

You Need To Live Upside Down

Most of us spend our lives striving to possess things, power and position. But true success in God's kingdom requires us to do the opposite

I stood in the sanctuary of the empty Angelus Temple, the famous church built by Foursquare founder Aimee Semple McPherson, and found myself close to tears. I looked up at the slate-blue dome directly overhead. It was well lit and resplendent, though the rest of the sanctuary was dim. The mural of a resurrected Jesus behind the platform still inspired awe, and the stained-glass windows two stories high gave the feel of a modern cathedral.

But this was no ordinary cathedral. For years, the innovative Sister Aimee had used this as her pulpit to the world. In the 1930s she was more famous than any film or music star. Thousands flocked every Sunday to hear her preach and to see her many spectacles, illustrated sermons, great choirs and dramatic presentations.

Most of all they came because she loved them. She wasn't just putting on a show. She was feeding the hungry—one and a half million of them during the Great Depression.

She was giving people hope during hard times. She was delivering the gospel to a city desperate for a true message among the glitter of movies.

Sister Aimee had learned the secret to success in the spiritual kingdom: giving oneself away. According to the Bible, we will succeed in direct proportion to how much we give ourselves away—not just in ministry, but in marriage, in

raising children, in friendships, in business and even in recreation.

I know it doesn't make sense. By nature we would rather possess than share, have than give. But if you follow the Lord long enough, one day it clicks: Joy is not living palms up—it's living palms down. Nobody has become happy from what they possessed, but anyone can increase their happiness by giving.

Giving is truly the key to blessing. I have seen more souls saved in the last four years of my ministry than in the 47 years before. I have seen more money come through my hands for the ministry recently than ever before.

Why? Not just because I have better staff or a better strategy than ever but because we have learned to focus more and more on servanthood, on downward mobility, on giving everything away. We have found that the more we give away, the more God pours resources and surprise blessings into our hands.

Do you really believe it's better to give than to receive? Does the thought frighten you? In their minds, most Christians believe this principle works—but few actually practice it. Some see this tidbit of wisdom merely as a nice suggestion, never realizing the seismic power it holds.

I admit, it's not easy to convince yourself that the Bible and only the Bible is right. When it says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35, NIV), we should accept that as 100 percent correct—but often we don't. When it says: "The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be

exalted" (Matt. 23:11-12), we should accept it as a rock-solid fact—and act on it. That's the stuff of revolutions.

But most people never reach that place in their lives.

Debunking the Myth of Lack

Why do we struggle with the principle of giving? A major hindering factor is the world in which we live—it encourages us to hold tightly to everything we have. Things always seem to be running out. Our cell phones have limited minutes and limited calling areas. Our cars can hold only so much gas. Our vacation time runs out. So does our patience, our energy, our attention. Our monthly budget seems to disappear down rabbit holes.

On a global scale we are told that the oil supply will run out in a few decades and that there isn't enough room on the planet for all the people who will be born. Some say the supply of fresh water is dwindling; others say the ozone layer is thinning too quickly.

We are conditioned to think in terms of limits, and therefore the world operates on the principle of lack. The world says you start from a position of not having anything, and you have to grab and claw your way to a place of having enough. In the world, the successful man is the one who stores up the most.

God approaches life from the opposite angle. He operates on the principle of plenty. In God's kingdom, the successful man or woman is the one who gives the most away.

The world says, "He who dies with the most toys wins." The kingdom says, "He who gives away the most wins."

God doesn't see the cup half full or half empty—He sees it overflowing!

From God's perspective, words such as "scarce resources," "conserve," "save up" and "limited" are meaningless. His is a world without limits, and we can connect to it.

I'm reminded of the way the fuel tank of an Air Force fighter plane is refilled while the plane is in the air. A fuel-bearing tanker flies right above the plane and extends a gas pipeline down to the fighter plane's tank. The fighter plane doesn't have to land; it is refueled in mid-flight. That's what God does for us.

Our minds are juxtaposed between a world that says lack is the rule and a God who says we lack nothing. The challenge is to act based on God's truth. We can demonstrate our belief in it by giving away as much as we can.

Most Christians I know are sincere about wanting to please God, yet many of them are frustrated and end up striving for God's promises. There are plenty of books and teaching tapes about how to have more peace or joy or good relationships. In a way, that advice can encourage the kind of chasing after worldly things that God prohibits us from doing. Yes, we may be chasing the right things, but it may be done in the wrong spirit—a spirit of striving and worry.

Sad to say, I believe Christian books can take advantage of this by "selling" solutions—blessings, joy and peace—as if

they can be chased down and grabbed. The advice tastes good, like ice cream on the tongue, and of course it's coated in Bible verses. But by the time it reaches our stomachs there's nothing there, and the striving makes us ill.

Such striving encourages us to believe that we lack something. It clouds the fact that we already possess the promises of God. In fact, God's promises don't need to be hunted down. He has given them to us already!

The secret, I believe, is realizing that in the kingdom life there is no such thing as want. In Christ, we have all we need right now. We don't need books or teachings to bring us closer to the promises.

Many believers think that in Christ potentially we have everything we need. They think we can access everything we need only if we pray hard enough, read the right books or learn the right spiritual formulas.

Such a belief arises from a lack mentality. In truth, whether we are poor or rich ("whether living in plenty or in want," as Paul talks about in Philippians 4:12), we have everything we need. That means everything—from spiritual things to material things. For that reason Paul could say, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (v. 11). He didn't chase down what he wanted. He knew he possessed it already in Christ.

Beloved, there is no need to search all over for the latest key to God's benefits. As a believer, even as you read these words you possess the promises. God can't make His Word any truer. It's up to you to flip the switch from unbelief to

belief.

When we flip the switch we discover that we don't need to chase after the same things the rest of the world chases after—money or position, personal fulfillment or tranquility. To run after those things—or even after the things God wants us to have—is the first sign that we don't really have them. When we really believe we already have them, we can relax.

That, in turn, makes us better givers.

The Kingdom Way

Life works only when lived upside down—that's the kingdom way. It works only when lived backward from what you would naturally expect. Giving yourself away is not just a nice thought. Giving is actually better than receiving—whether we like it or not. God made His kingdom to work that way, and if we don't play by His rules, we won't get His results.

I have found that when I plan or preach or pray without a giving spirit, my investment comes back small. But when I go into it by giving all the energy and fervency I have, I find myself replenished, and the investment multiplies.

That's how the “kingdom engine” works. You are free to put in it whatever you want, but the only way to get it to run effectively is to fill it with giving.

This principle of giving yourself away is more powerful than any automobile engine. It's even more powerful than an energy plant or a booster rocket. It doesn't move just tons of

steel—it moves mountains. It shapes destinies, sets the course of history, defines how governments and societies behave, inspires inventions. Literally, it is a force that no man can stop. Indeed, giving is one of the few things nobody can stop you from doing. Even if you were shackled and imprisoned, you could still give yourself away.

But you can give only what you have in your heart. If you have worry, you give worry. Maybe you're the kind of person who worries about money, and now you're breeding that worry in your children or spouse.

If you have anger, you give anger. Maybe you blow up when things don't go as planned. Proverbs 19:3 says, "A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord." In other words, an angry person ruins his own life and then blames God for the results.

But when you truly have the peace of God, it spreads to others like a beautiful fragrance. I have found that the most tranquil, faith-filled, happy people are those who give of themselves at every opportunity. They have risen to that heavenly level where nothing stops them from giving.

This is the highest—but not the only level. There are actually three levels of living and giving.

One is the hellish level, where people return evil for good. When the Jewish leaders put Jesus to death and treated Him shamefully, they were acting on this hellish level. We see glimpses of this in our day when acts of kindness are paid back with evil.

Another is the human level, where people return good for good and evil for evil. Most people's idea of morality is, If you're nice to me, I'll be nice to you; but if you're mean to me, I'll be mean to you.

Third is the heavenly level, where people return good for evil. This is the level on which Jesus said we should live, though not many people live on it consistently. It means doing good to people who hurt you, steal from you or cheat you.

Living on this level doesn't really make sense—unless you see it from God's perspective. The Bible says that God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked (see Is. 26:10).

Is that because He likes ingratitude and wickedness? No. It's because His character doesn't change no matter how men behave. He is the source of all goodness, and the only way to counteract evil is with goodness (see Rom. 12:21).

It is on the heavenly level that we realize God's supply of goodness has no end. We can afford to pour it out on friends and enemies alike without ever fearing that we'll run out. That's the level on which we're invited to live.

Sadly, the vast majority of people give to get. But Jesus tells us, "'Freely you have received, freely give'" (Matt. 10:8). I believe we ought to give because we already have received—and not just a small portion. Those who have God have everything.

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