

Stewardship Forum

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Stewardship Tools for Individuals : Lifestyle Issues

Title: The Art of Giving Well

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Background

2 Corinthians 8-9 offers a wonderful opportunity to explore the biblical principles of stewardship. These chapters indicate that Christians in Jerusalem were suffering from famine and financial difficulties. So, during his travels Paul told Christians in other churches about the needs of the suffering church in Jerusalem and invited contributions for them (*Rom. 15:25-26, 1 Cor. 16:1-2, Cor. 9:2-5*). Although poor and persecuted themselves the Macedonian Christians had given generously (*2 Cor. 8:2-5*) and Paul writes to the Corinthians to remind them about the gift they had already promised to make (*v11*).

Principles for Giving Well

Several principles for giving well emerge from these two chapters. First, *Christian generosity includes giving to believers in other countries and cultures*. Paul asked Christians in Greece to give to Christians in Jerusalem. The location of the need or the race was unimportant: what mattered was that they were fellow Christians who needed help and support.

Secondly, *Christians should strive for excellence in giving*, Paul says, “Just as you excel in everything...see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” (*2 Cor. 8:7*) Paul ranks generosity with faith, love, knowledge and sincerity. As Christians, we are not to settle for some minimum standards but to excel in all the qualities mentioned including the *grace of giving*.

Thirdly, *Christians are to give voluntarily and cheerfully*. “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (*2 Cor. 9:7*) Paul presented the need and he allowed the Corinthians to decide for themselves whether or not to give. He did not manipulate their emotions or make them feel guilty. Church leaders today should follow Paul’s example and encourage people to view their giving as a response to God’s love to them and a way of partnering with Him and others for sharing the Gospel.

Fourthly, *Paul teaches us that God applies our measure to ourselves*. “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” (*2 Cor. 9: 6*) We cannot experience the full extent of God’s blessings to us if we are not faithful in the area of giving.

Finally, *the more one gives, the more one has to give away*. Paul says “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.” (*2 Cor. 9:11*) As one of

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the most generous people I know once said, “ I shovel out, and God shovels in... and God has a bigger shovel.”

Many Christians say “I would give more but, ...” and the list of excuses goes on and on. We all face enormous cultural pressures to cultivate our identity as consumers of material wealth and possessions rather than as stewards of God given resources. However, the Scriptural mandate is clear: we are to give generously and cheerfully, just as God has given us.

Habits to cultivate

Here are some healthy habits to improve your giving.

1. **Give to God first** – before paying your bills or putting aside money in your savings account. “ Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops” (*Prov. 3:9*) When we give to God first we trust Him to provide for all our needs. Perhaps it is time for some of us to stop saying “Lord, help us get through this month and we will give to the church next month” and start trusting “ Lord, here is our gift of love to your church. Thanks for taking care of us.”
2. **Set aside money for special offerings.** We need to follow the lead of the Galatian believers (*1. Cor. 16:1-2*). Like them, we too can set aside a sum of money every Sunday and give it away to specific needs as they arise. Through our special offerings we can show Christian love in action be it to congregation members who are having a difficult time, or members of the local community or help eradicate the poverty and suffering of people in other parts of the world.
3. **Listen for opportunities to give.** If you hear that a member of your church is having financial struggles, why not put some cash in an envelope with a small note of encouragement and give anonymously? Suppose you know that a young couple from your church are trying to raise support in order to serve God as full time Christian workers: Why not be part of their support team committed to give to them and to pray for them regularly? If you pray and ask God for opportunities to give, God will direct you. Loving others as you love yourself and sharing your wealth with them are things that please God greatly.
4. **Give in gratitude for special blessings received.** Often in OT the Israelites brought special offerings to God showing their thankful hearts for the blessings they had received. God too blesses us in many different ways: with newborn children, new jobs, good health, friends, marriage, financial windfalls and so on. So perhaps sometimes we can give extra gifts to the church, Christian organisations or mission projects as gratitude for blessings received. One grandmother I know has always made special offerings to a children’s charity shortly after the birth of each of her grandchildren.
5. **Buy a little extra food when you shop for your family to give to your church’s food bank or a needy friend.** Some churches encourage people to give both food and money offerings to special outreach projects in their local community. This way once again we are putting into practice the OT principle of gleaning (*Lev. 19:9-10*,

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Deut 24:19-21) and the NT principle of caring for our neighbours and loving them unselfishly.

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