

GIVING
Proverbs
By Raymond White

More words of the Bible are devoted to the subject of money than any other subject. And more than half those verses that deal with money deal specifically with giving. Of all the things that God has commanded us to do or don't do, God seems to be most concerned with how we deal with chronically poor people, the true have-nots.

[1] THE POOR AND THE GENEROUS

Mark 14:7 For ye have the poor with you always...

There is never a time or a society that does not have truly poor people, and God judges every society largely on how it deals with those people.

So, let's explore the Bible now and see what we might learn about how to deal with the constant poverty that surrounds us.

Deuteronomy 15:7 thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother. :8 lend him :9 Beware that there be not wicked thought in thy heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and givest him nought.

Loan to the poor and don't worry that you may never get any of it back.

Israel had not only a Sabbath Day but also a Sabbath Year. In that Sabbath Year, all slaves were released and all debts were forgiven. What this verse is saying is don't be concerned about the Sabbath Years. If your poor brother needs a loan, you might think about the Sabbath Year coming up soon and you won't get your money back. This verse is saying, don't worry about that, and don't worry that you might not get your money back. If you never get it back, then you are a generous giver.

Deuteronomy 15:10 Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.

When you give, don't feel bad that now you're out a few bucks. Instead, feel good that did something good for someone, and besides, God will bless "all thy works," your business, your job, your family, and the causes that you contribute your time and effort to. A generous person seems to be lucky a lot. Fact is, he is blessed and protected.

Job 4:5 Offer the sacrifice of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.

When you're giving, you may worry that you'll go broke being generous. That's a reasonable concern, but trust God that you'll be okay.

***Psalms 41:1** Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.*

***Proverbs 3:9** Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase. **:10** So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*

***Proverbs 11:24** There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. **:25** The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*

This is an interesting contradiction of money that the generous get richer, which the stingy go broke. Proverbs repeats this theme a lot.

***Proverbs 15:6** In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.*

***Proverbs 17:5** Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.*

***Proverbs 19:17** He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.*

***Proverbs 21:13** Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.*

***Proverbs 21:26** He covereth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.*

***Proverbs 22:9** He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor. [Bountiful eye means to see what someone else should have.]*

***Proverbs 28:27** He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.*

***Proverbs 29:7** The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.*

***Proverbs 31:20** She [the virtuous woman] stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.*

***Daniel 4:27** Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be...shewing mercy to the poor...*

***Acts 10:31** ...thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.*

2 Corinthians 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. :9 (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever.

[2] LIMITS TO GENEROSITY

Generosity is of course a good thing. You just read the verses. But is generosity *always* a good thing in every circumstance no matter what? Should there be balance?

In politics there is a perpetual tug-of-war between liberals who are so sympathetic to the poor that they would bleed the rest of us to death with ever increasing taxes to pay our “fair share,” and conservatives who try as best they can to say enough is enough, we’ve paid our fair share many times over.

With this tension always on-going and with no end in sight, it makes sense to see if the bible might weigh in on the matter. Are there limits to generosity?

[2.1] A DISHONEST RECEIVER

2 Kings 5:22 And he [Gehazi, Elisha’s servant] said...even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets [this is a lie]: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments [Gehazi’s greed overcame him, he just wanted stuff] :23 And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. :26 And he [Elisha] said unto him [Gehazi] ... :27 The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed fore ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.

Naaman was very generous and grateful for the opportunity to repay the kindness that had been given to him — he was cured of leprosy. He had no idea of the damage his generosity was about to cause — his leprosy was about to fall on Elisha’s servant.

Sometimes you need to be a bit cautious with your kindness. Sometimes there are unintended consequences, as in this example, Gehazi being stricken with leprosy. And for another example, unlimited welfare to single mothers encourages those mothers to not bother to marry the fathers of their children, which in turn increases the number of fatherless households, which in turn creates a poverty cycle from children growing up in fatherless households. So this generosity actually causes the problem it’s trying to solve.

Today if you perpetually give to someone who constantly abuses the gift, society would call you an “enabler”; that is, you enable someone to continue in self-abusive behaviors. Half the trick in stopping the self-abusive behavior is to stop the enabler.

[2.2] THE GREEDY POOR

Deuteronomy 23:24 When thou comest into thy neighbour’s vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. :25 When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour’s standing corn.

Back then there were no restaurants, and travelers could only take some much food on a journey, so they needed to find food as they traveled. And of course wherever there were farms and orchards, there was food. But did they have a right to take it? They did. But there were limits.

The law allowed anyone to go into a field — it didn't matter who owned the field since it was all a gift from God anyway — and eat what you needed. It was sort of a tax on farmers. The amount of food consumed by a traveler — whether a merchant or a vacationer or an itinerant preacher as Jesus was or just a homeless person — was negligible so the farmer wasn't giving up much.

What would not have been negligible however, is if the traveler or poor person took advantage of the situation and filled up a bucket or two or ten with apples or corn or whatever and took it all home. That, the law forbade.

Today, if you go to an all-you-can eat-buffet, you really are allowed to eat all-you-can-eat-*here*, at the restaurant. That does *not* mean all-you-can-carry-home. There is not take-out, no fill your cooler so you can fill your refrigerator at home.

It's the same principle here.

From the liberal viewpoint: The poor need food to live. So eat, at the farmer's expense. Fair enough.

From the conservative viewpoint: What the poor are allowed to take is limited to what they need right now. They are not entitled to take food for later, like tonight's dinner or tomorrow's breakfast. There is no perpetual entitlement to someone else's crops. God does not want starving poor people, but he also does not want starving farmers either. There's a balance.

Also, the text says *standing corn*. The travelers can help themselves to the crop in the field which has not been picked, but not to the harvest in the stacks, or wagons, or barns. If you expect someone else to give you food, all right then, but at least pick and shuck the corn yourself, don't require the farmer to do *that* for you too. The law allows you access, nothing more. You want it? Go get it. Don't expect it to be brought to your door. Poor is one thing, lazy is another.

Today, poor people remain poor because so much is given to them without any effort on their part that they are locked into a cycle of poverty because entitlements make it too comfortable to be poor. They don't have to do anything.

I believe, yes, there should be provision for the poor, but something should be required of the poor to get it. Go sweep the streets, go pick up leaves in the park, go do *something* useful, or even something not useful, but something anyway. The government should provide, not dole, but minimal jobs for absolutely anyone who needs money to eat. No resume required. You want a job? Here's a shovel, go dig. With that arrangement, the poor would soon start improving their lives by moving from job to job, from low responsibility to higher responsibility, and from very low wages (less than the minimum wage) to higher wages.

None of this applies, of course, to the truly invalid, although I would apply it to the partially invalid. A paraplegic with good arms can make license plates. But a quadriplegic can make nothing. And both deserve to not starve. We're all in this life together. You want to eat? Do something useful, if you can.

[2.3] ENTITLEMENTS

Luke 6:30 Give to every man that asketh of thee...

Are we really to take this literally? The problem is, when takers find a generous person, the number of takers grows. There were some charities that I used to give to, but then my mailbox started filling up with more and more pleading for contributions from more and more charities until all the crap that landed in my mailbox daily wouldn't even fit in the mailbox. And I couldn't get the post office to stop it. I felt like Sorcerer's Apprentice (Mickey Mouse) and those water carrying broomsticks that multiplied and kept coming in increasing droves. I only solved the problem by moving and refusing to allow the post office to forward C class mail. That stopped it.

Those charities had abused my generosity. And to any charity who happens to be reading this, I will never again contribute to a charity that does not provide a guarantee of privacy. Or maybe I will send cash, or a money order but I will not provide my address because I know it will end up on limitless mailing lists.

The most generous person who ever lived was Jesus Christ. Did he have this problem? Yes he did. His generosity drew people like flies — both the worthy needy and the unworthy greedy.

One evening Jesus fed 5,000 people from five loaves and two fish. This great story displays for us his power and his generosity. It also display their greed. The next morning those same people came back to him looking for breakfast. He told them no, and that what they really needed was the bread of life; that is, himself.

John 6:26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat the loaves and were filled.

In other words, they wanted more free food. And when they realized they weren't going to get a second course, they argued with him and left in a huff.

I understand what Jesus said, "Give to every man who asketh of thee." But even Jesus recognized when people were taking advantage of him, and he didn't like it.

Maybe he also doesn't like it when we take advantage of his grace.

[3] PRINCIPLES

The following is a list of miscellaneous principles for giving. The bible bounces around and we shouldn't want to miss any of it, but we have to make decisions so here are the ones I've found that seem to belong on my list.

[3.1] GIVE TO GOD, BUT ALSO GIVE TO THE NEEDY

Deuteronomy 16:10 ...give unto the LORD thy God.

Deuteronomy 15:11 Open thy hand wide...to thy poor.

Everyone wants your money, including God. Without generous donations, face it, your church wouldn't exist. The platitude "God doesn't need your money" isn't a fair assessment. If a church's generous givers suddenly decided to stop giving, that church would vanish, the same as any other entity. You need to be generous with God.

However, being generous with God and your church, is no excuse for being stingy with the poor, your fellow man. Writing a check to your church does not let you off the hook for helping others who have nothing to do with your church.

Giving to God is simple, even tax deductible. Giving to the beggar whose motive is not clear is not so simple. Or how about the newly widowed young mother around the corner? Or flood victims in Asia? Or drought victims in Africa? Or lepers in Brazil? "Oh, but I give to my church and my church takes care of all that." That's not the directive. God said, "Open *your* hand wide to the poor." God wants *you* involved, he wants to see who *you* care about. Delegating generosity to your church is a pretty good indication that you probably don't much care about anyone.

Think of it this way: What a grand opportunity tactical giving is (that is, to specific people) to let God know, and let yourself know, just who it is you care about. Your attitude should be: "God, I have a great sorrow for *them*, and I have to give." That's a good thing, isn't it, to know that you care — about someone?

[3.2] SACRIFICIAL GIVING IS BETTER

2 Samuel 24:24 Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing.

Here was the situation: David needed God's help and wanted to make a sacrifice. He offered to buy what he needed from Araunah, but Araunah, a generous man and David's friend, basically said, "You don't need to pay me, just take what you need."

We all have friends who are generous with us like that. The problem is, how impressed would God be with your giving if it was just given to you? That's not much of a sacrifice. Well, it would have been a sacrifice alright, but Araunah's sacrifice, and David needed to make his own. And so David said something like, "Thank you friend, but I need to do this. Let me pay for this. Please."

Clearly, giving what you need and find difficult to do without is better than giving what you don't need and wouldn't miss.

Luke 21:3 And he [Jesus] said of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: *:4* For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offering of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.

You'd think it wouldn't matter, a dollar is a dollar, but somehow it does. Sacrifice, and not just giving, brings the blessings. And not just to the giver, but to the receiver as well.

[3.3] GIVE NOW, DON'T WAIT UNTIL YOU ARE RICHER

Hunger won't wait for you to feel more generous, or to make more money.

Luke 16:10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.

Jesus makes the point here that your characteristic of stinginess or generosity has nothing to do with your financial level. If you're stingy when you're poor you'll be stingy when you're rich. The same with generosity. Character is character, and getting rich does not change your character. Stinginess crosses all class boundaries.

[3.4] GIVE AS YOU DECIDE, NOT AS OTHERS DECIDE FOR YOU

2 Corinthians 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give.

Yes, I know, there is tithing, 10%. But understand that tithing is not a tax. The church does not (as the IRS does) come and take it from you. Whether it is tithing to your church, or a donation to the soup kitchen downtown, or sending medicine to sick people on the other side of the world, giving must be freewill. It must come from your heart, from how you earnestly feel about the sufferings of other. It is your dollar, it is your gift.

Don't let someone else intimidate you into giving. God is giving you the opportunity to be a part of meeting someone else's need. Don't let your joy be corrupted by giving from guilt. Much better is to give from love. Then you can enjoy it, and the gift, I believe, has more power.

[3.5] BE LESS PICKY

Luke 6:30 Give to every man that asketh of thee.

This takes us back to our opening verse. Give when someone needs your help, don't wait until just the right needy person comes along or you're in a mood to give. There are lots of people who need your help, and Jesus wants us to respond to needs as they arise. Now obviously our resources are limited and you can't give what you don't have. But still, we should try to respond in some way to each person's need.

There's a story (whether true or folklore I don't know) about a billionaire who decided to give everything he owned to everyone on the planet. And when his accounts and finished their accounting, the billionaire realized that were he to give everything to everyone, each person on the planet would receive from him one matchstick.

Clearly, you can't be generous with everyone. You don't have the means. But still Jesus did say, "Give to every man that asketh of thee." So somewhere between breaking yourself by trying to give to everyone, and total stinginess, there is a middle ground of sincerely trying to help when help is needed. That is where God wants us to be.

[3.6] GOD BLESSES THE GENEROUS WITH TEMPORAL BLESSINGS

Luke 6:38 Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together...

Is it a sin to want God's blessing? It is a sin to *not* want God's blessing. He wants to give, and he reciprocates to your giving. Believe me, I take all I can get. I have no reluctance at all about asking God for favors.

In old times in cracker barrel stores, you'd walk in and buy a sack full of flour. When the shopkeeper fills up the sack, you hope to see him fill it to the top, press it down, and shake it so he can get more it. That's the good measure of an honest merchant. That's the blessing that God dispenses to generous people.

[3.7] GOD BLESSES THE GENEROUS WITH ETERNAL BLESSINGS

Matthew 25:34 Come...inherit the kingdom...:35 *For I was an hungered and ye gave me meat.*

It is no secret that God is looking for generous people to populate heaven with. You should want to be among them.

[4] PERSONAL FAVORITES

I have never been a rich man. And everything I ever gave, I gave from my financial stresses. There are many different charities that I have given to at one time or another, but there are two that I have stuck with for decades, because what those two charities do is where my heart is at. I will share them with you now.

The first is the "National Right to Life". If ever there was discrimination against a class of people, it is the world's unborn. Murdered by saline, murdered by scalpel, murdered by whatever clever means abortion "doctors" can devise and get away with, these babies are killed constantly, over a million a year in this country alone, babies, who will never see the light of day because their mothers and their accommodating "doctors" decided they weren't worthy to live. So, some of my money goes there.

The second is the "American Leprosy Mission". It breaks my heart that that most evil of all diseases still has its way in some parts of the world, destroying lives, maiming and disfiguring people, mostly children. This organization sends doctors around the world into isolated regions and looks for and cures this specific disease. May their efforts be blessed and may that dread disease one day be completely eradicated. And so, some of my money goes there.

Of course there are many, many organizations that help. I have my favorites, you have yours. Let your heart be your guide. Be generous. That God allows you to be generous, is itself generous of God. He's letting you on the team, to contribute, to help. Isn't that wonderful?