

Jack Hayford: The Key to Everything

Before you read any further, let me tell you directly what the key to everything is: It's giving.

To give is to exercise the key to everything. But the key isn't simply to give in an abstract way or with no motivating reason. Nor is the key utilized by means of a secret formula of words, social magnanimity or intellectual brilliance. Rather, learning and applying the key to everything involves the growing of a heart attitude in giving, which gives the right thing at the right time in the right way and for the right reasons.

Such giving takes many forms. There are times to give up, not in resignation or in abandonment to despair but in a surrender of self-righteousness.

There are times to forgive, that is, to release what otherwise could be retained as a grudge, as anger, as pain or as internalized stress because of perceived or real injustices.

There are times to give over, to place into the hands of the Creator-Judge of the universe matters that only His might or His justice can sufficiently handle.

There are times to give to, providing with generosity in assisting the circumstance of another human being or group.

There are times to give in through simple obedience because the only wise God has shown principles and patterns for giving as a discipline, intending by these to release us from a self-centered survival mindset or from our all-too-human self-protecting fear of want or poverty.

And there are times to give wisely because we understand

reciprocal laws of God that promise a bountiful return if we give. That return is His way of making possible our learning to give over and over again with increasing resources and joyfulness.

In short, the key to everything involves giving everything but never in the way we most fear. For our fears have taught us that to give anything is to be left with less, and to give everything is to be left with nothing. But this deep affliction of self-protectiveness is a soul-sickness directly related to mankind's separation from God. Once a genuine rebirth of the human spirit occurs, the seeds of a possible restoration of full freedom are sown.

But growth takes time.

Biologically, nine months in the womb, plus at least a dozen years following birth, only begin the growth of a human being who can think and care for anyone other than himself. Similarly, in our spiritual beings, our new birth in Christ is only the starting place for growth in a life that can learn to live in the spirit of God's releasing grace. God's releasing grace is that grace in life that causes us to give as we have received, forgive as we have been forgiven, and trustingly care for and serve others as we have been entrusted with resources, gifts, time and influence.

The Spirit of Releasing Grace

The words "the Spirit of God's releasing grace" create the foundation of all giving. They draw their truth from the highest principle of all—that love gives. They are rooted in God's love, which is the foremost of all the attributes of His Person and personality. It is God's love that not only mandates His giving and forgiving because His nature can do no other, but it is His love which also mandates that those who are born into His family learn to do the same.

This principle is at the heart of one of Jesus' most revealing

parables. Take a quick break and read Matthew 18:21-35—the parable of the unforgiving servant.

I observed earlier that our challenge as disciples of our Lord Jesus, who gave us this parable, is to learn to give the right things in the right way at the right time and for the right reasons.

Jesus' teaching in this vivid story deals with all those "right" things. He is issuing a lesson in forgiveness that reveals the need for forgiving others, giving up selfish interest and giving in to God's greater wisdom. But undergirding the whole, at the crux of the story, is the reason for such a mandate to forgiveness to be issued.

Begin with me by securing in our understanding "the right reason" for our giving. This is essential because the key to everything isn't a wand waved as a magic exercise. Instead, it's an attitude worked into the human heart through understanding God's heart and methods. The pivotal point in Jesus' whole teaching is one central moment: the confrontation between the forgiving master and the unforgiving servant. The lord of the servant drives the point home with understandable force of speech: "O, you wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you?" (Matt. 18:32-33).

Jesus' message is pungently pointed: Forgotten grace breeds unforgiving living.

His analogy isn't obscure. The picture of God's greatness of grace in forgiving each of us our sins through the cross of Jesus Christ is clearly in view in the master's release of his debt-ridden servant. This is the power base from which the key to everything springs. Jesus makes the gift of God's love and salvation the starting point for our learning about giving through any of the multiple ways we are to learn. Whether

mercy or money, forgiveness or finance, we must first see, receive and understand His grace as the fountainhead of our lives and growth in the grace of giving. The foundational elements for those insights and that growth are in the parable I just recounted.

First, the context of Jesus' telling of this story is significant. Peter had just expressed what to him seemed to be a gracious offer: "Lord, how often shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21).

Don't make any mistake: Peter was stretching well past the common expectations for forgiveness in his day. The schools of thought in his religion proposed that even God didn't forgive anyone more than three times! This had been deduced from the preaching of the prophet Amos, in which the judgment of God is repeatedly announced upon nation after nation "for three transgressions ... and for four" (Amos 1-2). The conclusion some rabbis had drawn was that God forgives and excuses three times, but when a fourth violation occurs, judgment strikes. So when Peter asked, "Lord, should I forgive seven times?" it ought to be noted that he honestly thought he was being generous.

However, Jesus' answer must have stunned him and those with him: "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22).

The men He addressed were not fools. They recognized immediately that Jesus was pointing to an unthinkable pathway of unrelenting forgiveness. In the 70-times-seven equation, He was saying, "Never stop forgiving!" He wasn't suggesting the creation of books with 490 tiny squares on each page into which check marks could be tabulated until a person could finally be condemned with divine approval.

Central to Jesus' call to live a life of giving and forgiving is the truth that our debt before God has been paid by

Him—entirely and freely. And He has done all this for us notwithstanding our responsibility for our sins and our helplessness to pay for them.

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In his latest book, *The Key to Everything*, Pastor Jack Hayford shows you how to unlock the door to God's purpose for your life with the powerful tool of giving. Learn how to embrace the attitude that will set you free! You can find this book at [www.jackhayford.com](#), or anywhere Christian books are sold.