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This Grace of Giving

Understanding the nature of God: He is a giving God.

To enter the life of discipleship is to enter a life of giving. Jesus is the Master of the Disciple, and he set the example of being a giving person. Paul refers to this in Philippians 2:4-8. "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

From the very beginning, God has born witness to the fact that He is a Giving God. Deuteronomy 32:18 reproves the Israelites, "...you forgot the God who *gave* you birth." Psalm 112:9 "He has scattered abroad his *gifts* to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." Psalm 135: 12 "He *gave* their land as an inheritance, an inheritance to his people, Israel. Moses reminds them in Deuteronomy 9:11, "At the end of the forty days and forty nights, the LORD *gave* me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant." And in Deuteronomy 8:18, "But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who *gives* you the ability to produce wealth." Asaph reminds us in Psalm 78:15, "He split the rocks in the desert and *gave* them water as abundant as the seas.

The greatest gift of God is pointed out to us in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he

gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

When Jesus had conquered death and the grave, He immediately demonstrated His giving nature by fulfilling Psalm 68:18, as Paul points out in Ephesians 4:7,8, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says; 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and *gave gifts* to men.'"

God continues to this day to be a giving God, as Paul emphasizes in 2 Corinthians 9:10. "Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also *supply and increase* your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness."

We are called to be like him, a giving people.

God's people have always been givers. We are reminded in Proverbs 3:9 "Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops." In Malachi 3:10-12 the importance of giving back to God, and doing it first, before anything else, is hammered home. "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,' says the LORD Almighty. 'Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,' says the LORD Almighty." This was the message for Israel, under the Law

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given to Moses. This is the only time when God invites us to put Him to the test. He says if we are faithful in this we will have abundance in life.

The principle of giving to God and His Kingdom first was re-emphasized by Jesus. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus taught us, "But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." When we put God's interests first, in money, time and talents, He supplies our needs in abundance. Jesus focused on the power of a giving attitude in Luke 6:38, when He said, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." In this case He was discussing giving in the area of forgiveness, but the principle affects all aspects of life.

The Apostle Paul taught the vital importance of being a giving person by personal example, as he explains in Acts 20:35. "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to *give* than to receive.'"

Paul spoke to the Corinthians of the grace of giving, encouraging them to excel in this reflection of the nature of God. He says in 2 Corinthians 8:7-9, "But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in *this grace of giving*. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of

our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he *became poor*, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

He also indicated that our willingness to excel in this area of godly living would affect the way we would experience God's blessing in kind. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 explains, "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to *give*, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful *giver*."

Note the analogy Paul draws in the above verse. He describes giving as planting seed. When a farmer wants a crop, he plants seed. He does not expect to reap a harvest of watermelons if he plants no seed. It is a similar thing. We want to receive an abundance in life, of money, of relationships, of health. These are all affected by the kind of seed we sow. If we sow generously, with thankful hearts, we are promised a great harvest in kind.

Giving is not exclusive.

This counsel to be of a giving, sharing nature is consistent and repetitious in the Scriptures. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome in Romans 12:13,20, "*Share* with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." That is the counsel about sharing with our brothers and sisters in Christ. But does our generosity end with them? Paul continues by quoting from Proverbs, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, *give* him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Our grace

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of giving is not to be restricted just to those who share our faith or beliefs, but is to be extended even to *our enemies!* *That's because giving is a way of life, not a selective behavior.*

A related teaching is contained in Matthew 5:43-48, where Jesus addresses the selective, proscribing behavior of the bigoted. He says, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

If we want to be complete, to be perfect in this area of our giving, not to be lacking in our being sons and daughters of our Father, we will give of ourselves even to those whom we feel do not deserve it. That is the nature of those who practice the grace of giving.

Avoiding the practice of favoritism.

Another trap which we are warned against in our giving is that of the practice of favoritism. For some reason, we humans have a tendency to give to those who don't need it, and ignore those who do need it. The Apostle James addresses this in his letter, James chapter 2, verses 1-10. He describes a situation where a rich man comes into a meeting and people fall all over

themselves getting him a good seat, and when the poor man comes in, he is told to sit on the floor, or stand 'over there'. He declares, "Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him? But you have insulted the poor." He sums up in verse 9, "If you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers."

In conclusion, consider the counsel in Hebrews 13:16 "And do not forget to do good and to *share* with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

We invite your response to this message. If you feel led to contribute to this effort, send correspondence to:

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