

PROSPERING BY GIVING

*“The generous man will be prosperous,
and he who waters will himself be watered.”* Proverbs 11:25

*“He who trusts in his riches will fall,
but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.”* Proverbs 11:28

*“He who sows bountifully, shall also reap bountifully—
for God loves a cheerful giver.”* 2 Corinthians 9:6,7

Keith S. Fifer

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A. WE CAN PROSPER BY GIVING

Whoever heard of such a thing as gaining more by giving away more? Answer: Anyone who has read the promises of God in His word, the Bible. But it just doesn't make sense to us—we know that when we give something away, we are left with less than we had before.

This is very true if we are talking about worldly matters, and leaving God out of our reasoning process. But when we have God as the centre of our thinking process, we may ask the question regarding any situation we are in. How may God's influence impact on this situation?

God says he will reward our generosity so let us look at this further.

Jesus said in Luke 6:38—“*Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap*” Let us note well that Jesus said: “*it will be given to you*”.... There are no ‘ifs’ or ‘buts’ about this; the promise is definite, and it's from God the Son, so it is 100% reliable.

Secondly we note that the returns are exceptional—pressed down, shaken together, running over.... How could one better describe an abundance of returns?

Thirdly, these returns will be “placed in our lap”. There's no need to go looking for them; they will just appear. How true this is, as many people who experience God's rewards can attest. The rewards are typically totally unexpected when they arrive in ‘our laps’. Many Christians I have spoken to have said that the more they give the more they seem to have.

B. SOME EXAMPLES

The famous Christian author, Norman Vincent Peale, writes of this in his book “The Tough-minded Optimist”. He writes that his wife, Ruth, had a strong belief that “the Lord will provide” no matter how bleak the future looked. Quoting from his book—

Ruth probably did not know it at first, but she had stumbled on to one of the greatest laws in this world of law. It is called the law of supply. In fact, neither she nor I had ever heard that term until many years later, when it was used by Dr Frank Boyden, Headmaster of Deerfield Academy, one of our outstanding schools for boys. Dr Boyden had built this great institution from practically nothing. Today its standing is one of the highest in the educational field.

‘How did you do it?’ I asked admiringly as he told of the adversities and close brushes with bankruptcy over the years.

He chuckled, ‘I’m sure the bank wrote me off a hundred times; but funds always came. Time and again we were

scraping bottom but it always came.’

‘How?’ I insisted.

He turned a face full of faith towards me and said, “Through the law of supply. I was doing something God wanted done;

making men out of boys. I was doing my best; I sought and followed God’s will. I put everything in His hands and I worked my head off. All of this stimulated the law of supply and it’s still flowing”.

As we drove away from Deerfield after this conversation, Ruth kept repeating, half to herself, ‘the law of supply—the law of supply, why that is just what I have been practising all my life. I never heard it names but that is it—the law of supply. This is our big secret of living, Norman’, she said sort of awestruck.

These sentiments are reflected over and over again in testimonies by Christians which fill our Christian bookstores.

The world looks for good investments that yield promising returns, and this, no doubt, is prudent husbandry. But the Christian already has the best investment of all readily at hand, all the time—‘giving’ in Christian love, and without any thought of reward.

C HOW MUCH SHOULD WE GIVE TO THE CHURCH

The Bible is clear on this in the Old and New Testaments. From the Old Testament—

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and test me now in this,” says the Lord Of Hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.” Malachi 3:10.

We see again God’s promise of great rewards for giving what he commands; namely, a tenth of our produce, or in today’s terms, a tenth of our income. This is, indeed, bountiful of God because as Jesus pointed out, we must do everything that we ought according to God’s word, without thinking we are doing anything special, or worthy of reward.

From the New Testament—(Jesus speaking) *“Yes, you should tithe, but you shouldn’t leave the more important things undone”*. Matthew 23:23. Here Jesus is stressing that we should pay great attention to justice, mercy and faithfulness in addition to tithing. This means that our charity contributions are to be in addition to our tithing to the Church.

There are seemingly many Christians who believe that giving a tenth of their income to the Church is too much to ask, as our church offertories indicate. Recently a church in our district indicated that the average weekly offertory was of the order of \$15 per family. If the people were tithing, this means the average income per family was about \$750 per annum. Yet

there are some Christians who are very happy to believe that a tenth is the bare minimum, and who give more than this, some much more, and then make substantial charity contributions on top of this again. A speaker on the subject of giving was asked—“Should we give a tenth of our net income or our gross income?” The answer was simple—“It depends on whether you want to receive net blessings or gross blessings.”

A better answer may have been—“It depends whether you love God to a net degree or a gross degree.” Or—it depends on how we regard Jesus’ purchase of eternal life for us on the cross, to keep us out of hell.

D. WHAT IS ETERNAL LIFE WORTH?

Psalm 49:8 (from the Living Bible): *“A soul is far too precious to be ransomed by mere earthly wealth. There is not enough of it in all the earth to buy eternal life for just one soul, to keep it out of hell.”*

Christians give generously in response to God, and for what he has done for them in the Lord Jesus—already purchased a place in heaven with his own blood and suffering. They do not give in order to get further blessings as a result of their giving—the further blessings are a bonus promised by an overwhelmingly generous God—but never a reason for giving.

E. THE BIBLE DOES NOT CONDEMN WEALTH

In many places the Bible speaks of wealth as being a gift of God, and the implication is clear that wealth can be welcomed as a blessing, and certainly not considered ungodly. God blessed the patriarchs, such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with wealth, as he did the kings of Israel such as Solomon. But the Bible does condemn many of the behaviours that can accompany the

possession of wealth—such as pride, devotion to wealth, lack of generosity commensurate with the wealth.

In the Bible, God frequently mentions the importance of helping the poor—Proverbs carries many such exhortations --

Proverbs 14:21 *“Happy is he who is gracious to the poor”*.

Proverbs 21:13 *“He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered”*.

And the Book of James enjoins us to help the poor and hungry if we are to show that our faith in Jesus is real, and not just lip service.

Jesus said: *“Let your good works so shine before men, that they give honour to your Father who is in Heaven”*.

Christians show how loving they are, and how loving their God is by giving—AND they are showered with further blessings by their infinitely loving God when they do so.

F. IT'S DIFFICULT FOR A RICH MAN TO ENTER HEAVEN

Why does Jesus say it's difficult, if not practically impossible, for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? From the example quoted in Matthew 19:23, 24, we see that this particular rich man was very rich indeed and very wedded to his wealth, and could not contemplate being without it. In other words, Jesus saw that this rich young man was primarily devoted to his wealth.

This is why Jesus said we cannot serve God and money—serving God means giving, not hoarding. Jesus is stating what all Christians know in their hearts that money is a means to an

end and not an end in itself—it is not to be valued for itself but for what it can do.

But why say ‘harder than going through the eye of a needle’? It seems pretty clear that Jesus is talking about rich people as those who have much more money than they need.

If this is the case, one might reasonably ask the question—why have more wealth than one needs to have?

It means that there is substantial wealth sitting somewhere achieving nothing (except, perhaps, accumulating more wealth) when there are enormous needs in the world for people to be helped—particularly people who are in desperate need. Of course, many rich people are most generous with their money, but the fact remains that many still have excess riches.

If we were to ask such a person the question—“if you saw a child who was dying of hunger outside your home, would you wish to provide some food to save the child’s life?”—the answer would almost certainly be ‘yes’. If we went further and asked—“if you heard of a starving child in the next street, or the next suburb, or the next town—how far away would the child have to be for you not to think for one moment of helping? For we all know of many thousands of children dying of hunger, not in our view, but further away—yet the rich continue to hoard their wealth and let the children die. Some might say that there are so many people in dire need, we can’t help them all, anything I could do would be a drop in the ocean.

These comments are true, but Jesus doesn’t ask us to help everyone, just one or more if we can afford it.

When we come before him at the judgement seat he may not ask us why we didn’t solve all the problems of need in the world, but perhaps

to ask us how many people we did, in fact, help—and perhaps how many we could have helped, but didn't. I recently read of a ninety-year old man who has sponsored 100 children through World Vision, and who corresponds with each of them. So we don't need to donate our money to a general fund, if we would rather be able to identify the person we are helping, and learn of the wonderful changes made to their lives by our generosity.

Jesus sums up God's attitude to the well-to-do in Luke 12:48, when he says: "*From everyone who has been given much shall much be required*".

G. CONCLUSION—WE CAN'T GIVE TO GOD!

God makes it clear in the Bible that no one is able to boast in His presence. Why?

Firstly, because everything we are and everything we have comes from God.

If we give of ourselves, our time, our efforts, our money—it is only giving back a small portion of what has already been given to us. If we give through love of God, and to honour God, he will then proceed to give us much more in return—thus multiplying his blessings over and over.

All of this is in addition to His greatest gift of all—His infinite, unconditional and eternal love and His forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. All honour, thanks, praise and glory be to our great God. Amen.