

Gifted to Give

Winton Churchill once said, “*We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.*” One might say, “You are what you give!” This honesty probably stems from the fact that God Himself is a giver. For God so loved the world that He gave us His only begotten Son Jesus (**John 3:16**) – a gift that manifested through much pain and suffering. Notice, God gave to us first! He is our role model for giving.

According to the University of British Columbia’s psychology researchers, thoughts related to God cultivate co-operative behaviour and generosity. In a study published in the September 2007 issue of the *Psychological Science* journal researchers investigated how thinking about God and notions of a ‘higher power’ influenced positive social behaviour, specifically co-operation with others and generosity to strangers. They found that priming people with ‘god concepts’ promoted goodness and generosity. But what these scientists failed to realise is that all people have been elected by God to be generous. We have been divinely **gifted to give** - to take on the very nature of our Creator.

There is a direct relationship between our faith, love and generosity. Genuine faith expresses itself through love (**Galatians 5:6**), but love expresses itself through generosity. When faith, love and generosity are perfectly synchronised the character of God is revealed. But if you do not have one then the other two cannot function correctly.

Generosity is not just a sacrificial act, nor an expression of one’s wealth, but rather, it is the will of God ‘for every believer.’ According to **2 Corinthians 8:5** you ought to, first, generously give yourself to the Lord and then generously give to someone else. To excel and abound in this grace of giving is as important as any other area in which you display passion, and for which you can be commended. The key issue, when being generous, is having a sincere desire to give, and not necessarily the amount given. Such giving should flow naturally out of the heart. It really is the thought that counts!

Now there’s a specific process which follows any act of true generosity. Generosity accelerates spiritual maturity and this in turn leads to liberality (2 Corinthians 9:10, 11). The Greek word translated *liberality* is literally ‘a singleness of heart’. With this being the case, as you mature you are in fact being enriched in everything in order to produce a *singleness of heart*. But where is this singleness of heart directed? You become single-minded and single-hearted about your giving – about being a blessing to others.

Great men and women of faith are to be remembered, not only for their celebrated exploits for God, but also for their love and generosity. Therefore, we must undertake to practice love and generosity by sharing our time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. This may seem obvious, but the feeling of generosity and the capacity for being generous are sometimes misunderstood. We also need to express our generosity through the act of giving.

If our love for each other (and others) expresses itself through generosity, then generosity surely expresses itself through our giving.

On a more practical note, how exactly should we be generous? Here are seven areas to consider:

[1] With our finances. Billy Graham has said many times, “*Give me five minutes with a person’s cheque-book and I will tell you where their heart is.*” If Billy Graham were to spend five minutes with your chequebook, what would he find? Would he find that giving to the Kingdom of God is your first priority? Would he find that giving to God shapes how you live?

[2] With our praise. Sincere praise and compliments can have a powerful effect on people. Praise boosts one's self-esteem. When you genuinely give praise, it releases energy in the other person. When you receive sincere praise, you get a smile on your face and your spirits soar. So give that you may get!

[3] With our forgiveness. Forgiveness is a special gift you give to yourself. It is not something you do for someone else. And it is not complicated. Forgiveness is an act of the imagination. It dares you to imagine a better future, one that is based on the possibility that your hurt will not be the final word on the matter. It challenges you to give up your destructive thoughts about the situation and to believe in the possibility of a better future. It builds confidence that you can survive the pain and grow from it.

[4] With our time. Your time is probably the most valuable commodity you have. It's the only thing you can't get back! So think how God views it when you have given your time to someone in need, with no hidden agendas?

[5] With our love. Giving love is not optional. You are commanded to love; however, the degree to which you give love is an act of your own free will. You can give a little love, or give a lot of love - it's up to you! You can give love conditionally or unconditionally. Giving love should come naturally and be from the heart.

[6] With our commitment to others. Commitment ignites action. To commit is to pledge to a certain purpose or line of conduct. It also means practising your beliefs consistently. If you have made a commitment to another person don't be stingy with it. Commit to doing even more!

[7] With our commitment to God. There are people, young and old alike who are uncommitted. They have the appearance of commitment. But their actions speak louder than their words – displaying half-hearted conditional commitment. See if these words sound familiar... *“Lord, I’ll come to church but only on Sunday Morning.”* – *“Lord, I’ll come to church every time the doors are open but don’t expect me to do anything.”* – *“Lord I’ll do anything for you as long as it doesn’t cost me anything.”*