

Week 10 – The blessing of giving

Day 1 – The blessing of giving

In the previous chapters we have talked about some practical issues which have a strong and positive impact on our lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

Surely you have started to realise how important it is for healthy spiritual growth to know and live God's principles.

Therefore if we talk about the blessing of giving, God's Word has to be our foundation.

Many Christians don't feel at ease with the teaching of giving. They tend to think that people are after their money!



But this is lopsided, because when we talk about the blessing of giving it is definitely not all about money. The Bible tells us that giving has to do with our spiritual understanding. But before we concentrate on the aspect of giving, we first have to clarify an important matter.

To whom do I really belong?

Surprisingly, this question is not always answered clearly and coherently in Christian circles. But since we have decided to become people of the Word, we want to turn to God's Word.

In the Letter to the Galatians we find the key truth to this question:



Gal 2:19-20:

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (ESV)

Let us consider the following truth:

Paul states that his life is no longer characterised by his old ego, but by Jesus Christ!

Born again people have a new identity. We have been transferred to God's Kingdom and live under the power of the King of Kings.

The logical consequence: We do what He wants us to do because we belong to Him.

Open your Bible in Romans 12 and read the verses 1-2.

What is our spiritual worship?

These verses speak clearly about whom we should dedicate ourselves to.

Our body belongs to God and therefore we are to dedicate ourselves to Him. For this reason Peter uses the term sacrifice:

No matter how long we have follow Jesus, it is again and again a challenge to completely dedicate ourselves to Him.

In the following passage from 1 Corinthians 6 Paul describes it as follows:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (ESV)

We don't belong to ourselves, but to our Lord!

Jesus bought us with His blood and made us a temple of the Holy Spirit. All that we are and have belongs to God.

However, God's Word does not teach us self-abandonment. On the contrary, it offers us a foundation to experience the blessing of giving.

Jesus says in Luke 12:42

Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? (ESV)

Here Jesus emphasises the importance of being a good and faithful steward.

Let's summarise:

All that we are and have belongs to God, and He appoints us as stewards who are responsible for taking good care of His property.

We are stewards of the things God has given us. As stewards we have the assignment to faithfully and wisely handle these things. This does not only refer to our possessions. It is also true for our talents and gifts, our time, our compassion and love, etc.



Today we have learned: **Everything belongs _____, I am appointed as**

Solution:

Everything belongs to God, I am appointed as a steward

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Day 2 – What can and should we give? Part 1

Yesterday you have learnt that you belong to God completely. What you are and have belongs to Him. And He has appointed you to serve Him as a good steward with all that you are and have.

Therefore giving becomes something positive and natural.

Today and tomorrow we will gain an insight into the broad area of giving as it is described in the New Testament:

Paul makes an important statement in Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (ESV)

What does acceptable spiritual worship look like?

What is this thinking different from?

Solution:

A: You offer your body as a living sacrifice
B: It is different from the thinking of the world

It all starts with our dedication to God, to His thinking, to His will.

This addresses the whole wide spectrum of practical service, be it in the family, at our workplace or in church.

Since our body belongs to God we have a responsibility for how we treat our body. Do I care for a balanced diet and enough water, how do I handle sexuality, do I give my body enough periods of rest?

Love in our heart

Read Romans 5:5

This verse deals with the divine love. Mark the correct answers and cross out the wrong ones.

- Love has to come from me.
- God gives me enough love through His Holy Spirit.
- Love is in my heart, I can take from it.
- The verse speaks about the future.
- As Christians we can take this as a fact.
- Only mature Christians receive divine love.

Solution:

Correct: 2, 3, 5; False: 1, 4, 6

Paul emphasises the fact that God has poured out His love into our hearts.

This means: God's love is poured out!

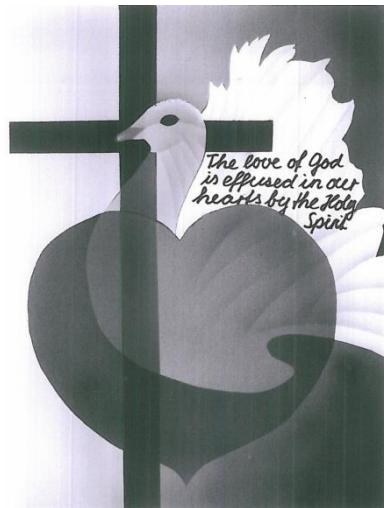
We can and should pass on this love without ifs or buts, because God has given it to us.

Am I prepared to pass on this love to my fellow-man, my spouse, my children, my family, my workmates, etc.?

It is God's love that we so desperately need in our relationships. This love comforts and encourages us, and it has to do a lot with caring for each other.

Am I prepared to love because I myself have received love?

How and where can I pass on this love in my everyday life?



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Day 3 - What can and should we give? Part 2

Yesterday we have looked at the question of what we can and should give.

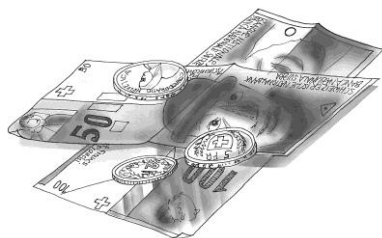
We have seen that we first should dedicate ourselves to God, because we belong to Him. Then we talked about love: God has poured His love into our hearts and we ourselves should pass on this love to others.

Today we are going to deal with three things that we can give. We are going to analyze them one at a time.

Giving of finances

Read the following verses from 2 Corinthians:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. (ESV)



So it is about money?

Yes, the Bible is very clear about this aspect of our life. In the Gospels, Jesus speaks more about handling finances than about the fact that there is a heaven and a hell!

It is important that we see this truth in the right context. This is why the above passage has been quoted at length.

Further on we will come back to this passage, so for the moment we will only consider the following thought:

Jesus has given us the great commission to spread the Gospel to the whole world. This task requires a financial engagement. Establishing a church costs money, so does carrying out a mission or an evangelization.

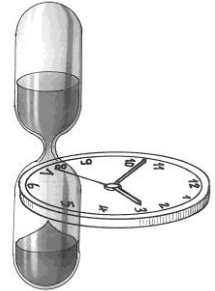
Giving of time

Read the following statement of Jesus:

Markus 14:37:

And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? (ESV)

Are we willing to give our time to serve others or simply to listen to them? God is Lord, also of our time.



Prayer

Paul speaks in this verse about one of his assistants:

Colossians 4:12

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. (ESV)

A last aspect that we should consider are our prayers and intercession. Epaphras was a man who apparently recognized that he had to give something in this area and actually did so.

If we look at this short list we realise that giving is not only about finances, it rather has to do with a Christian lifestyle.

You have been appointed by God as a steward over your finances, your time, etc. The three areas finances, time and prayer show that giving has to do with a broad understanding.

Take your time to discuss with God the management of your finances and your time. Think also about your responsibility in prayer. Write down the points that you consider important:

Discuss your questions with your companion.

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Day 4 – How should we give?

Once we have learnt from the Bible what we can give, we have to become clear about how we ought to give.

When God speaks about giving, He doesn't want us to act mechanically and simply follow a commandment according to the motto:

God has said that I have to give, so I simply give!

What really matters is our heart's attitude.

It is not so important to God what we give outwardly as it is with what inner attitude we give it.

Here too God's Word gives us clear instructions.

1. We give with a cheerful heart, not under compulsion

Read the following passage from the Bible

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (ESV)

When Paul speaks of a cheerful giver, he uses a term which is translated best as "cheerfulness and willingness to do something quickly".



This is the attitude of heart that God would like us to have in relation to giving! The Bible teaches us that God lives in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. And since giving is a matter of the heart and God lives in our hearts, we should act the way He showed us.

Since we know that people who are obedient to God are blessed, we can freely give with a cheerful heart!

2. We give with discernment and understanding

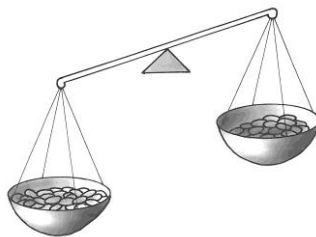
Paul teaches us about giving:

2 Corinthians 8:13-14

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. (EU)

This statement is practically self-explanatory. We cannot give what we do not have; therefore we give with discernment and understanding. The times where we live in abundance are the moments where we should give with a joyful heart.

Go back to day three and read again about what you can give. What does it mean in your situation to give with discernment and understanding?



Discuss your thoughts with your companion.

3. We give before God, not before men

What does Jesus mean when in Matthew 6:3-4 He says:

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (ESV)

We are always in danger of trying to impress others with our generosity.

But we need to understand that giving has to do with God. The illustration that Jesus uses in this verse points towards our heart's attitude.

God sees in secret, only He should know what you give because it is He who will reward you.

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Day 5 – The law of the sowing and reaping

Yesterday we looked at three points about biblical giving. Today we will consider one last point:

4. It is not important how much we give, but how we give

Read Mark 12:41-44

Let's summarise: God is not impressed if we donate a huge amount of money or invest a lot of time to serve in the congregation. He does not care about "how much" we give, but about "how" we give. In other words, for Him the heart's attitude is important. This becomes clear by the anecdote of the widow, whom Jesus takes as an inspiring example for His disciples.

In conclusion we emphasise again that we have a responsibility before God to handle the goods God has entrusted to us in a correct and responsible manner.

At this point we will look at a last aspect:

Although for our way of thinking it may seem illogical, God's Word shows us very clearly that people who give are blessed. The truth about the blessing of giving is based on God's Word.

Paul explains it to the Galatians like this:

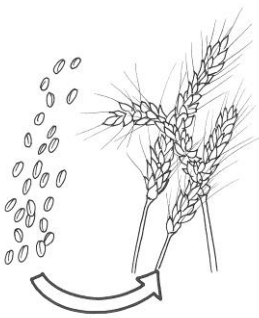
Galatians 6:7

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. (ESV)

Paul speaks of the law of sowing and reaping. We know that a farmer who sows will also reap. Without sowing there is no harvest.

The seed comes first. Every farmer knows that he has to give first in order to receive something later on.

Christians who live a life of giving (as said before, not only in the area of finances) will be rewarded by God.



Jesus confirms this truth with the words in Luke 6:38.

Read Luke 6:38

Obviously, this statement from Jesus is not our only motivation to give, because, as we have seen before, giving is a matter of the heart! Nevertheless we may know that every giver will experience the law of sowing and reaping.

There are many other statements in the Bible concerning the blessing of giving, but God wants us to primarily understand the principle behind it.

Christians belong to God with all they are and have.

God has decided to appoint His children as stewards that they may faithfully and wisely care for all the things He has entrusted to them.

Those who consistently practice a lifestyle of giving will definitely experience the blessing of giving.

Reflections at the end of the week

This week you have discovered that giving is more than a simple donation. Giving is a lifestyle in the Kingdom of God.

However, giving can sometimes be a challenge. Therefore remember that we give ourselves first and that we are appointed by God to be stewards of goods that belong to Him.

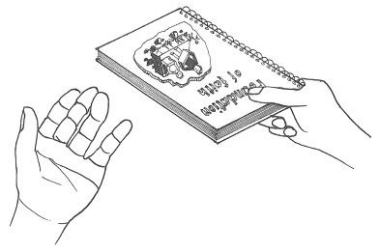
Write down your thoughts about this week's teaching and discuss with your companion the questions you have.



And now the time has come to say farewell; today we have finished the course *Foundations of Faith*.

Actually we could say that it is now that the course really starts. The point is that we put these truths into practice in our everyday life, that we grow in them and that we pass them on to other people.

It would be great if you were to take this book to hand again soon and, this time as the companion, support someone who is willing to study this course. Then you will see that this also has to do with giving and that you will be blessed as a giver.



Putting into practice

What has moved you this week and what will you apply to your everyday life?
