

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT
PART 15
THE GIFT OF GIVING

This morning in our series Foundation of Faith we are going to deal with a subject I am a little uncomfortable talking about and many of you know that already and that is the idea of giving. I never want people to feel they are forced or compelled to give for the work of God here at Calvary Chapel and so I tend to avoid this subject, only dealing with it when we come across it in the Scriptures. In fact, over the past 16 years I have been accused of not telling the body here at Calvary what is needed.

But this morning, as we continue looking at spiritual gifts, we can't avoid this one, the gift of giving! Paul, in Romans 12:3-8 lists more of these spiritual gifts that are given to us and specifically the gift of giving. So let's pick up in verse 3 of Romans chapter 12 as we look at these gifts. We are told, **“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”**

Now please understand that yes we are all to give to the work of God but this is a gift of the Spirit, it is more than just normal giving. You see, the gift of giving is the supernatural ability given to a person by the Holy Spirit to give of himself, his resources, his talents to aid others. We are all called to give like I have said, but this is taken to a higher level. And, as I have also said and admitted, this is one of those topics I don't like to talk about. Maybe the reason is that I have seen the pressure put on people to give, and the abuse that is spawned from that. Here at Calvary we are easy going when it comes to giving. There is no pressure, no pledges, whatever God places upon your heart, you can give. It is as simple as that.

Now I don't know if you heard about the story of the man who had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. Because of his condition he could receive little company and was not to be excited. While in the hospital a rich uncle died and left him a million dollars. His family wondered how to break the news to him with the least amount of excitement. It was decided to ask the preacher if he would go and break the news quietly to the man. The preacher went in to see him and gradually led up to the question. The preacher asked the patient what he would do if he inherited a million dollars. He said, "I think I would give half of it to the church." The preacher dropped dead.

Sorry about that, but many times it is true with people and how they give for the work of God. You see, when you think about it, giving goes against the very nature of man. We are very selfish when it comes to giving by nature. We want something in return for our giving and if it is not worth it to us, if it does not benefit us, we usually won't give.

On the other hand, God is very giving. We read in John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** Thus, by His own nature, God is giving, man is not!

The problem for us is this. In Jeremiah 13:23 we read, **“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.”** The answer is obvious. No an Ethiopian can’t change the color of his skin. Nor can a leopard change the color of his spots. Thus, we, by our very nature, can’t do good unless we are born again in Christ.

Paul tells us in I Corinthians 6:11, **“And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”** And in II Corinthians 5:17 we read, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** And so God can change us, and He does, even though at times that old nature rears its ugly head!

Now, before we get into what giving is, I want to take some time to share with you what giving is not. In the church today we see this kind of mentality growing, as it is being taught over and over again, that giving is like investing. God has a great return on our investment. Now the principle is true, they have just perverted it and we see their perversion has led to greed and the wrong motivation in their giving.

Paul tells Timothy about those “**. . . who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.**” I Timothy 6:5. You see, Paul is speaking of the wrong motivation behind the giving. You see, greed is a big motivation, making a profit off of God, but that is not how they would speak of it. They talk like this, “Hey, I’m the Kings kid and the Father doesn’t want me to be poor, to drive around in this old car or have this old house. If you sow your seed faith offering to me, then God will bless you a hundred fold!” And the only one who gets rich is the one promoting this false doctrine. If a person is in the ministry for the money, they are in for the wrong reason and they truly need to get out. It is as Calvin said, “For these men all Christianity is to be measured by the gains it brings . . . Paul forbids the servants of Christ to have any dealings with such men.” Again, that is the wrong way to give, to get something in return!

Now James is a little blunter when he says, “**You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.**” James 4:2-3. Again the thought is wheeling and dealing with God to make a profit, to spend it on our own fleshly pleasures. That is a wrong attitude for giving. You see, they may not ask God or even if they do, they are asking “**amiss**” which is the Greek word, KAKOS, (kak-ocē’) and it has a basic meaning of being bad, being evil, diseased, sick, it is obviously not good.

In fact they want to “**spend**” it on their own pleasures instead of what God desires. The word “**spend**” is the same verb used in Luke 15:14 of the wasteful spending of the Prodigal son. Folk’s, prayer is not to change the will of God or to pull some strings to get what you want. Prayer is done to align our will with His, to accomplish His will on this earth and not our own! They were self-seeking and trying to get their will done and it caused all kinds of contentions in the church! That kind of behavior will cause conflict, it is never good. What a powerful lesson for us to learn!

Now look at what is being taught in the church today regarding money, riches, giving. Frederick K. C. Price said in regards to us thinking that Jesus was poor, that he is trying “to get you out of this malaise of thinking that Jesus and the disciples were poor. . . . The Bible says that he has left us an example that we should follow his steps. That’s the reason why I drive a Rolls Royce. I’m following Jesus’ steps.” And sadly people believe what he has said and why do they believe him? Because they want to drive around in a Rolls Royce, have lots of money and yet Jesus said in Matthew 8:20, “**. . . ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’**” The reason people look to man instead of the Word of God is because they are greedy, they want what they want and not what God has for them!

I think the ex-wife of televangelist Richard Roberts summed up what is going on very well. Patti Roberts said: “I know a lot of people were blessed and sincerely ministered to by what we sang on TV, and by what we said - but the overall picture, I’m afraid, seemed to say, ‘If you follow our formula, you’ll be like us,’ rather than, ‘If you do what Jesus says, you’ll be like Him.’ It was certainly more exciting to follow us, because to follow us was to identify with success, with glamour, with a theology that made everything good and clean and well-knit together. To identify with Jesus, however, meant to identify with the cross.”

Bingo! That is it in a nutshell! How many people want to die to self and take up their cross and follow the Jesus of the Bible? That is a life of surrender, of sacrifice but, on the other end of the spectrum is a life that is self-centered and trying to obtain all the earthly treasures they can and they make it sound good because they say that is what Jesus wants them to have!

Now let me also say this. The prosperity teaching does have some truth to it, but they have taken a Biblical principle and grossly perverted it. As hard as this is for me to say, there is a principle here and Paul even spoke of what you sow you will also reap. And, just as gravity is a physical law, so is the law of giving a spiritual law. Jesus put it this way in Luke 6:38 when He said, **“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”** God wants to bless you but if you give to get, if you give with strings attached, if you are looking to get rich off of God, that is the wrong motivation and we call that kind of an attitude, ***GREED!***

The reason we give is to build up the body of Christ, to help those in need, and in the end we do get blessed more than we can imagine, but that is not the reason we give. You see, God will bless you because God will be a debtor to no man! And please understand that the blessings are not always monetary! I can tell you from experience, in fact just this past summer with Vacation Bible School, many people gave of their time, their resources and they were blessed. I can tell you also that to have those young children come up and give you a hug and say; “Hi Sherriff Joe!” was a tremendous blessing. To have them say, “When are we going to do this again?” What a blessing! To have them give you a big hug when they see you, what a blessing! You see, it was not money that was the blessing, it was the children themselves and as we blessed them, God blessed us!

In Haggai chapter 1 the Lord is coming against those who were more interested in self than with God in their giving. The context here in Haggai is the Jews had returned home from their captivity in Babylon. The land was a mess, the walls broken down and the Temple a big rock heap.

Out of the 2 to 3 million that went into captivity in Babylon, only just fewer than 50,000 returned home, the rest had become comfortable in captivity. And so for this small group of people, the work was overwhelming. And as they returned home and began the clean up, the repair, the removal of the stones off the Temple Mount, by the end of the day, it looked like they did nothing, they had made no progress. And after a period of time they became discouraged, disheartened, and they gave up building the Lord’s house, and began to build homes for themselves.

They not only built houses for themselves, but they began to fix them up, make them look nice, while the Temple or the house of God remained in ruin. And because they had placed their own desires above God, judgment had come upon them. They had used their own resources to build up their kingdom instead of God's.

And so in Haggai chapter 1, beginning in verse 2 we read, **“Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: ‘This people says, ‘The time has not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.’ Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ‘Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?’ Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes.’ Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,’ says the LORD. ‘You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.’”** Haggai 1:2-11.

It is not something we like to think about, but God speaks very clearly here on how He feels about giving. In fact, when we do things like that, putting God behind our own needs, keeping from God, we end up losing. Proverbs 11:24-25 says, “**There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.**” In other words, the person who gives to others spreads out his wealth or resources and he will see them increase. On the other hand, the person who holds onto their things will never have enough.

Listen to the way the Lord put it in Malachi 3:8-10 where we read, “**Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try 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 such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’**”

Imagine when we hold back on giving to God He says we are “**robbing**” Him. Not only that, but we do miss out on the blessings that He desires to pour out upon us. You can’t give to God and not be blessed. He wants to open up the windows of heaven and pour out his blessings that will be exceedingly abundantly above all we could ever imagine! As Jesus said in Matthew 10:8, “**. . . Freely you have received, freely give.**”

Now we can see people today, and even ourselves, gravitate to either of these extremes. At times we give to God to get something in return. At other times we hold back from giving to God because we feel that we can't afford it. The reality is, you can't afford not to give to God. Other times we are more interested in building up our kingdom here on earth. What I would like to do now is spend some time looking at the Scriptures to see how we are to give; the motivation that led's to the action of giving. And again, I don't want you to feel that I am pressuring you to give, I am just showing you what the Scriptures have to say and the rest is between you and the Lord!

HOW ARE WE TO GIVE?

1. GIVE CHEERFULLY - II CORINTHIANS 9:6-7

Listen to what Paul tells us in II Corinthians 9:6-7 in regards on how we are to give and specifically, we are to give cheerfully. He wrote, **“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”**

First of all Paul uses an agricultural principle to make his point. If you sow lets say corn seeds very sparingly, when it comes time to harvest the corn, you will have very little in return. But if you sow bountifully then when harvest time comes you will reap bountifully also. I do understand many are afraid to even speak of that principle because of all the abuse, but let's not throw the baby out with the bath water. God has said it in His Word, and lets not be afraid of it.

Paul goes on to say that when we give we need to be cheerful about it, for God loves it when we give out of that kind of heart. He does not love it when we give out of compulsion, when we are forced to do so and we do it grudgingly, but when we do it out of a heart of love. In fact the word “**cheerful**” in the Greek is HILAROS, from which we get our English word “hilarious” from. In other words, God loves a hilarious giver! That is how we should give to Him.

Maybe you heard of this story regarding giving, but it does speak for itself. We are told,

A mother wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church “Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself,” she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. “Well,” said the little girl, “I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I’d be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did.”

- Bits & Pieces, February 4, 1993, p. 23

You have to love that and really, if you can't give out of a cheerful heart, then don't give. Imagine getting your spouse a birthday present and as you hand it to them you say, "Boy, this sure cost me a lot. I hope we have enough to get by." How would you feel when you received that gift? You would feel horrible and you would feel that your spouse really did not want to give it to you, at least not with a cheerful spirit. Now apply that to God and how do you think He feels when you give grudgingly or out of compulsion? You see, I think you got the picture!

2. GIVE FREELY - PSALM 54:6

Next we are going to look at the idea of giving freely. In Psalm 54:6 we are told, **"I will freely sacrifice to You; I will praise Your name, O Lord, for it is good."** The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, **"With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks and praise Your name, O Lord, for it is good."** And The Living Bible says, **"Gladly I bring my sacrifices to you; I will praise your name, O Lord, for it is good."**

You see, God wants us to give to Him freely, with no strings attached. We are not to give like this, "Lord, if I give this to you then you need to do this for me!" That is wrong. It is when we give freely; it is out of that heart attitude, that motivation, that we are blessed! I truly believe that tithing is an Old Testament principle. And please understand when I say principle that is exactly what I mean. I don't mean we have to give 10%. We can give more, we can give less, we just give freely to the Lord. In fact, when you add up all they were to give in the Old Testament, it came to around 23½ % per year in tithes. I don't hear anyone saying we must give 23½% in our tithes!

Folk's, we are living in the age of grace, and in the age of grace we are not forced to give, but again, as you sow you will also reap! We are called bondslaves of Christ, and thus we are willingly to give to Him everything, our Master, as we are under His authority. Thus, it is all His! So when you give to God, you are giving out of a cheerful heart, or don't give at all! You are to give freely to Him or don't give at all!

3. GIVE OUT OF LOVE - I CORINTHIANS 13:3

Now you might not think this one is important, but it is. We are to give out of love. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 13:3, **“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”**

There are many people that give but do so with the wrong attitude. In fact they become angry, resentful, bitter at times, looking down upon those who are less fortunate. God wants us to give out of love and if you can't, then don't give, because it is worthless in the eyes of God. Listen to this story and you will see what I mean. We are told,

In the latter part of the 17th century, German preacher August H. Francke founded an orphanage to care for the homeless children of Halle. One day when Francke desperately needed funds to carry on his work, a destitute Christian widow came to his door begging for a ducat - a gold coin. Because of his financial situation, he politely but regretfully told her he couldn't help her.

Disheartened, the woman began to weep. Moved by her tears, Francke asked her to wait while he went to his room to pray. After seeking God's guidance, he felt that the Holy Spirit wanted him to change his mind. So, trusting the Lord to meet his own needs, he gave her the money. Two mornings later, he received a letter of thanks from the widow. She explained that because of his generosity she had asked the Lord to shower the orphanage with gifts. That same day Francke received 12 ducats from a wealthy lady and 2 more from a friend in Sweden. He thought he had been amply rewarded for helping the widow, but he was soon informed that the orphanage was to receive 500 gold pieces from the estate of Prince Lodewyk Van Wurtenburg. When he heard this, Francke wept in gratitude. In sacrificially providing for that needy widow, he had been enriched, not impoverished.

- Source Unknown

This man could have looked down upon this woman and said or felt, "Hey, I am in need more than you!" But he didn't do that, he brought it to the Lord and the Lord told him to give to this poor woman and he did so with a heart of love, of compassion and not out of anger or bitterness for having to do this and God blessed him exceedingly abundantly above all he could have asked or thought! What a lesson for us, that when we give we do so out of love!

4. GIVE WITHOUT DRAWING ATTENTION TO YOURSELF – MATTHEW 6:1-4

Also, when we give we are not to draw attention to ourselves. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:1-4, **“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”**

That is the proper attitude to have when you give, not drawing attention to yourself, because when you do, you are taking it away from God. That is why we don't have plaques of what people have donated to the church; we don't want to rob them of their rewards by giving them the glory, the attention and praise now. Listen to this true story of Charles Spurgeon and his wife and you will see how this was done in their life. We are told,

Charles Spurgeon and his wife, according to a story in the Chaplain magazine, would sell, but refused to give away, the eggs their chickens laid. Even close relatives were told, “You may have them if you pay for them.” As a result some people labeled the Spurgeon's greedy and grasping.

They accepted the criticisms without defending themselves, and only after Mrs. Spurgeon died was the full story revealed. All the profits from the sale of eggs went to support two elderly widows. Because the Spurgeons were unwilling to let their left hand know what the right hand was doing (Matthew 6:3), they endured the attacks in silence.

- Chaplain Magazine

Imagine how hard that must have been for them and yet, they did not want to draw attention to themselves how they were helping these two widows out. And so, when we give to God we are not to do so in a way that would draw attention to ourselves!

5. GIVE WITH SIMPLICITY - ROMANS 12:8b

Paul, in Romans 12:8b tells us, "**he who gives, with liberality**" and what Paul is saying here when he says that we are to give with liberality, that word can be translated "simplicity." Again, the thought is with no strings attached, no conditions. God accepts giving with no strings attached. And so the thought here is when we give we should do so generously and with simplicity.

In Psalm 50:10-12 we read, **“For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness.”** In other words, it is all the Lords and what the Lord does is He allows us to give back to Him that which He has given to us, so we can assist in the work of God, the building up of His kingdom by giving of ourselves to His people. And what a blessing it is to be able to help others in our giving.

I would think that probably all of us understand that principle, but when it comes to application, it is a little more difficult. It is like the farmer who came running into his house to see his wife. He was all excited and said to her, “Honey, I have great news. Our cow bore twin calves today!” And as he jumped around and hugged his wife over this news, he said to her, “Honey, the Lord has truly blessed us this day. I am going to give one of these calves to the Lord!”

And she said, “Which one?” “It doesn’t mater”, was his reply.

A few months later the farmer came home very sad and his wife asked him “Honey, what’s wrong?” He said, “I’ve got some bad news. The Lord’s calf died!” We tend to give to God second best, but we should give out of our best, He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, He deserves nothing less. So give to Him generously and with simplicity! We tend to make things so difficult, so complicated and it doesn’t have to be that way.

Let me give you an example and I think you will see what I mean. When my kids were growing up at Christmas time they would make Christmas gifts for us and what a joy that was to receive them. The reason they were so special is because they made them. Now look at where we are at today. Last year I saw commercials for kids to buy their moms for Christmas diamonds! Are you kidding me? We have taken that which meant something to the children and the parents and turned it into something that is superficial. You see, when we give to God it is not only monetary, we give of our time, of our talents, it is serving in the body of Christ and yet so many make it so complicated and it isn't. Keep it simple!

6. GIVE WILLINGLY - EXODUS 25:2

The next thing we will look at in regards to our giving is that we are to give willingly. We are told in Exodus 25:2 in regards to the building of the Tabernacle, **“Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering.”**

This was a huge building project in the desert wilderness. There were no Menards or Lowe's to go and buy your supplies. These were all to be provided by the people and then constructed, put together by others. And what I want you to notice here is that there was no pressure for them to give. No one was coming to their door with a pledge sheet. They didn't get envelopes in the mail telling them to give. I remember growing up in the Catholic Church there were the envelopes for my parents each week and at times it was tough for them. What really amazed me is that they had envelopes even for the kids and if you didn't send them in, they looked down upon you!

But what we see here in Exodus is that God wanted Moses to tell the children of Israel, to instruct them about giving, and then only those who gave from a willing heart would be received. There are churches around town that have passed the collection plate around several times because they did not get enough money the first time it went around. How sad that is and how wrong that is! People aren't giving willingly, but they just want the plate to stop going around, so they will do anything it takes to get passed this.

Now what is the result of all this when there is no pressure to give? In Exodus chapter 36 we see the result of what happens when people give willingly. We read beginning in verse 4, **“Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, and they spoke to Moses, saying, ‘The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do.’ So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, ‘Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary.’ And the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done - indeed too much.”** Exodus 36:4-7.

Imagine that, Moses had to tell the people to stop bringing in their offerings; they had more than enough for the work of building the Tabernacle. And so the people had to be restrained from bringing any more. Imagine that kind of a problem!

I remember several years ago, when we purchased this building, I was uncomfortable in asking the congregation for money to buy it but I felt and was told I needed to let the people know and then, like Moses, all those who were willing to give, could. And I did that for a couple of Sunday's and I was shocked at what the Lord did. He gave us enough for the down payment and to fix up the building to make it meet the city and state codes and here we are today. No pressure to give, but those who had a willing heart did so, not like this story. We are told,

The American industrialist, Henry Ford, was once asked to donate money for the construction of a new medical facility. The billionaire pledged to donate \$5,000. The next day in the newspaper, the headline read, "Henry Ford contributes \$50,000 to the local hospital." The irate Ford was on the phone immediately to complain to the fund-raiser that he had been misunderstood. The fund-raiser replied that they would print a retraction in the paper the following day to read, "Henry Ford reduces his donation by \$45,000." Realizing the poor publicity that would result, the industrialist agreed to the \$50,000 contribution in return for the following: That above the entrance to the hospital was to be carved the biblical inscription: "I came among you and you took me in."

- Bits & Pieces, March 3, 1994, pp. 1-2

A funny and true story but that is how many give. They don't do so willingly but they feel pressured to give and God does not want that. He wants you to give willingly for His work.

7. GIVE HONESTLY - ACTS 5:1-11

The next thing we will look at in regards to giving is that we are to give honestly, which makes sense and yet, that does not always take place. In Acts 5 we read the story of Ananias and Sapphira and let's pick up in verse 1 to see how this plays out. We are told, **“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?’ She said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ Then Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.’ Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.”** Acts 5:1-11.

The problem with Ananias and Sapphira was not that they didn't give all they had to God, but they lied to God about what they gave to make themselves look good before the people and the apostles. God wants us to give honestly to Him, to be faithful about what we are giving to Him because you can't hide anything from Him. Everything is open and naked before the Lord.

And so, as we have seen we are to give cheerfully, we are to give freely, we are to give out of love, we are to give without drawing attention to ourselves, we are to give with simplicity, we are to give willingly and we are to give honestly to God. As you look at your life, see if these things match up. If they don't, ask God to help you in these areas. As you support certain ministries, see how they are using what you have given them. Is it to buy a Rolls Royce or to have all kinds of homes all over the place? You see, make sure the money you give for a ministry is being used wisely, if it is being used to build up the kingdom of God or just someone else's kingdom! If it is not used for God, then maybe you better not support them.

Now when we are told to give to God, the first thing we think of, and maybe the only thing we think of is ***MONEY, MONEY AND MORE MONEY!*** You know, "Show me the Money!" mentality! We are going to take a few minutes to look at this issue a little closer so we can see what the Scriptures have to say in regards to what God wants us to give, and you might be surprised.

WHAT WE ARE TO GIVE TO GOD?

1. GIVE YOURSELF - II CORINTHIANS 8:1-6

I think that this covers everything when we speak about giving, give yourself. Place your life on the altar of sacrifice and give yourself over totally to God, all that you have you give to Him so He can use as He desires. Paul, in II Corinthians 8:1-6 tells us, **“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.”**

Here in II Corinthians chapter 8 we see that Paul is commending the believers in Macedonia for their generosity in giving. These believers were going through very difficult times, they heard what was going on with the believers in Jerusalem, the hardships they were having, and they were willing to help out at all cost their brethren in Christ. In fact Paul says they went overboard in their giving, but not because they felt they had to, but they willingly gave of themselves to help others, even beyond their own means!

G. Campbell Morgan said, "Contributions to the work of the Lord are only valuable as they are the gifts of those who are themselves yielded to God." You see, as we surrender ourselves to God, walking in the Spirit, we will be willing to give of ourselves to help others in need, whatever that might be.

But so often we are not even focused on what needs there are and we are oblivious of the situations that are around us as this story illustrates for us. We are told,

A fellow in our office told us recently of a household incident of which he had been an innocent but perplexed spectator. Our friend had called a Venetian-blind repairman to come pick up a faulty blind, and the next morning, while the family was seated at the breakfast table, the doorbell rang. Our friend's wife went to the door, and the man outside said, "I'm here for the Venetian blind." Excusing herself in a preoccupied way, the wife went to the kitchen, fished a dollar from the food money, pressed it into the repairman's hand, then gently closed the door and returned to the table. "Somebody collecting," she explained, pouring the coffee.

- Caskei Stinnett in *Speaking of Holiday*

Do you see how she missed the point? They were not collecting for those blind Venetian people but came to pick up the Venetian Blinds! And so here giving was just empty, she did not give of herself, she did not even care but gave this man a dollar and went back to her daily life and many do that today!

Folk's, as we give of ourselves we give of our time, our talents, our gifts, and yes, even of our money to help those in need. A great example of a person who gave himself to the service of God was Epaphroditus. Paul, in Philippians 2:25-30 said, **“Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.”** You see, he was God centered, and others centered! He was willing to give his own life to minister to those that were in need, to those who needed to hear of Jesus and those that needed to be built up in the faith!

And so, when you think of giving don't limit it to money as many do. Give of yourself for the work of God. And truly, as I look at this body of believers, I see people who give themselves over to assist in the work of God, to minister to others in need, to function as a healthy body of believers.

If you are struggling in this area, which can be a turn-off because of all the abuse that is seen in many churches and Christian organizations, let me help you to get a correct perspective on this issue. In Matthew chapter 6, beginning in verse 19 we read, **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** Matthew 6:19-21.

Instead of having an earthly perspective, building up our kingdom here on earth, a kind of “The one who dies with the most toys wins!” mentality, be heavenly minded. Keep a heavenly perspective, desiring to give of yourself to the people around you the things of God, ministering to them on a spiritual level, and at times even a physical level, providing food, clothing, and shelter for them, and you will be blessed. Proverbs 19:17 says, **“He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given.”**

And the truth of the matter is you can tell where a person’s heart is at, what he loves, what is his passion, by what he does, how he gives, where he spends his time. If you lay for yourself treasures in heaven, it will be eternal and the focus will be others instead of self. If you build up your kingdom here on earth, amassing as much possessions as you can; moth, rust and thieves will eventually take it all away. Where is your heart?

Again, as Jesus said, “. . . **Freely you have received, freely give.**” Matthew 10:8.

When we give to God out of our own resources we are only giving back that which is already His. And as we give out of a right heart, God does bless us abundantly! As I have said, talking about money, giving makes me uncomfortable, but I will teach on it as we come across it in the Scriptures because God has felt it is that important to place it in His Word. There are blessings as we give! But I don't want to pressure anyone into giving or make anyone feel like they have to give. That is between you and God! You give out of a cheerful heart and see the blessings that God will rain down upon you!

And when the gift of giving is poured out upon people, the giving is supernatural, it is powerful, it is more than you can imagine.

Let me leave you with these words from Paul the apostle in II Corinthians 9:8-15. He said, **“God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: ‘He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’ Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”**

The gift of giving, what a blessing it is in the body of Christ, not only to those who receive it but also for those who are the ones who give cheerfully, freely, out of love, without drawing attention to themselves, with simplicity, willing and honestly! As Martin Luther said, “I have tried to keep things in my hands and lost them all, but what I have given into God’s hands I still possess.” May we not forget that!