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Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

What You Get When You Give

In Acts 20, Paul was preparing to take leave of his beloved Ephesian brethren. At the end of his parting speech, he said,

You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Really? It’s better to give than to receive? Our own experience tells us that it’s more fun to get birthday presents than to buy them. Our own experience tells us that it feels nicer to get a backrub than to cramp our own hands giving one.

And yet, like so many of Jesus sayings, when we stop and think about it for a moment, and break out of our selfish patterns, it is profoundly and absolutely true.

Receiving is nice. But here are a number of reasons why it is even more blessed to give than to receive.

It Just Plain Feels Good

Only the most cynical and calloused soul does not gain pleasure from providing food to the hungry, handing a lollipop to a child, sending a kind note to the hurting, having fellowship with a foreign preacher.

In fact, this good feeling is quantifiable. According to Steven Levitt's *Freakonomics*, researchers conducted a study in the 1970s that pitted altruism against compensation. They offered people various incentives to donate blood. They discovered that people donate more blood when they are simply thanked for their gift, and donate less blood when paid money. "The stipend turned a noble act of charity into a painful way to make a few bucks, and it wasn't worth it" (p. 24). See, the good feelings associated with freely sacrificing to help a stranger that one will never meet is still more of a motivator than being paid for it!

As souls made in the image of a compassionate God, we are hard-wired to gain fulfillment from helping other people. We read of God's love and help toward mankind, and we are confident that we become children of God by our small acts of service (see Matthew 5:43–48). In fact, we are commanded, in the introduction to the parable of the good Samaritan, to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). Solomon goes so far as to say, "he who despises his neighbor sins," but on the other hand, "happy is he who is gracious to the poor" (Proverbs 14:21).

We Are Confident God Will Repay

Jesus warns us in Matthew 6:1–4 not to do a good turn to be praised by the witnesses, otherwise we "have our reward in full."

On the other hand, when we do it to someone who cannot help in return, God promises the deed does not go unnoticed. Jesus says,

When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:12–14).

Some would call even this a form of selfishness. But we realize that we cannot indebt the eternal God. We do not plan to present God a bill for services rendered. We are not worried about how the math works out, for we are content that God sees and that God is the rewarder. “God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered . . . to the saints” (Hebrews 6:10). Our treasures in heaven, whatever they are, will make all our efforts and sacrifices on this earth worthwhile (Phil. 4:17–18).

We could look at this from the negative as well. Matthew 25:31–46 teaches that some will be lost because they ignored the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned.

God’s Family Notices

Solomon says, “he who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered” (Proverbs 21:13). “He who gives to the poor will never want” (Proverbs 28:27). Good times come and go, and people will rush to help when a man known for his charity finds himself down on his luck.

It Demonstrates Thankfulness for the Grace of God

If I selfishly withhold an offering that I am able to give, or a helpful deed that I have the convenience to provide, it’s a slap in God’s face. Let us consider what He gives each day! He provides our daily bread, the sunshine and rain, air to breathe, water to drink, our loving families, and all things that we enjoy. All our possessions come from Him in the first place. David recognized the irony that “all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You” (2 Chronicles 29:14). In other words, God asks for nothing more than a portion of what He has already provided.

Even more, let us consider the ultimate sacrifice of His Son! Paul said in Colossians 1:24 that he was mindful of Christ’s afflictions when he “did his share” in the church. Therefore, the gift of Christ should be all the more reason to be pleased to give.

—*John Guzzetta*

I'm Not Growing Old

This old shell in which I dwell
Is growing old, I full know well,
But I am not the shell!

What if my hair is turning gray?
Gray hair is honorable, they say.
What if my sight is growing dim?
I still can see to follow Him.

What should I care if time's old plow
Has left deep furrows on my brow?
Another house, not made with hands,
Awaits me in the glory land.

This outward man—do what it can,
To lengthen out his life's short span—
Shall perish and return to dust,
As everything in nature must.

The inward man, the Scriptures say,
Is growing stronger every day.

Then how can I be growing old,
When safe within the Master's fold?
Ere long this soul shall fly away
And leave this tenement of clay.

This robe of flesh I'll drop, and rise
To seize the everlasting prize.

I'll meet you on the streets of gold
And prove that I'm not growing old!

—*author unknown*

Quote of the Week:

“The only thing that walks back from the tomb with the mourners and refuses to be buried is the character of a man. What a man is survives him. It can never be buried.”

—*J. R. Miller*