

Giving Up

Making Ourselves Good and Poor

September 8, 2024



Today we're talking about how to give till it no longer hurts!



So: **When did you last flex your faith by giving?** Generously. Sacrificially. Cheerfully. When I was young, I couldn't grasp the concept of enjoying giving. Because becoming a cheerful giver (the type that most pleases our Jesus) is something we build up to – like building muscles. It hurts a bit at first. But **that soreness** (as they say) **is the feeling of weakness leaving our body.** Likewise, **when we really start caring by sharing, we can feel the pain of greed leaving our soul.** And grasping that will help us achieve our created purpose, satisfied joyfulness, and eternal best.

We understand building wealth, but not so much building benevolence. So, where you at with working that out? **Who'd win an arm wrestling match between your giving and your greed?** Well, want to be blessed? "I don't know ... is it a trick?" In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor, the hungry, and the heartbroken." Basically, **blessed are the broken and the broke.** "I knew it was a trick." No trick. Just two types of poor. You see:

There is *one* who makes himself rich, [down here] yet has *nothing*; [treasured up, up there] and *one* who [briefly, purposely] makes himself poor, yet has *great riches*. [In store, in heaven] – Proverbs 13:7 NKJ

Last Sunday we heard God ask Job: "Who has given to Me that I should repay him?" (Job 41:11) And we saw Solomon's answer: "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay"! (Prv 19:17) Which is why Paul asks: "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay?" (Rom 11:35) And we need to know this to know why in the world Paul would write the following, saying:

As you *Philippians* know ... when I set out from Macedonia, [the poorest of the poor believers] not *one* church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you ... Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. [What account? The one God repays!] I have [personally] received full payment and even more ... And [so I know that] my God will meet all your needs [but, it'll be] according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:15-19 NIV

The mistake of the prosperity doctrines, isn't in **expecting God's blessing in response to faithful giving** – we should – it's **dictating how we define His blessing.** Topping "His glorious riches" list is wisdom, and **the blessing of sharing the life-giving light of His love!** Not to mention joy and peace and all the fruit of the Spirit. And waaay down the list is worldly wants and wishes that won't distract us from our calling. Cuz, **our Savior isn't an investment scheme, He's an investment opportunity.** But we tend to reverse that list, like children ignoring the gift to play with the box.



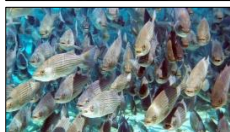
And it's *not* like the *secret to life* is ... a *secret*. *Giving is good*. And the *whole world knows* it. And *always* has. Ever since *Jesus* said, "It's *more blessed to give than to receive*", (*Acts 20:35*) there's been a *wide range* of folks with *similar quotes*. As author *Judy Blume* put it: "**Our fingerprints don't fade from the lives we touch.**" Or as *Winston Churchill* said: "**We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.**" Or *Pablo Picasso*: "**The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.**" Or *Booker T. Washington*: "**Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.**" Even "the great agnostic" *Robert Ingersoll* said: "**We rise by lifting others.**" And the ancient Greek fable creator, *Aesop*: "**No act of kindness has ever been wasted.**" As well as puritan preacher, *John Bunyan*, who said: "**You haven't lived till you've done something for someone who can never repay you.**"

I *did* that the other *day*. I gave a *stunned stranger* a surprisingly *cheerful gift* he can never *repay* ... when he *rear-ended* me. Now, I could *have* a *nice car* – but I'd have to *treat* it like a *nice car* – which is *why* I *love* my ol' \$1,500, '98 *Honda*. It's been *side-swiped twice* (both by *Shar* – in our *driveway*), so I *treat* it like a *work truck*. And on *Saturday*, July 20th, I'm at a *stop sign*, on my way to *finish* my *sermon* wherein the *main point* was: **Do nice things**. And I *glance* at my *mirror*, and a *voice* in my *head* says, "I'm getting hit!" CRASH! But ... it was a *happy fun voice*. "I'm getting hit!" I'll tell you *why* in a *bit*, but it *put* me in the *best mood*. So we *pull over*. His *truck* is *barely scratched*. And I *walk* to him, *chuckling*, "So what *happened*?" He says, *sadly*, "My *foot slipped off the brake*." So I *look* at my ol' *Honda*, and I *look* at *him*, and *back and forth* again, and I say, "Hey, *have a good day*." And I *shake* his *hand*, and *walk away*, as He says, "What? *Thanks Buddy!*" Now, to some of you, **being a cheerful rear-ender is as hard to comprehend as being a cheerful giver**. Want the *backstory*? You'll likely *either* think it's *hilarious* or *horrific*.

It's a *story* I've never *told* you. I don't *think* I've even *told Pops*. So *brace* yourself. Because, when I was in *8th-9th grade*, I'd have *three friends spend* the *night*. And I'd have *two drivable cars* in the *wrecking yard*. And we'd *sneak out* after *dark* and play ... *tag*. *Two* in each *car*. One *waited* while one *hid* in *eleven acres* of *cars*. The *waiter* would then *cruise slowly up and down* the *rows* – BLUB-BLUB-BLUB – till *headlights* suddenly *appeared* from *behind*. Then the *only goal* was to *rear-end* the *other*! It was *dangerous* and *stupid* ... and *so much fun*! I've been *hit* so many *times*, *so much worse* than that *Saturday*! We'd go to *school* the next *day*, *sore* and *rubbing* our *necks*. That was *50 years* ago. And I *kind'a forgot* about it, till I *glance* in my *mirror*, and a *13-year-old's* *voice* says, "I'm getting hit!" And it all *floods back*! That *guy hit* the *jackpot*! And now, when I see that *scar* on my *car*, **I see his face receiving grace, and it puts a smile on mine and warms my heart!**

Being a *cheerful giver* is like being a *cheerful rear-ender* in that it's *all* about the *subtext* and *context* and *experience* and *attitude*. And, **as believers, we know we receive far more than whatever we offer in love!** It's like *Jacob* trading a *bowl* of *stew* for a *birthright*! We should be *laughing* all the way to the *bank*, as we *make* ourselves *good* and *poor*! Because, **by giving up the things you can't keep, you're storing up the most valuable, meaningful, eternal things you can't lose**. Which should make *anyone* with an *ounce* of *sense*, quite *happy* ... and *generous*! No matter how *broke* or *broken* you *momentarily* happen to be *down here*. Which is *why*:

We want you to know about the grace that God has given the *Macedonian churches*. [The *poorest of the poor, because*] Out of the most *severe* trial, *their overflowing joy* and *their extreme poverty* welled up in *rich generosity*. [Like the *widow who gave her two cents*] For ... they *gave as much* as they were *able*, [out of their *extremely limited funds*] and [then] *even beyond their ability*. [*Sacrificially!* Giving up *necessities!* They were *so poor*, in fact, that *Paul* wouldn't *allow* them to *give any more*; but] *Entirely on their own*, [*Voluntarily!*] they *urgently pleaded with us* [*Eagerly!*] for *the privilege of sharing* – 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 NIV



Wow. *Eagerly. Voluntarily. Sacrificially. How close do you come to flexing that attitude?* After Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to *leave their livelihood as fishermen* to become *fishers of men*, and sent 'em out without *money, food, or change of clothes*, they returned ... to being *fishers of fish*. For *one whole night*. Without one *bite*. (Lk 5:5) And Jesus *waits* till All is *put away* the *following day*, to say, "Hey, we should go fishing!" Cuz He had a *point* to *make*. But *Peter pouts* till Jesus *flexes His faith* and *fills the boat*. Then *he repents and falls on his knees under the weight of regret* in the *face of God's power*, as *his boat is sinking under the weight of God's blessing*. (Lk 5:5-8) It's a *bigger payday* then they could've ever *imagined!* But then *Jesus has them leave it on shore to share with the poor*. His *point?* When *He's in your boat*:

You will be *made rich* in every way *so that* you can *be generous* on every *occasion* ... *overflowing* in many expressions of *thanks to God* ... for your *generosity* in *sharing* [*which He credits to your account*] – 2 Corinthians 9:11-13 NIV

Then He *hikes 'em up that hill*, and *prays all night, carefully considering* which *twelve to appoint as junior partners*. (Lk 6:12-13) And *that's* the *context* when:

He came down with *them* [*following*] and stood on a level place, [*with them behind, up on the hillside*] with a great crowd of His [*other*] disciples [*below*] and a great multitude of people ... And He *lifted up* His eyes *on His disciples*, [*on the hillside*] and said: "*Blessed are you who are* [*now*] *poor*, [*on account of Me* (as we'll see in verse 22), *having left the biggest catch of their careers*] for *yours is the kingdom of God*. *Blessed are you who are hungry now*, [*having given away a boatload of fish*] for you *shall be satisfied*. [*For the Lord will repay*] *Blessed are you who weep now*, [*having given up the greatest haul in history*] for you *shall laugh* [*about it, later*] ... *Rejoice in that day*, and *leap for joy*, for behold, *your reward is great* in heaven – Luke 6:17-23 ESV

That's no *scheme*, it's an *eternal sure-thing!* And Jesus isn't *teaching* the *crowd* that *poverty, hunger, and grief* are *good*; He's *reassuring* His *faithful followers* on the *hillside*, that *hardships from following Him are followed by unimaginable blessings*. Literally. Because *He's* ...

The *One* who can do *infinitely more* than *all* we can *ask* or *imagine* – Ephesians 3:20 ISV

And like that *night of no fish*, *He often disguises the lead-up to victories as calamities and tragedies*; cuz how else could we *flex our faith* and *triumph*? So *take heart!* Cuz He was tested just as we, in every way, (Heb 4:15) and He *overcame the cross!* So *don't dictate or define how the Lord expresses His love or dispenses His blessings*. Especially since He's *told us exactly how He does and will: He'll never leave us nor forsake us; and He'll work all things to our eternal best; and:*

"In Me you may [or may not] have peace. [Your choice. But] In this world you [definitely] will have trouble. [Also not your choice; and also translated: *affliction, tribulation, persecution, and suffering*] But take heart! I have overcome [as in: *defeated, conquered,* and (my favorite translation) *won the battle with*] the world." – John 16:33 NIV



It's not: "I've overcome the world for you, so you won't have to," it's: "I've overcome the world as one of you, so that you'd know that you can too!" Which is *how* and *why* **we can be all at once broke and broken and blessed.** And cheerful! I mean, "For the joy set before Him [He] endured the cross". (Heb 12:2)



I want to show you two clips from "Schindler's List", back to back, to contrast **one man buckling under the weight of regret, while another buckles under the weight of the glory of selfless generosity.** Schindler's List is a story of the transformation of a self-centered taker into an other-centered giver, who, at the climax, collapses under the weight of regret of not having given all he could to get what he realizes he most wanted.



Here's the moment he received a gold ring from the Jews he saved, and realizes the only meaningful value in saving money is in using it to save people. And now, let's contrast that to one of the most incredible examples of giving in Schindler's List; and it isn't Schindler. It has to do with Mr. Jereth, who supplied the gold for Schindler's ring – in a very sacrificial, painful, joyful way: with the gold crowns from his teeth! It reminds me of the picture in Revelation of those around the throne casting down their golden crowns. But even as Mr. Jereth's knees are buckling, he's grinning with a bloody rag in his mouth. So, here's the contrast: neither man can stand, but **one can't stop smiling from the privilege of sharing,** while **the other can't be consoled from the anguish of regret.** You see:

The Messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come ... [but] Who can stand when He appears? ... Will a man rob God? – Malachi 3:1-8 NIV

Not without robbing himself! As we saw last Sunday. Cuz, **the golden crowns cast down up there must be laid up down here.** (Rev 4:10) And **only the cheerful givers will still be standing and smiling when regret weighs in.** And so:

Each of you should give what you have [carefully, prayerfully considered and] decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver [He's even pleased with a regretful giver; but who can stand a miserable taker?] – 2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV



[So] Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay [down] here in [righteous] fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold ... but with [the "glorious riches" of] the precious blood of Christ – 1 Peter 1:17-19 NKJ

For **what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?** (Mk 8:36) *Nothing!* Know what that dung beetle's singing? "I got the whole world in my hands!" But, **if flexing your faith on God's account, shrinks the amount in your bank account, you'll rejoice in the day you give an account, for Christ will repay your credit account!** For what does it profit a man to forfeit this ol' world on account of his soul? We can't even imagine!

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.