



Giving out of Gratitude

By: Daryl Heald

As I've talked to Christians all over the world about financial giving, one question has rarely come up. I normally hear questions like "What should I give to?" or "Where should I give it?" or "To whom, how much, or when should I give?" These are all important tactical and transactional questions to ask.

But there's a key question that few people ask, and it is a transformational one: "Why should I give?" It seems really rhetorical, doesn't it? When I ask others this question, I hear many different answers, such as, "Because this is a strong, evangelical ministry" or "Because God commands us to give" or "Because giving is part of our heritage as Christians."

We certainly do give for all these reasons, but I think the question of "Why should I give?" must be answered at a much deeper level. Perhaps we can ask this question a different way: If "[t]he earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1 NIV), and if God has entrusted these things to us as stewards, then why has He given us more than we need?

I believe 2 Corinthians 9:11 answers this question: "*You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God*" (NIV).

And in 1 Timothy 6:17-18 we are told: "*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share*" (NIV).

Great wealth, great opportunity

You look at the statistics today as they relate to the evangelical church in America, and it's not a pretty picture. For 30 years in a row, giving has declined in the American church. Why is that? We're living in great prosperity. During the 1990s, several trillion dollars of wealth was created in the United States alone, some of it in the hands of Christians. Why has our sovereign God entrusted incredible wealth to Christians today like no other time in world history? Perhaps we can answer this question by considering what God is doing in His kingdom around the world as we speak.

In my interactions with missions experts and church planters through the Maclellan Foundation, we have observed that God has His church poised for explosive growth. The church grew more in the 20th century than in all the previous 19 centuries since the time of Christ combined.

The World Christian Encyclopedia tells us that in China alone, we are seeing at least 10,000 new converts every day, and the Christian population in India may nearly triple to 125 million believers in the next 50 years. That's more than the total number of evangelicals in America today.

Do you notice the confluence of events here? We have unprecedented wealth in the hands of American evangelicals, and we have unprecedented opportunities for church growth around the world. So if you were God, why would you have entrusted vast wealth to people like ourselves at this moment in history?

Giving benefits the giver

The apostle Paul was a great fund-raiser for the church. He told the Philippians he wasn't asking for himself but for their sake (Philippians 4:17). In other words, he was giving them the opportunity to invest in God's kingdom. Why? It inured to their eternal benefit. Likewise, for those of us living in the 21st Century, it is to our own eternal benefit to give.

But in the church today, we've mostly looked at giving as an obligation. We only see it as a command, and we haven't explored the doctrines of grace that make giving an opportunity.

Giving really does inure to our benefit. It really is a form of worship. "[T]he Lord Jesus himself said: *'It is more blessed to give than to receive'*" (Acts 20:35 NIV).

How many of us can think about a time when we've given a special gift to our spouse or a good friend and thought, "This is the perfect gift." If you would reflect on that feeling for a minute, I think you'd find that there was more joy in that than anything. That is why Paul exhorts us to give.

Another reason why God says to give is because *"where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:21 NIV). Here's what Jesus is saying: Give to my kingdom because I want you to be thinking about things with an eternal perspective.

You're living here temporally. But the only way to break the power of money and the power of possessions and the material culture in this present earth is to give. The benefit is this: When we start giving to God's kingdom, we start thinking more about heaven than earth.

And blessed is the man who, as age matures us to our appointed time, is moving toward his treasure, toward heaven, not away from it. What does Jesus say will happen when we store up treasures here on earth? Moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal (Matthew 6:19).

So it really is more blessed to give than to receive. It's about joy. God is saying: I want you to get it. I'm not asking you to give because I want you to not have stuff. I want you to give so that you can *"take hold of the life that is truly life"* (1 Timothy 6:19 NIV). If you're holding onto the stuff of this world, it's impossible to receive anything else.