

The Gift of Giving

A gifted story: Billy usually fidgeted during the sermon, but this morning he was captivated by the story being told from the pulpit. The pastor had just told about the poor widow who gave all she had to the church, and how that was more meaningful than all the riches conveniently given by wealthy persons. Billy had his little coin purse with him—it was filled with coins he had saved over many weeks. The plate was being passed down the pew. He knew what he had to do. When the plate arrived in front of him he squeezed open his coin pouch and all the coins tumbled out into the plate, and then it moved on. For a moment he was stunned by what he had done, but then joy overcame him and he was most glad at heart.

Biblical references:

Romans 12:6-8 - So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have; if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; if it is to encourage others, we should do so.

Whoever shares with others should do so generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do so cheerfully.

2 Cor. 8:2-4 - They (the churches in Macedonia) have been severely tested by the troubles they went through; but their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor. I can assure you that they gave as much as they could, and even more than they could. Of their own free will they begged us and pleaded for the privilege of having a part in helping God's people in Judea.

Definition and comment:

The gift of Giving: the special gift that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to contribute their material resources to the work of the Lord liberally and cheerfully. This kind of giving from material blessings is characterized by exceptional willingness. The believer is able to recognize God's blessings and to respond by generously and even sacrificially giving of one's material resources to support the Lord's work.

The Greek word for "giving" is *metadidomi* - it means "to share," "to impart," or "to bestow." None of these root meanings convey any sense of self-benefit. What is involved is simply unconditional giving. The Holy Spirit directs the giver to exercise the gift for the common good, and the giver obeys this message in the heart in such a manner as to draw no personal attention.

There is a temptation to connect this gift with the wealthy, but that would be in error because even the poor can exercise this gift with the greatest of effectiveness. Jesus took special note of the poor woman who gave "all she had to live on" to the Temple Treasury (see Luke 21: 1-4). Even though it was only two small coins, it became a gift that taught a lesson of great importance about sanctity of sacrificial giving.

Attitude, perceptiveness, and the spirit of self-sacrifice are the keys to understanding this gift. When giving is characterized by these attributes, the supernatural dimension is evident, and the spiritual gift of giving is undoubtedly at work.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

1. Do you feel moved to give when confronted with financial needs in God's kingdom?
2. Are you willing to have a lower standard of living in order to benefit God's work with your finances?

3. Do you have a conviction that all you have belongs to God and you want to be a good steward for the sake of his kingdom?
4. Do you freely and joyfully give of your resources because you love God?
5. Do your giving records show that you give more than 10% of your income to the Lord's work?

Areas for study and personal growth:

1. Explore giving as it is described in scripture. Read Romans 12:8; Acts 4:32-37; Luke 8:1-3; 2 Cor. 8:1-7; 2 Cor. 9:6-15; Mat. 6:2-4; 1 Cor. 13:3; 2 Cor. 9:7; Phil. 4:14-19
2. Learn as much as you can about being a good steward of the resources God has given you. Through good practices of budgeting, cost control, and abatement of compulsory behaviors, you will be able to maximize your giving potential.
3. Become aware of the needs of all that your giving may be able to help, whether in the church or elsewhere. No matter how willing you are to give, there are limitations to what you can do.

It will be important to know where God wants you to direct your giving. Prayer is essential to hear God's voice in this.

4. Find out how others who have this gift choose to exercise it. Biographies about philanthropists may be helpful in understanding the ways and means by which they exercised this gift.

Examples of the generosity of people with more meager means may be even more enriching as you assess the best way to exercise your gift of giving.

5. Become an expert on stewardship in the church. Create a card file of examples of giving that touch you in a special way. Share faith stories of the giving of others that clearly demonstrate how God can use the giving of individuals for great and effectual purposes.

General ways to use the gift of giving:

- Personally: help a person out financially; help a Christian friend discover the joy of giving; make a no interest loan where it will do some good.
- Within the church: contribute generously to a fund drive; give above what is expected; give a presentation on stewardship (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet Channels for Using the Gifts).
- Within the wider community: provide financial support for a Christian organization; invest "seed money" in a new and needed cause; give an anonymous gift to help a child attend camp.

For reflection:

Every Christian is called to give support to build up the Body of Christ. The tithe (10%) is the standard mentioned in the bible, and many people have yet to reach that level. Since giving is the responsibility of all Christians, it is hard to grasp that giving is also a spiritual gift given only to some individuals. But Paul clearly mentions giving as a spiritual gift, so we know that some people are endowed with this supernatural gift in the same manner that all Christians are called to have faith, but some are given the supernatural gift of faith.

If you have the gift of giving and you exercise it through study of needs, prayer and sacrifice, your giving will be especially God-directed, and there is assurance that important things will be done. Just as God will call upon you in a special way to provide from your blessings, he will return back to you even more blessings. To him you will be the faithful servant worthy of his trust. There has to be excitement in

the prospect of opening the lines of communication with God, to use his blessings to do work that he has given you to do. Clearly, the process of deepening your spirituality in order to know where to exercise your giving will be faith enriching.

And so each of us is to "bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord (our) God has blessed (us)." (Deut. 16:17). Our gift is acceptable to God when the willingness to give is present. It is not the amount that matters so much as the willingness, and that may be hard for many Christians to bear. But for the person with the spiritual gift of giving, the willingness to give comes with the gift - it is just there and there in ample portion. Therefore the giving will not only alleviate human need, extend the gospel, and honor God, but it will also enrich the giver in the assurance that God will always find it acceptable. How wonderful a circumstance for your action to always be acceptable to God!