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1

CHAPTER

GOD CREATED US TO GIVE

See that you also excel in this grace of giving.

—2 Corinthians 8:7

The Christian faith rests on this fundamental truth: God, in Christ, gave once and for all the most perfect and unmerited gift in all of history—redemption of sin and a “living hope” of eternal life through the death and resurrection to life of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3–4). It is not possible to fully understand giving and getting in the kingdom until we see the God who gives as revealed in Holy Scripture. Giving is fundamental to God’s nature, and grace is at the core of true giving. God’s gracious gift gives context and meaning to *our* impulse to give and helps explain the joy that comes from the act of giving. God’s gift of breath and eternal life naturally impels us to give with gratitude to Him. God’s activity on our behalf, and our response to it, is the key to unlocking the unique character of giving in the kingdom.

GOD IS A GIVER

The witness of Holy Scripture and God’s creation resoundingly affirms that God is a God who gives. It is in His very nature. It defines

His character.

The creation of the world was a gift. Entrusting His creation to mankind was a gift. His forbearance with a sinful and recalcitrant human race is a gift. His provision, in Christ, for deliverance from the bondage of sin to sanctification and hope was the greatest gift. It is no wonder, then, that humankind, the creatures of the God who gives, would have the impulse to give hardwired into our beings.

GRACE IS AT THE CORE OF TRUE GIVING

While any gift is an event—even a transaction—it is, at its best, rooted in a most beautiful word: grace. Grace has been well-defined as unmerited favor. Grace is the oxygen that gives life and breath to living—and to giving in the kingdom. God’s common grace certainly extends to all of creation. The prophet Isaiah declared that “grace is shown to the wicked” (Isaiah 26:10) and the New Testament affirms, “For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Romans 1:20). But, in a most particular way, God has extended saving grace to those who inhabit His kingdom through the gift of eternal life through Christ. Grace, of course, is a central theme of the Bible, and a key to understanding life in the kingdom. The Scripture passages below give a taste of the centrality of grace in God’s interaction with His creation:

- The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. (Psalm 116:5)
- We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. (Romans 5:1b–2)
- If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? (Psalm 130:3)

- And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, experienced in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6–7)
- So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (Romans 11:5–6)

Life and breath are a gift of the Creator. So is the grace in which inhabitants of His kingdom stand. It is incongruous, then, to have any response to this lavish, unmerited gift than the strong impulse to give back.

GIVING IS OUR RESPONSE TO GOD’S GIFT

If our Creator’s very nature is to give, and if His giving nature has been amply demonstrated by His grace extended to us in Christ, then we have both an explanation and an imperative for giving in the kingdom. No aspect of life is a more natural reciprocation for God’s gifts to us than giving.

The impulse to “give back” is imbedded in the human heart (see chapter 15 on Reciprocity, p.209). It is fundamental to all kinds of giving, both within and outside the kingdom. But within the kingdom, giving away time and resources, at its best, is in grateful response to God’s indescribable gift in Christ. The thoughtful Christian steward reflects the sentiment of Scripture: “the grace of God teaches us to . . . live . . . godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope” (Titus 2:11–13). “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24).

For anyone, giving back—in response to a kind gesture, or an education received, or in response to help in the midst of a dire situation—is both a natural human impulse and a noble gesture. In the kingdom, however, there is a divine obligation for those who have been recipients of God’s grace in Christ to give away time, talent, and treasure: to the poor, to widows and orphans, to Christ’s church, and to every conceivable person or program that advances His eternal kingdom. However, as we will see, that “obligation” is often accompanied by great joy, rendering that obligation an easy “burden.”

For inhabitants of Christ’s kingdom, giving is far from a point of pride or distinction. Rather, it is a privilege granted to citizens of the kingdom. That is one reason that human recognition of a gift to the kingdom is so tricky (see chapter 15). Giving out of the context of the grace we have received is not, ultimately, an idea we thought up. It is a grateful *response* to a lavish gift. But as we will see, this divine obligation and impulse to give is not a heavy burden to bear or a mere duty to perform, but is pure joy.

GIVING BRINGS JOY

It stands to reason that Christians who give in response to God’s grace in their lives experience deep joy and satisfaction. Scripture is replete with references to the joy and blessing that comes from a generous spirit.

- Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in times of trouble. (Psalm 41:1)
- Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. (Psalm 112:5)
- One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. (Proverbs 11:24)
- A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. (Proverbs 11:25)

- Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. (1 Timothy 6:18)
- For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. (2 Corinthians 8:3–4)

Notice the strong correlation between generosity and joy. The amount of the gift itself is irrelevant. A million-dollar gift can be joyless, just as the widow's mite can be cause for much admiration and joy (Mark 12:41–43). What does it mean to give generously? I once heard Warren Buffet say in an interview (I paraphrase here) in reflection upon his gift of \$26 *billion*, “My gift has not changed my lifestyle one bit. I still go to the movies I want to go to and eat at the restaurants I care to dine at.” He went on to say, “What about the person who gives a gift that requires that they can’t go to the movies or eat out? They are the true givers—the true heroes (of philanthropy).” Mr. Buffet’s observation is right on the money. The size of the gift does not define generosity. Rather, generosity might well be defined as giving to the extent that it alters our choices and activities.

THE SIZE OF THE
GIFT DOES NOT DEFINE
GENEROSITY.

Randy Alcorn, in his marvelous book *The Treasure Principle*, gives a powerful visual illustration of the proper worldview of a follower of Christ.¹ It is simply this:

- _____

The dot represents this life—a mere blip on the screen in terms of eternity. The solid line represents the expanse of eternity. Life on this earth is a tiny slice of the eternal existence of Christ’s kingdom.

The immediacy of our lives, complicated greatly by our sinful tendency to look out for our interests above all others, causes us to put

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GOD IN CHRIST.**

far too many resources in the dot (the matters of this world) and fewer investments in the line (the eternal kingdom). True givers in the kingdom, recipients of God's lavish grace, joyfully invest in people and programs that will outlast the dot. And invariably, those who invest generously in Christ's kingdom bear out the truth of Scripture: "For the kingdom of God is not a

matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy" (Romans 14:17). Giving, at its best, is not a self-motivated act of philanthropy but a joyful response to a prior gift—the grace of God in Christ.

That certainly distinguishes giving in the kingdom from what is commonly understood by the term "philanthropy." Nonetheless, philanthropy, that impulse to love and care for others, is within every human heart. And giving in the kingdom is not well-understood until we grasp the world of philanthropy.