and become spiritually stronger.

"A man I met at the Chicago seminar was also at the World Conference. He gave me \$56,000 to use in our ministry. After the conference, my business started to prosper. That month, we did \$ 12,000 worth of business. The next month, we did \$26,000 in business, then \$63,000 the month after that, and \$73,000 the month after that! As a result, I was able to clear my \$70,000 debt.

"I am in the masonry business. I do stone work. Six months after the World Conference, I did a job for a big company in Charlotte. I needed about \$8,000 worth of boulders and \$8,000 worth of top soil. God gave me both the boulders and the top soil for nothing.

"I take evangelists around the country to preach the gospel. I believe in supporting people who are wise with God's money. I have learned to cast my bread out on the water. It has not always come back the way I expected. It is not like planting tomatoes. Many times, the harvest has arrived ten years after the planting."

MR. AND MRS. JEROME RHAMES

"We attended Morris Cerullo's annual World Conference. He encouraged everyone to give \$100 in the offering for financial deliverance in their own personal lives. We had come to that conference on our last dollar. I had brought an offering to give, but my wife felt that she should give another \$100 by faith, so she filled out an offering card. We saw no means of getting the money but believed God when Morris Cerullo asked everyone to give.

"We had been fighting a legal battle for a long time. We had been told that we would not get anything, but after the World Conference, we were surprised to receive a check in the mail for over \$800. We immediately sent our

pledge to Morris Cerullo World Evangelism. I also received a letter at the beginning of the year from MCWE inviting us to become elders. We did not have the money for the plane trip to fly to San Diego for the special Elders' meeting, but we prayed and told God that if this was His will, we would look to Him to provide the money.

"Unexpectedly, we received a check in the mail for \$5,000 as compensation for a job-related accident I had had. It was ten times what we were looking to receive! This money came just in time for us to go to Palm Desert. We are walking in total provision, continual supply. Praise God!"

MR. AND MRS. ED GAVIN

"We have been partners with Morris Cerullo for over ten years. During this time, many of our prayers have been answered. We have six children and have been married for 34 years. In the past, work has been scarce for my husband, Ed. He has been in construction for the past 25 years. One year, he made only \$5,000. When we heard about tithing, we did the best we could. Dr. Cerullo sent a letter to say that he was agreeing in prayer for our financial situation. He prophesied that my husband's income would double the following year. Well, Ed's income did not double. It tripled!"

"We were able to buy our own home in New York. The God we serve is a God of provision for every need we have. We are now financially secure. Ed holds a good job, and God has provided well. Recently, we had another financial blessing which came unexpectedly. I enjoy working and taking care of retarded Hassidic Jewish children. Several years ago, I fell and hurt my right leg. Some friends told me I should sue the organization, but I

did not feel right about that. However, God worked it all for good. Just a few months ago, Worker's Compensation called and said that they would give me \$7,000 for the time that I could not work as a result of the injury! God just keeps giving and giving!"

MR. AND MRS. EMMANUEL KURKJIAN

"I am the manager of an auto repair shop at a Shell gas station. I was \$75,000 in debt. This included \$25,000 that I owed my brother for my home. The property was in his name. I was only making \$1,000 a week and was barely making ends meet. I could not afford to give \$1,000 to a ministry. I did not think I could ever do that; yet, I did at the Chicago Partners' Seminar.

"God spoke to me to give \$1,000. I said, 'Dr. Cerullo is my partner. I am going to give.' I made up my mind to give. I surrendered my business to God. At this stage, I was not giving my tithe or offering, but I started at the conference, and my financial picture changed. All of a sudden, people started coming in to my business. I found myself making three times more than in the previous year—\$3,000 per week. I never thought my home would be under my name, but I was able to pay off the \$25,000 debt that I owed my brother.

"At the Chicago Partners' Seminar the following year, God spoke to me to give another \$1,000. I asked God to set me free from the bondage of credit cards. All of a sudden, I had people coming in at the station to sell me their cars. I bought their cars, fixed them up, and sold them. I knew it was God. In two weeks, I sold six cars—making huge profits on each of them—and was able to pay off all my credit card debts.

"At the World Conference, I gave \$300 to Operation

Israel. Two months later, I received a letter from Home Savings, saying that my monthly home payments would be reduced to \$400 a month. I was not expecting this, and it was a real blessing to me. God also blessed me with two new cars. We now send our children to private school. Everything we touch turns into a blessing. The blessings are still continuing, and I am able to be a blessing to others."

GANGA RAMNARAIN

"During Morris Cerullo's Florida World Conference, I felt that I should give \$2,000 in the offering. While I was at the conference, a call came from my family that my two-year-old grandson, Roy, was in the hospital. Later, the doctor told me that Roy had a malignant brain tumor, and they would have to operate. I called and asked Dr. Cerullo to pray for Roy. He came through the operation wonderfully and was standing up in bed within half an hour.

"Before we brought Roy home from the hospital, they told my son the bill was \$67,000. My son's insurance had expired three months before the operation, and he did not know about it. The company was not going to pay his bill. My son talked with the doctor, and he said, 'We are going to take care of it. You don't bother. Take your son and go home!' The whole debt of \$67,000 was canceled! This entire testimony took place just after I obeyed God and gave sacrificially for the first time."

REBECCA HAGER

"I discovered that the Bureau of Land Management had never released 135 acres of vacant mountain land, which I had bought and paid for. For ten years, Dr.

Cerullo stood in agreement with me for the release of this property. God reminded me of a years-old vow to Morris Cerullo World Evangelism of \$100 for Israel. I paid this and again requested prayer that the land be released. This time, it happened.

"At the Elders' meeting in Palm Desert, CA, Dr. Cerullo prophesied that the real estate—which we had held for a long period of time—would be sold. Within five days of returning home, I had a contract to sell one plot of this land for \$120,000 cash. Three months later, another plot sold for \$95,000 cash. I was holding deeds of trust for \$100,000. Unexpectedly, this was also paid in cash. This made a total of \$525,000 cash. Out of this, I was able to give over \$30,000 into foreign missions.

"I invested in more real estate, bought a new car, paid off the second mortgage on my daughter's home, remodeled my home, and went to the Ukraine. I planted a church west of Kiev by holding a three-day crusade. I rented a building and paid two pastors' salaries for six months in advance. I now have a contract with the television station in Rivine, 300 miles west of Moscow. I pay for a television program which is reaching about 2,500,000 million people daily."

PAUL LUBEGA

"I went from my home in Sweden to Morris Cerullo's World Conference in Florida. At that time, I had a large tax debt due, but I placed \$1,000 in the offering for the Billion Soul Crusade vision given to Dr. Cerullo by God. I also gave for the Jewish Outreach. I gave a deposit at the conference and sent the balance when I returned home.

Immediately, God began to open doors. He gave my wife and me two new businesses; one was a department

store, and the other was a small restaurant.

"We did not have the money to purchase these businesses, but through supernatural intervention, God provided the money. We feel that God gave us these businesses as a result of our sacrificial giving at the World Conference. God also blessed us by allowing us to purchase a plot of ground in Uganda, our home of origin, for a very small price. God has provided to such an extent that we have no lack or struggle."

RAPHAEL BAMADO

"I live in Togo, Africa, and have been very greatly blessed by Morris Cerullo's ministry. When I came to the United States for the World Conference, God did a work inside me. He spoke to me during one of the services, and He told me to start supporting Dr. Cerullo's ministry. I gave \$2,700. Upon my return to Togo, miracles began breaking forth. Among them, a high-ranking country official invited me to pray for him. This person was blessed and gave me money. He did this three times, and I received a total of \$10,000."

VALNICE MILHOMONS

Valnice Milhomons is a great woman evangelist and teacher in Brazil. She attended Morris Cerullo's annual World Conference. While there, she felt God move upon her as she heard Dr. Cerullo share about the Jewish Outreach. In obedience to God, she gave \$5,000 for the Jews. The money she gave was her personal savings, which she had amassed over a period of 40 years. Four months after this, God gave her a beautiful house in Brazil. The house is for her ministry headquarters and is valued at \$500,000. This new headquarters for Valnice's ministry

was dedicated in September for the glory of God.

DARLENE ANTHENS

"Ever since I attended a Morris Cerullo World Evangelism School of Ministry in California, my life has been revolutionized. It keeps on getting better and better as blessing after blessing continues to come upon me. At the beginning of the year, I gave \$1,000 for Operation Israel. I love to give to the Jews. God has put a real burden on my heart for them.

"I joined the forty-day fast. One of my prayer requests was for a debt cancellation of \$26,000. I agreed to covenant in prayer and fasting for 40 days, and the debt cancellation was one of the agreements for my prayer to be answered. I began to take each of the steps that Dr. Cerullo requested, giving \$100, \$200, and so on.

"A week later, I received a letter from Dr. Cerullo which asked me to give toward a ministry airplane. Shortly after this, my uncle died, and his wife died six days later. I received \$334,000 from their estate and was able to pay off my debts. This was totally unexpected. Their Will had stipulated that whatever was left over in their estate would go to the other one, and that if both of them expired, everything should come to me.

"God has enabled me to give over \$7,000 to MCWE. That is what you call 'coming from behind' to win the race because I started giving with nothing."

SANDRA BELL

"I attended Morris Cerullo's World Conference after going through a series of financial troubles, which were the result of a divorce. Everyone knew I was going under. The question was, how would I survive as a single parent?"

Giving and Receiving

At the World Conference, Morris Cerullo made a statement about the blessing of God running after those who made a sacrificial gift toward the work of God. I made a vow for \$1,000 and placed the \$2 I had in the envelope. When I returned home, I unexpectedly received a check for \$998, which was exactly what I needed to fulfill the vow I had made during the conference. Immediately, I sent the money to MCWE.

"As a direct result, I believe, of my faithfulness to God, I received a financial blessing in my job with a salary increase of \$10,000. I am the head nurse of a dialysis program at the Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn, NY. I praise God for His faithfulness. He has performed financial miracles for me over and over again."

LOUISE PICHE

"During Morris Cerullo World Evangelism's forty-day fast, I vowed to give \$500. I was at Dr. Cerullo's meeting in Toronto without any money, so I trusted God to supply the gift. He did. I received a \$1,000 bonus from my employers because of my work and commitment to the company. This was a miracle because the company was not doing well financially. I could pay my vow with no problem! My \$500 gift was part of a memorial prayer that I am lifting up to God, asking Him to help me break through in intercessory prayer. Like Hannah in the Bible, I am pouring out my soul to God and must have a breakthrough.

"I am blessed to be one of Dr. Cerullo's partners. God has us working together to accomplish His perfect plan to reach the nations of the world for His glory."

ONESMO MWAKYAMBO

Onesmo attended Morris Cerullo's All African Congress on Evangelism, where he learned about getting a breakthrough in his finances. At this congress, he did not have any money to give in the offering, but he was wearing two shirts. He took one of them off and placed it in the offering. Onesmo went back to his church and taught a seminar on finances. Everyone was to give their best offering and tell God how they wanted to be blessed. Onesmo's wife asked God for a vehicle. Soon, they were given a Toyota truck.

The next year, God gave Onesmo some land for a giveaway price of \$100. He planted rice. In six months, he had made \$222,000—more than double the amount normally received for his crop. God told Onesmo to give the total amount to his church for a sound system. He planted another crop. In six months, Onesmo made \$250,000. He gave his tithe plus half of his income to God's work. Onesmo bought more land. In six months, during high inflation, he received \$80,000, which would have been three times higher if there had not been inflation. Onesmo asked God for more land so that he could provide for the ministry.

A man who owned property—who would not sell to anyone—gave Onesmo 20 acres for the best price. Onesmo also bought other land around him and now has 200 acres of sugar and rice plantations.

Onesmo conducts seminars and Schools of Ministry in evangelism, as well as a School of Ministry for children in the secondary schools. He continues to give his tithe, plus half of his total income to God.

CAROLYN AND MICHAEL WALLACE

"I attended Morris Cerullo World Evangelism's World

Conference and gave to the Jewish World Outreach by making a pledge of \$100, which I paid when I returned home. God also told me to give \$100 every month to support Morris Cerullo's ministry. God said that this was good, fertile, and moist soil because the Holy Spirit had ordained the ministry. The Word of God is being preached with signs and wonders following. My husband and I didn't have any money to give. We had three mortgages on our homes and business and owed the IRS \$5,000. During the time God told us to give, my husband said to me, 'Look, we don't have any money. You are giving \$100, and we don't have any food money.' I said, 'God said it. I know He will do it.'

"We also went to the Chicago Partners' Seminar. We made a pledge of \$1,300 and paid this pledge as soon as we came home. We took hold of giving and continued to give every time that we could. The IRS ended up owing us \$1,200. The \$5,000 we owed them was canceled. We owed back rent to two landlords on our businesses. One landlord wrote off our debt of \$18,000. The other landlord wrote off another debt of \$13,000. We only had to pay \$2,000. We are completely out of debt. At a Morris Cerullo World Evangelism meeting, Morris Cerullo shared a testimony of a man who said, 'We give ... to get... to give.' We had to get out of debt, then we got back to square one and started building up again in our business. Now we can say we've got it. We give to get to give."

JOSEPH MARNELL

"I owned seven Burger King restaurants and one Steak House restaurant. Because of my divorce, I lost all of it, except for the Steak House. I came to the January World Conference and gave \$11,000 to the Jewish Outreach, exactly the amount I owed the seller of the Steak House. I

also owed the bank \$500,000. At another January conference, I gave \$1,000 to the Jewish Outreach. The bank canceled the \$500,000 I owed them. Then, the man I owed money for the Steak House made the loss over to a bank, which promptly went bankrupt. My \$11,000 debt—along with interest that raised that amount to \$20,000—disappeared.

"In September the same year, after the twenty-one-day fast, the court ruled in my favor in a tax court case, canceling the \$200,000 I owed to the IRS as a result of my divorce. As of December, I am debt free and am now praying for the restoration of my family."

JANET STALB

"I received a prophecy letter from Morris Cerullo stating that God was going to cancel His children's debts by the end of the year. The end of the year was only a few months away. It was for whoever heard the prophecy and acted on it. At first, I was reluctant to believe because we've been deceived by other televangelists, but this scripture kept coming to me, *"When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously...."* (Deuteronomy 18:22).

"I took a step of faith and sent Dr. Cerullo's ministry a check for \$40. Just 20 days later, my father-in-law called, requesting to see my husband. My husband went to see him. When he returned, he had a check made out in the amount of \$10,000! We are out of debt and no longer striving to make ends meet! I pray that many others will act upon the prophecy which was proclaimed. What God does for one, He will do for others!

"I worried about our finances because we had been

struggling for 14 years. I was not trusting God fully in the area of finances. The Holy Spirit gave me courage to step out and act upon the prophecy given through Morris Cerullo. I praise God!"

GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

I trust that these testimonies have been an enormous encouragement to us all. Certainly, I never fail to be awed by God's power and love when my partners describe how He has met their needs in such miraculous ways. We serve the all-giving God, Who delights to honor His Word and fulfill His promises. What He says *does* come true. When we follow His giving principles, we can rely on Him completely to supply all of our needs.

The people we have read about in this chapter are ordinary people who took a step of faith for many different reasons. Some gave in thanksgiving. Others gave because of their love. A few gave to have their own needs met. God dealt with them according to all of the promises that are noted in the Bible.

These partners of mine are givers who became receivers. They are people who have found that the secret of receiving is giving by faith. There is absolutely no reason why every single reader of this book should not experience exactly the same level of overflowing blessing. However large our needs may seem to us, we know that they are not beyond the resources of Almighty God.

I promise that when we give like these partners, we will receive like them, too. May these testimonies act not just as a monument to God's grace, but also as a spur which prompts us all to start giving generously in faith and obedience.

A Giving Partnership

This has been a hard book to write. Who could possibly write about such a subject without being aware of their own shortcomings! But it has also been a wonderful book to write, for the joy and blessing of giving and receiving have impressed themselves upon me in a fresh way. Sometimes critics have accused me of asking people to give for our ministry's sake. It is true that there is a job to be done which needs financing; but how much more I long for us all to experience the delight of our generous scriptural giving, which results in our receiving so many wonderful blessings here on Earth.

More than that, I do not want anyone to be disappointed on the great day which is before us all. I do not want a single partner to be ignorant of how they can receive a great eternal reward from God. I do not want anybody to ask why I had not explained to them about converting earthly wealth into heavenly currency. I want everybody to discover that the secret of receiving is giving by faith.

We are going to spend an eternity worshipping God with all of our wonderful Jewish and Third World brothers and sisters. I know that I am incredibly privileged by being able to meet them and worship with them here on Earth. I sincerely hope that as a direct result of the change in the way we all give, this book will make a practical difference to their lives.

As you now have arrived at the last page, before you put the book down, I want you to stop and consider what changes you should make in your giving patterns. This

Giving and Receiving

book will have been written in vain if it does not revolutionize the way that we all think about giving, does not transform our actual giving, and does not trigger an avalanche of divine blessing into our lives.

Please reflect on what I have written, and promise to put into practice all of the different things that God has impressed upon you. Finally, it may be that God has blessed you through this ministry (perhaps through this book), and you now want to stand with me as a partner. Please write to me. My address is on the next page. It will be a deep honor to share with you in the work of the gospel.

For more information on this wonderful worldwide ministry, please write to:

MORRIS CERULLO WORLD EVANGELISM

P. O. Box 85277 • San Diego, CA 92186

United States

MORRIS CERULLO WORLD EVANGELISM

P. O. Box 3600 • Concord, Ontario L4K 1B6

Canada

MORRIS CERULLO WORLD EVANGELISM

P. O. Box 277 • Hemel Hempstead • HERTS HP2 7DH

United Kingdom

MORRIS CERULLO HELPLINE

*MIRACLES HAPPEN WHEN SOMEONE CARES...
AND WE CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU!*

Inspirational, encouraging, and amazing testimonies
of people whose lives have been completely turned around
through the power of prayer

**I want to pray for you and believe
with you for whatever needs
you have...**

...spiritual, emotional, physical, financial,
family and relationship needs.



I would like to hear *your* testimony of how God helped
you overcome impossibilities in your life. Reach Helpline through
telephone, e-mail, and our web site, **www.helplinetv.com**.

United States and Canada: (866) 756-4200

United Kingdom: 0800 316 0795

Outside U.K.: +44 1442 288 547

ABOUT THE MINISTRY OF MORRIS CERULLO

Dr. Morris Cerullo, President

Morris Cerullo World Evangelism



Morris Cerullo's accreditation for ministry is in itself quite formidable: a divine, supernatural call from God to preach and evangelize when he was only fifteen years old, and over half a century of experience as a pastor, teacher, author of more than 200 books, and worldwide evangelist.

Many honors have been bestowed on Morris Cerullo, including honorary doctorates of Divinity and Humanities, both by academic and spiritual leaders and heads of state around the world in recognition of his achievements and contributions to global evangelization.

Dr. Cerullo is respected and revered by millions around the world, including over one and a half million Nationals trained through Morris Cerullo's Schools of Ministry. His ministry outreaches include:

- **The Morris Cerullo Helpline Program** – a major television, cable, and satellite weekly, hour-long, prime-time broadcast reaching out to hurting people in virtually every nation on Earth.
- **Schools of Ministry** – training national pastors, ministers, and lay people to reach their nations for Christ through mass evangelistic crusades.
- **Mission To All The World** – reaching the entire world, region by region, with Schools of Ministry, miracle crusades, television prime-time specials, and local Schools of Ministry designed to cover every village, city, and town in every region.
- **Victory! Television** – cutting-edge, daily television programming designed to strengthen the Body of Christ to reach the entire world.

Dr. Cerullo has made a tremendous impact on the destiny of the nations of the world. He has sacrificially dedicated his life to helping hurting people and to train others who will take the message God has given him and train others.

We Care!

Morris,

I am sending you my most urgent prayer requests. Please pray for my needs:

- Enclosed is my love gift of \$/£ _____ to help hurting people through the ministry of *Helpline*.
- Please tell me how I can become a *Helpline* Circle of Hope member to help keep *Helpline* on the air as I make a monthly financial commitment.
- Please send more information including the benefits and resources I'll receive as a Circle of Hope member.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State or Province _____

Postal Code _____ Country _____

Telephone (_____) _____

E-mail _____

Mail today to:

MORRIS CERULLO HELPLINE

U.S.: P.O. Box 85220 • San Diego, CA 92186

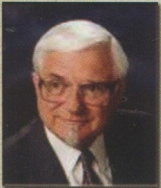
Canada: P.O. Box 3600 • Concord, Ontario L4K 1B6

Europe: P.O. Box 277 • Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP2 7DH

- HOW SHOULD OUR TITHES BE USED?
- WHO SHOULD WE GIVE OUR MONEY TO?
- HOW DOES GOD MEASURE OUR GIVING?
- DOES GOD CARE ABOUT OUR DEBTS?
- WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE GIVE?
- HOW DO WE EARN A HEAVENLY REWARD?

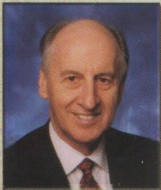


In this challenging book, Morris Cerullo shows that Jesus taught more about money than any other topic except the kingdom of God. Dr. Cerullo does not insert any qualifications into Jesus' ideas and straightforward teaching about finance. He does not dilute the Bible or explain anything away. He simply reveals that the Bible's teaching about faithful giving is both frightening and exciting—and the way to receive God's abundant blessing.



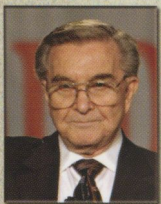
"Preachers who are timid about mentioning money should read what Morris Cerullo says in this outstanding book. They will absorb a sound biblical theology of giving and receiving. Nothing else I have seen matches its thoroughness, balance, and wisdom. This book has warmed my heart, igniting in me a desire to be a more generous and cheerful giver."

DR. C. PETER WAGNER, *GLOBAL HARVEST MINISTRIES, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO*



"A combination of faith-inspiring, biblically-based thinking, and level-headed, practical planning is basic to sound financial management. This book helps in both regards. It will help believers to function biblically, give faithfully, and reap God's harvest joyfully."

DR. JACK HAYFORD, *THE CHURCH ON THE WAY, VAN NUYS, CALIFORNIA*



"It has been my great delight to stand beside Dr. Morris Cerullo in various parts of the world for a quarter of a century. The heartbeat of this book comes from the inward cry of God's man to share immutable principles. When we put its teachings into practice, we will enjoy a life-changing experience. When we teach it to others, we'll help fulfill the Great Commission and reap the end-time harvest."

DR. CHARLES BLAIR, *BLAIR FOUNDATION, DENVER, COLORADO*

MORRIS CERULLO'S life has been sacrificially dedicated to training and equipping pastors, laypeople, and evangelists to reach their own nations for Christ. Many honors have been bestowed upon him by academic and spiritual leaders from around the globe in recognition of his achievements and contribution to world evangelism.

