

LESSON 10

DEVELOPING THE GRACE OF GIVING

“You people there are leaders in so many ways—you have so much faith, so many good preachers, so much learning, so much enthusiasm, so much love for us. Now I want you to be leaders also in the spirit of cheerful giving” (2 Cor. 8:7, TLB). The grace of cheerful giving should belong to every Christian. Yet the joy of giving is unknown to much of the Christian community.

Giving has been approached too often from the point of church needs. While this is important, it is but one aspect of the grace of giving.

Earlier lessons explored the meaning of giving and proportionate giving. This lesson raises the question. What prompts a Christian to grow in the grace of giving?

Why Christians Give

The aim of Christian giving.

The goal of Christian giving is to serve the purposes of Christ. This goal is realized as the contributions of believers are used to meet human needs, to strengthen the Christian fellowship, and to support the gospel ministry. This sense of purpose was evident in the Old Testament as the people erected and furnished the tabernacle (Ex. 25:31; 36:30). Concern for the needs of fellow Christians possessed the early believers following Jesus' ascension. “All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common: they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the need of each required” (Acts 2:45, NEB).

The causes to be supported.

The New Testament identified at least three major concerns for Christian giving. Early Christians gave to the support of the church, the care of the family, and the needs of the unfortunate.

The church.—The work of the church in the gospel ministry heads the list of believers' interests. The shared life of the believers made the church central. The Lord's commission to the people turned them into a people on mission for Christ. Money given for the church was used in the following ministries.

1. *The support of the ministry* was a major objective in the early church. “Elders who do well as leaders should be reckoned worthy of a double stipend, in particular those who labour at preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle a threshing ox’” (1 Tim. 5:17-18 ,

Is the following statement true or false?
Church needs is but one aspect of giving. _____

(true)

The goal of Christian giving is to serve the
_____ of _____.

(purposes, Christ)

After reading this entire section, mark the statements true or false.

1. The support of the ministry was not a part of the early church. _____

NEB). Paul voiced strong appeals for the support of the ministry and contended that "the workman earns his pay."

2. *The worldwide task* of the church demanded the support of the early churches. Paul was the great missionary of that era. His zeal inspired the churches to support him and others. To the Philippian Christians he wrote with gratitude, "When I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again" (Phil. 4:15-16, RSV).

3. *The care of needy fellow members* was a third use of church money. The believers of the Jerusalem church offer a model of such concern. "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need" (Acts 4:34-35, RSV). Early Christians believed that a church should care for its own.

4. *The needs of Christians in other countries* prompted the loving concern of the early churches. The great Jerusalem offering sponsored by Paul in the churches of Asia illustrates the kind of concern Christians are to express for fellow Christians. The Macedonian churches excelled in this response and became the example Paul used to spur other churches (2 Cor. 8).

The family.—The support of the believer's own family was considered a Christian action. This involved his immediate family plus any relatives who were unable to support themselves. No conflict is noted between the use of funds for the care of the family and the support of the church. Both are musts for the Christian. Paul considered the Christian who refused to care for his family worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:4-16, RSV).

The ministry to unfortunate persons.—The Christian is a helper. Jesus expected His followers to reach out to the needy without fanfare (Matt. 6:2-4). Those who help the unfortunate will be repaid. "'But when you give a party, ask the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind; and so find happiness. For they have no means of repaying you; but you will be repaid on the day when good men rise from the dead'" (Luke 14:13-14, NEB). Jesus commends the "cup of water" given in His name (Matt. 25:34-35).

Helping Christians Grow in the Grace of Giving

The Christian life by its very nature calls for constant growth in Christian understanding and practice. The grace of giving is the Christian's goal. The development of this grace must be a major concern for all Christians and church leaders.

Guidelines for growth in the grace.

What can help a Christian to mature in giving? There

2. *The early church supported a worldwide task.*_____

3. *The care of the needy had no part in the use of money by the early church.*_____

4. *Needs of Christians in other countries was a concern of the early church.*_____

(1. false; 2. true; 3. false; 4. true.)

Following basic guidelines helps one to grow in_____

is no simple formula. The following basic guidelines can spark responses that result in growth.

Respond to the Lordship of Christ.—It is one thing to profess Christ as Saviour and something more to submit to His will as Lord. Until one acknowledges that Christ has the right to rule his life, there can be little growth.

Seek a better understanding of the biblical message of giving.—The world's views of possessions are constantly pressed upon the Christian. Wise are they who seek biblical teachings and insights.

Grow in the grace of giving.—Start where you are in your giving practice and launch out. Kingdom ministries demand a sense of great expectancy in the people's heart.

Adopt biblical models to guide growth.—The tithe model has been established as an effective guide for beginning growth. Christ and His example of giving is the best model.

Seek to become the gracious giver God has enabled you to become.—The joy of great giving is a privilege known to too few followers of Christ.

Follow a giving plan.

Christian giving will fall short of its goal if it is not guided by a plan. Without the discipline of a plan, it is hard to be fair with God and especially hard to grow in the giving grace. Paul's plan for giving is a good one. He admonished, "On every Lord's Day each of you should put aside something from what you have earned during the week, and use it for this offering. The amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you earn" (1 Cor. 16:2, TLB). His system calls for the believer to:

1. Give regularly.
2. Give in worship on the Lord's Day.
3. Give according to the size of income. The larger the income, the larger the percentage one can give.

What motivates a Christian to give?

What causes a person to give? If getting money for the local church is the only concern, then almost any motive may seem justified. However, if achieving God's purpose in the lives of givers is an equal concern, then only Christian motives are valid.

The following examples may help believers see the possibilities for planning their giving.

One family who lives on a small farm and who has little cash income decided to set aside one-tenth of their productive land as their tithe. They agreed to give all the income the crops from this dedicated land earned when they were sold in the market. They also included in their tithe one-tenth of the money they earned from the sale of their chickens, eggs, and goats.

Another family lives in a small fishing village by the sea. This family, though poor, earns a cash income more regularly than the farm family previously mentioned. The

(giving)

List three things 1 Corinthians 16:2 calls for the believer to do.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

father and sons are fishermen. They go to sea in their small boat each day to fish. Some days they make a large catch. On other days their catch is small. They sell their fish in the fish market every day. And every Sunday this family brings the tithe of their earnings to God's house.

In another family, both the husband and wife are teachers in government schools. They earn good salaries. They have a nice home and a motor car. This couple has practised tithing for years. While studying the Bible recently, they discovered that Christians should grow beyond the tithe in their giving. They saw that tithing is the place to begin giving. They immediately increased their offering to 11 per cent and decided to increase it annually by one half of one per cent. They learned to develop the grace of giving.

Many people do not have a systematic plan for giving because they consider themselves "too poor." But no one is "too poor" to give to the Lord. The Bible clearly illuminates this truth. The case of the widow of Zarephath is a good illustration of this lesson (see 1 Kings 17). The comment Jesus made about the widow who gave all she had also emphasizes this point (see Mark 12:41-44).

Every church member should have a giving plan. One's plan should include regular giving, worshipful giving, and proportionate giving. If every member of a congregation practised the grace of giving, funds would be available to meet all a church's needs.

During the first century Paul was the great motivator of Christ's followers in the ministry of giving. He employed the following appeals (2 Cor. 8; 9):

1. Give of one's own free will.
2. Show love for the ministry of other Christians.
3. Give self first.
4. Excel in giving as in other Christian graces.
5. Give to prove love.
6. Set an example for others.
7. Complete the task that was stated.
8. Give, knowing that God is able to provide your needs.
9. Give to the glory of God.

Paul's appeals were strong and persistent. He was bold in expecting a generous response. He was never apologetic for asking. No one could question his concern for the success of the offerings. Yet his urgency never caused him to adopt any of the following tactics.

*Is the following statement true or false?
No one is too poor to give.*_____

(true)

*Is the following statement true or false?
Every church member has the right to give only when he feels like giving.*_____

(false)

After reading this section on Paul's appeals, list three tactics he did not use.

1. He never threatened the reluctant giver with the judgement of God.
2. He did not claim that they were required by law to give.
3. He never set a specific amount for each to give.

By contrast, he did appeal for a sacrificial response, and he did express confidence that their love was adequate to move them to give.

Love is the primary Christian motive for giving. Appeals for giving should sound the note of love giving. Some doubt that people will give unless they are required by a law. Fear of failure has led many leaders to inject a law requirement into Christian giving. The issue of law giving versus love giving is not new for Christians. Few areas of the Christian's life serve so readily as a battleground for the issue of law and grace as does giving. The question, What does it take to get a person to give? sparks the issue.

The real issue centres in the question, Will love get the job done? Can the Christian be trusted to give because of his love for Christ? The New Testament answer is that love is what God demands. God wants man's love response.

Christian leaders need to be aware of this issue and to choose carefully the motivations used to promote giving. There is a temptation to employ law-based motivations because they appear to be easier to promote and seem to promise quicker results. It is easier to declare the explicit "thou shalt" of a law than to appeal for response to Christ's reign as Lord. As a result, Christ's exciting meaning of giving is missed, as well as the joy it brings.

A survey of what moved the people whose giving is recorded in the Scriptures will help to evaluate motives. The following passages from the Old and New Testaments reflect both the bad and good in motives:

1. Giving to receive a blessing (Deut. 8:18; 28:9-11; Prov. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:10)
2. Giving to gain God's favour (Gen. 28:20-22; Isa. 1:11)
3. Giving to make possible a place of worship (Ex. 25:2-8; 35:21)
4. Giving to obey the requirements of the Law (Lev. 27:30; Ex. 34:26; Mal. 3:8-10; Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42)
5. Giving to pay a vow (Deut. 23:21-23)
6. Giving to remove a spiritual barrier (Matt. 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)
7. Giving to reveal a new found love for Christ (Luke 19:1-10)
8. Giving to show love and gratitude for Christ (Luke 8:3; Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8; Mark 12:41-44)
9. Giving to receive recognition (Matt. 6:1; Acts 5:1-11)
10. Giving to help the needy (Matt. 25:40; Luke 10:25-37; 1 John 3:17; Jas. 2:14-16)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The primary Christian motive for giving is

(love)

God wants man's _____

(love, response)

List the worthy motives from the adjacent list. _____

Now list the unworthy ones. _____

11. Giving as an outgrowth of spiritual development (Matt. 6:19–20; Acts 20:35)
12. Giving out of love for fellow Christians (Acts 2:45; 4:32–37; 2 Cor. 8; 9; 1 Cor. 16:1–3)
13. Giving for selfish recognitions (Acts 8:18–24; Luke 18:12)
14. Giving for the support of the gospel ministry (Phil. 1:3–5)

This list reveals a sharp contrast between worthy and unworthy motives. In the New Testament the one Christ-like motive for giving is love—love for God, love for Christ’s work, and love for people. Using goals to encourage the love response is proper, but the motive should always complement the nature of Christian giving. This will help the believer grow in the grace of giving.

How Much a Christian Should Give

The giving which Jesus taught and practised was free, generous, and sacrificial. He praised the sacrificial gifts of His followers. He expected much, yet He did not give detailed instructions as to how much to give.

Paul reflected his Master’s ways in his writings. He underscored proportionate giving in keeping with earnings (1 Cor. 16:2). His instructions on how much are best defined in his statement, “Each person should give as he has decided for himself; there should be no reluctance, no sense of compulsion; God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7, NEB).

Guides on how much to give.

Since the New Testament did not specify a percentage, the Christian must prayerfully decide for himself. If his love for Christ is real, he will strive for growth in the grace of giving. Growth in giving will enable him to overcome any selfish desire to hold on to possessions.

When does a Christian give a truly great gift? When does his giving reach Christian maturity? There is no simple answer to these questions. There is no fixed measure that determines greatness. The gift that is great for one may be only a token gift for another. For one to tithe may require a spirit of great giving while others could give half their income at no great sacrifice.

The gift must reflect commitment.—The Christian who asks, How much must I give? as well as the one who gives as little as he can get by with, has completely missed the idea of the Christian life. The Christian way is not how little but how much is possible. Commitment seeks a way to serve—not a way out. The Christian will seek a giving pattern that reflects a personal commitment. His “how much” represents a sense of self-giving. The size of his gift will be measured by his financial ability and by his love.

The gift will call for a sacrificial spirit.—Great giving always has included the giving of oneself. Giving that

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Love is the one _____ motive for giving:

_____, _____, _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The giving which Jesus taught and practised was _____, _____, and _____.

(free, generous, sacrificial)

After reading the adjacent section, answer the following statements true or false.

1. The Christian gift must reflect commitment to be great. _____

2. Christians are not called on to give sacrificial gifts. _____

demands no inconvenience to the giver falls short of Christ's expectations. The Christian life is self-giving. True self-giving finds expression in a corresponding quality of money giving. The Christian is cheated who does not experience the joy of giving something he cherishes in order to serve his Lord.

The gift will be measured by how much is left.—Jesus commended the widow's gift. It was a great gift in his sight, not because of its value but because of what she had left. She kept back nothing. By contrast, the larger gifts of the others seemed much smaller when measured by what they had left. The same guideline was advanced by Paul when he based giving on the "as prospered" idea. The more one has, the more he can give. A tithe given by a family who has little or no cash income may be a much greater gift than a tithe from a family with a large cash income.

The gift will reflect growth.—The Christian life is never static. One does not attain Christian maturity and from that day on need no further growth. The Christian life is a continuous striving to be like Jesus. This is spiritual growth. It results in growth in the grace of giving. One way to assure this growth is to adopt models. The tithe can be a valuable model to help Christian growth. For some whose income is low, this 10 per cent goal represents sacrificial giving. Others will need to move on to the other goals more like the 50 per cent giving of Zacchaeus.

Jerry Horner wrote:

We should bear in mind that the New Testament nowhere tells us to give less than a tenth, and while taking care to avoid a legalistic system we should beware lest we fall into a reckless and haphazard system. Some are so fearful of establishing a definite amount and a fine point that they wind up with no point at all. They speak of our stewardship under grace as though being under grace means we can give more cheaply than those under law. Christ did not die on the cross to enable us to give two percent instead of ten percent, and the word grace is not a cloak of covetousness to do less instead of more.¹

How much did New Testament Christians give?

Information on giving in New Testament days is limited. Part of the New Testament record on giving relates to people not identified as Christ's followers. These include the Pharisees who gave tithes of their seasoning herbs (Matt. 23:23), the boasting Pharisee who tithed everything (Luke 18:11–12), the widow who gave her all (Mark 12:41–44), and the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). However, Jesus used the widow and the good Samaritan as examples of the kind of giving He commended.

Christian examples of giving include:

3. *How much is left will influence the greatness of the gift.*_____

4. *Great giving by Christians will reflect growth.*_____

(1. true; 2. false; 3. true; 4. true)

Is the following statement true or false?

1. Barnabas, who sold his estate and gave all (Acts 4:36–37)
2. The woman who anointed Jesus' feet with costly ointment (Matt. 26:6–13)
3. Zacchaeus, who gave one half of his possessions (Luke 19:8)
4. The man who had two coats and gave one (Matt. 5:40)
5. The Macedonians, who gave beyond their ability (2 Cor. 8)

The sacrificial spirit in giving

The term “sacrificial giving” is not found in the Scriptures. However, the idea is biblical. The dictionary states that to sacrifice is to surrender something prized or desirable for the sake of something having a higher or more pressing claim. This definition leaves many unanswered questions, yet it singles out the major point—“a higher claim.” The “higher claim” is the key to sacrificial giving.

J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, responded to the higher claim of Christ on his life. As a young man, he was convinced that he should give more of his meagre income for God's work. To do so, he reduced his eating habits. For breakfast he ate only rice and gruel. He skipped lunch and ate only an apple for dinner. By such discipline and sacrifice, Hudson Taylor gave two-thirds of his income to the Lord's work. This sacrificial discipline was valuable preparation for the important missionary service he was to render later in China.

The higher claim leads the Christian to let his love for Christ cost him something. He adjusts his way of life in order to do more for Christ. To grow in giving requires a willingness to submit to the higher claims of Christ. How much growth is realized depends on the Christian's willingness to adjust his life-style to serve Christ, willingness to accept his role as a trustee and refuse to indulge himself, willingness to share in the urgency of the gospel, willingness to help others in the name of Jesus.

What are the rewards of giving?

What would happen if modern Christians took seriously their challenge of believer giving? Would it impoverish the church? Would it reduce all Christians to poverty? This fear seems to prevent an aggressive development of this grace in church members' lives. The best example of what might be expected is found in the Christians of the first century. Against staggering odds, the minority people witnessed of their faith so dramatically that their world was changed. In the face of poverty, they gave with such generosity that the church was implanted in every country. To do this cost the believers sacrificial giving, but the rewards were great.

History does not record that they received great material wealth. The rewards were more valuable. They knew the reward of seeing the expansion of their Lord's

*The Christian examples of giving in the New Testament were those who tithed.*_____

(false)

*Is the following statement true or false?
There are no rewards for sacrificial giving.*_____

(false)

Kingdom. The world calls the rich “the beautiful people.” The “beautiful life,” however, belongs to those who are willing to commit themselves and their possessions to Christ.

A son became seriously ill. His father was forced to sell the family motor car to pay for the boy’s treatment. Later he had to sell their home. Finally the family exhausted all their funds and went deeply in debt. Then the boy died.

Friends came to console the family. One friend observed, “It must be a great disappointment to have sacrificed all your money and possessions for your son, and now it is all for nothing.”

The father replied: “I don’t know what you are talking about. We made no sacrifice. All we did was love our son.”

This father put the picture of Christian giving in a clear perspective. What is sacrificial giving? It is loving Christ!

Notes

¹Jerry Horner, “The Christian and the Tithe,” *Resource Unlimited*, ed. William L. Hendricks (Nashville: The Stewardship Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1972), p. 185. Used by permission.

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). Read the study guide text and answer the following questions.

1. What is the goal for Christian giving? _____

2. List four ministries of the New Testament Church which money was used to support. _____

3. Name five guidelines for giving that will help the Christian grow in the grace of giving. _____

4. What does Paul's giving plan in 1 Corinthians 16:2 call for the believer to do? _____

5. List two cases, with Scripture references, to support the statement: “No one is ‘too poor’ to give.” _____

6. In Paul's appeals for Christian giving, what present day tactics (used by some misinformed individuals or groups) did he refuse to adopt? _____

7. What is the New Testament answer to the question, “Can the Christian be trusted to give because of his love for Christ?” _____

8. After studying the 14 motives of giving (good and bad), what is the one Christlike motive for giving?

9. After studying "Guides on How Much to Give," list four marks of great giving. _____

10. List five examples with Scripture references for Christian giving which the New Testament commended. _____

11. Under "What are the Rewards of Giving," how does the author describe the "beautiful life"? _____

12. Discuss the rewards for sacrificial giving. _____

13. Read pages 163-168 in *God's Miraculous Plan of Economy*.
14. Prepare a sermon or Bible lesson on one of the following subjects. You may use Scripture references in the lesson plus others of your choosing.

"Why Christians Give"

"Growing in the Grace of Giving"

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3).

1. Summarize in four paragraphs Dr. Taylor's suggestions for one to get in on God's miraculous plan of economy.
2. Are there points in his suggestions that will not work in your life? In the life of your church or mission? If so, explain.
3. Write a paper of at least one page on one of the following subjects:

"Why Christians Give"

"Growing in the Grace of Giving"

Advanced activity (Level 3).

1. Prepare a sermon outline or a Bible lesson outline on one of the following subjects:
"How much Should a Christian Give?"
"Rewards for Christian Giving"
2. Contrast the giving practices of the Old Testament and the giving which Christ commended in the New Testament.
3. Defend or reject this statement: "The tithe is a good place to start, but a bad place to stop giving."

Seminar Discussion

1. Discuss the aim of Christian giving.
2. Can a Christian be “too poor” to give to the Lord?
3. Discuss the tactics which Paul never used in his appeals on giving.
4. Discuss the good and the bad motives for giving given in the Bible.
5. Discuss those Christian examples of giving which Christ commended.
6. Discuss the four suggestions given by Dr. Taylor for getting in on God’s miraculous plan of economy. If you have Level 2 or 3 students, let them share their answers to number 1 under Supplementary activity.
7. Discuss and share the sermons or Bible lessons prepared in answer to number 14 under Basic activity.