

Extravagant Giving

When giving comes from the heart, God will bless the gift-and reward the giver



Luke 6:38 is a wonderful verse. But it's also one of the most frequently misapplied, misunderstood Scriptures in the Bible. It's so familiar to Christians, you can probably quote it from memory: "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. ... For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

Many people assume that Jesus is speaking only of money here. In truth, He was unveiling a principle of God's kingdom that applies to every area of human life. Back up some and read verses 36 and 37: "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." Only after making those statements does Jesus say, "Give, and it will be given to you" (v. 38).

Jesus was talking about the broad principle of giving. He was saying, *whatever* you give is going to be given back to you in "good measure" and "running over."

Think about it this way: When you give away an apple seed, by planting it, you don't just get back an apple seed. In time, you get back a whole apple tree, and on that tree are many apples, and each apple has many seeds. You get back so much more than you gave.

This is precisely where so many people go wrong regarding Luke 6:38. Many well-meaning preachers and Bible teachers fall into the trap of teaching this verse as the *motivation* for giving. Jesus says it is going to be our *reward* for giving.

Why did Jesus precede this promise by saying, “Judge not ... condemn not” (Luke 6:37)? He was putting this promise in context—and in a very sobering light. He was saying, if you give judgment or condemnation, each will be given back to you in good measure and running over. Yet if you give good things, such as forgiveness and love, you will receive an overflowing harvest of those. The principle works both ways!

How must God feel when His people get excited only about giving toward His kingdom purposes after they’ve been whipped into a frenzy through get-rich-quick promises? God doesn’t want us to catch the vision of *getting*. He wants us to catch the vision of *giving*.

God is not against our having nice things. On the contrary, He loves to see His people blessed. But motives are everything, as James 4:3 shows: “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (NIV).

The Big Picture

If we back up a few verses from Luke 6:38, we see its message in a different light. Well, we get even more context and perspective if we back up a little further and read verses 30-35. Jesus says, in part: “Give to everyone who asks of you. ... Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great” (Luke 6:30-35).

The message of Jesus’ sermon is: “*Give!* Give, give, give! Oh, and by the way, when you do, your heavenly Father will make sure you get much more in return.”

Do you see the subtle but important distinction in emphasis? God is a *giver*. The reward comes because we’ve allowed God to do a work in our hearts in the area of *giving*—not *getting*.

There is an Old Testament glimpse of this truth in Deuteronomy 15: 7-15. In this passage, God tells His people:

"You shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother. ... Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart ... and you give him nothing.

"Your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.

"From what the Lord your God has blessed you with, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave ... and ... your God redeemed you."

Here is a clear view of God's heart for helping people. It is also more evidence that God looks at the heart attitude of the giver.

He makes it a point to tell the Israelites not to let their hearts "be grieved" (v. 10) when they give. All the way back then, God loved a "cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

God is trying to do a work in us. But, as that passage points out, there are some things about ourselves we are going to have to confront if we are to become pure-hearted givers.

1. The Selfish Heart. According to Deuteronomy 15:9, we're going to have to deal with the wicked thoughts that would keep us from having compassion on others. In this verse God clearly labels selfish thoughts as "wicked." Selfishness whispers that we won't have enough or that God won't be faithful to meet our needs if we give.

God says, "Don't allow your heart to think that way, but instead *do* the Word, for that brings success and blessing" (see Josh. 1:8, James 1:23-25). That's why selfishness is your enemy. It tries to manipulate and make deals with God.

The default condition of the human heart is to hoard and avoid sharing with anyone. Then a loving heavenly Father comes to us and says: "I want to deal with this wicked, selfish heart and

make you a giver like Me.”

2. The Grieving Heart. God instructs us not to grieve in our hearts *after* we have been obedient in giving (Deut. 15:10). It’s important not to think about what you could’ve done with the money if you had kept it for yourself. Selfishness can attack us *before* we give, but grief can attack us *after* we give.

This is seen in “buyer’s remorse”—a term for what people often feel after they’ve spent a lot of money on an item, such as a car or house. After the excitement wears off, they can experience a panicky “What have I done?” letdown. Because this may happen even when you have been obedient to give as the Holy Spirit prompts, you have to guard your heart not only before you give but also after.

So, how do you combat this kind of grief? You get a proper perspective regarding “your” money. The truth is, everything we have is God’s.

Whenever I observe a Christian operating selfishly, I know I’m looking at a person who either doesn’t know or has forgotten that it all belongs to God. He’s acting like an owner, not a steward.

3. The Generous Heart. With God’s help, we must also develop a liberal, or “generous,” heart. As Deuteronomy 15:14 says: “*You shall supply him liberally* from ... what the Lord your God has blessed you with” (emphasis added).

This goes against the grain of our fallen natures, but it is perfectly consistent with the new natures we received when we gave our lives to Jesus. My new nature—the spirit man inside of me—wants to be generous, but I must learn to renew my mind in this area.

To no credit of my own, this is a work God has done in my heart. And I am writing this to testify to you that it works.

I can't begin to tell you how much joy giving has brought to my wife and me. Being givers in God's kingdom is the most fun we've ever had. It has resulted in a more exciting life than we could ever have imagined.

4. The Grateful Heart. We also have to let God develop in us a *grateful* heart. Look back at Deuteronomy 15 one last time: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you" (v. 15).

Why did God tell the Israelites to remember they had been slaves? Because knowing it would fill their hearts with gratitude for what He had done for them. When we're grateful, we're generous. Genuine gratitude to God is a rare and powerful thing.

Gratitude or Greed?

Over the years, I've gotten a little glimpse of how God must feel as my wife, Debbie, and I have been involved in blessing and giving to other people. Any time we've given something to someone, we have encountered one of two attitudes in the people's response to a blessing: either gratitude or greed.

Once when Debbie and I were giving a vehicle away, we were standing in our driveway with the couple we were about to bless. There happened to be two vehicles in the driveway at the time—the one we were giving away and ours.

The wife was very excited and very expressive in her thanks. The husband, on the other hand, was not. He just kept commenting on how nice *my* car was.

When we stepped into the house a little later, he finally came right out and asked, "Do you think you will ever give that other car away?" I remember thinking, *Not to you!*

We need to be aware that our attitudes toward possessions have a powerful ability to expose the true nature of our hearts.

Whether it is greed or gratitude, money and material things will bring it out.

Does God bless givers? Absolutely! But those promises of blessing are given not to entice us, but to free us from the fear and grief that keeps so many believers from turning loose and giving.

Yes, when you give, it will be given to you, as Luke 6:38 says, in “good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.” When we come to the place where we give simply because we have an unselfish, liberal heart of gratitude toward God, we will be well on the road to a blessed life.

Robert Morris, the founding senior pastor of Gateway Church in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, knows something about giving. He and his wife, Debbie, have given away no fewer than nine cars and at one time lived on 30 percent of their income and shared the rest with those who were in need. Robert is the author of the best-selling book *The Blessed Life* (Regal Books), from which this article is adapted. Used by permission.