

Discipleship Training Course

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- Speech marks around entire quotes and at the beginning of new paragraphs have been omitted
- Anglicised spellings have been used
- All quotes begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop
- Some weights, measures and times have been replaced with easier to understand terms given in the footnotes using square brackets
- All verse numbers, footnote numbers and symbols have been removed
- Poetry has been indented and only new sentences start with a capital letter

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Chapter 8. Giving

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1. Introduction

To give means **to freely transfer the possession of something or someone to someone else**. Giving involves a shared understanding between two parties that ownership is being transferred. It is therefore more than merely attaching an object to another person. The ultimate giving was God's gift of Jesus to us:

*For God so loved the world, that **He gave His one and only Son**, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

John 3:16 (WEBPB)

*But **the free gift is not like the trespass**. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and **the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many**. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but **the free gift following many trespasses brought justification**. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and **the free gift of righteousness reign in life** through the one man Jesus Christ.*

Romans 5:15-17 (ESVUK)

*For the wages of sin is death, but **the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**.*

Romans 6:23 (WEBPB)

The tabernacle was built through freewill offerings:

*The LORD said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel to **bring Me their sacred offerings**. Accept the contributions from all whose hearts are moved to offer them. Here is a list of sacred offerings you may accept from them:*

*Gold, silver, and bronze;
blue, purple, and scarlet thread;
fine linen and goat hair for cloth;
tanned ram skins and fine goatskin leather;
acacia wood;
olive oil for the lamps;
spices for the anointing oil and the fragrant incense;
onyx stones, and other gemstones to be set in the ephod and the priest's chestpiece.*

***Have the people of Israel build Me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them. You must build this Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I will show you.**"*

Exodus 25:1-9 (NLT)

The love of God changed Zaccheus' heart after Jesus supernaturally identified him and visited his home. Money was no longer important to him. He now wanted to help the poor and restore relationships with anyone whom he had cheated. Jesus described this as salvation coming to his home. His relationship with God was restored, leading him to seek to restore his relationships with others with no concern about the financial cost.

*He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, **half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.**" And Jesus said to him, "**Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.**"*

Luke 19:1-10 (NASB1995)

The widow's offering shows us that it is not the amount that is important to God but the **attitude of heart** with which it is given and what it means to the giver:

*He looked up and saw the rich people who were putting their gifts into the treasury. He saw a certain poor widow casting in two small brass coins. He said, "**Truly I tell you, this poor widow put in more than all of them, for all these put in gifts for God from their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, put in all that she had to live on.**"*

Luke 21:1-4 (WEBPB)

2. Giving and generosity

At the time he wrote to them the Philippians were the only church which followed Paul's example of having a generous nature. This led Paul to pronounce a blessing on them:

*Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, **no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.** Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, **a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.***

Philippians 4:14-19 (ESVUK)

Paul further narrated about how the Philippians (Macedonians) had a **generous spirit** and gave out of their extreme poverty:

*Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. **They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.***

*For I can testify that **they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will.** They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. They even did more than we had hoped, for **their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do.***

Chapter 8. Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (NLT)

Giving should firstly be to the Lord and then to His people (His representatives on earth). It was in this context that Paul explained the principles of giving to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 9. These include the importance of giving coming from the heart rather than being under compulsion and the principle of sowing and reaping which leads to greater opportunity to be generous in the future. Ultimately, Paul compares the ideal of overflowing generosity with God's indescribable gift towards us, the Lord Jesus Christ:

I really don't need to write to you about this ministry of giving for the believers in Jerusalem. For I know how eager you are to help, and I have been boasting to the churches in Macedonia that you in Greece were ready to send an offering a year ago. In fact, it was your enthusiasm that stirred up many of the Macedonian believers to begin giving.

But I am sending these brothers to be sure you really are ready, as I have been telling them, and that your money is all collected. I don't want to be wrong in my boasting about you. We would be embarrassed – not to mention your own embarrassment – if some Macedonian believers came with me and found that you weren't ready after all I had told them! So I thought I should send these brothers ahead of me to make sure the gift you promised is ready. But I want it to be a willing gift, not one given grudgingly.

Remember this – a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say,

"They share freely and give generously to the poor.

Their good deeds will be remembered forever."

*For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. **In the same way, He will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.***

Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving – the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.

As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!

2 Corinthians 9 (NLT)

According to Paul, Jesus once taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive:

*In all things I gave you an example, that so labouring you ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, **'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'***

Acts 20:35 (WEBPB)

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) was not to withhold money from the sale of their land but it was to give the impression that they were giving everything when they were not.

However, sometimes it is more important to give others the opportunity to give to us. Jesus demonstrated this when He was willing to be anointed by Mary:

Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus – the man he had raised from the dead. A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honour. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with Him. Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping His feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray Him, said, "That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Not that he cared for the poor – he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.

Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for My burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have Me."

John 12:1-8 (NLT)

Are we like the Sea of Galilee, with an inlet and an outlet, or the Dead Sea, with only an inlet?

Giving is a form of worship. Cornelius' offerings and gifts to the poor were a memorial sacrifice to God:

*There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment. He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. **He did many charitable deeds for the Jewish people and always prayed to God.** About three in the afternoon he distinctly saw in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, "Cornelius!"*

Looking intently at him, he became afraid and said, "What is it, lord?"

*The angel told him, "**Your prayers and your acts of charity have come up as a memorial offering before God.**"*

Acts 10:1-4

3. Sowing, reaping and stewardship

The passage above from 2 Corinthians 9 introduces the Biblical principle of sowing and reaping. However, we should not seek to misuse this principle for our own selfish ends. Reaping should not be seen as the objective of sowing, but rather the objective should be to have **an overflowing spirit of generosity which touches many lives**. We should seek to have this attitude as it reflects the true nature of God. When God gave us Jesus, He did not give His second best or one of His begotten sons but He gave His **only begotten Son**. Also, He did not give us Jesus so that He could possess many more sons for his own selfish ends but rather because He loves us and wanted His generous spirit and His Son's generous spirit to also be in them that they in turn might lead many more sons to the Saviour.

Jesus taught this principle:

Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure – pressed down, shaken together, and running over – will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

Luke 6:38 (HCSB)

Jesus also understood the costly, radical nature of giving when He gave of Himself for the sins of the world:

I assure you and most solemnly say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone [just one grain, never more]. But if it dies, it produces much grain and yields a harvest.

John 12:24 (AMP)

We should not seek to use our giving to control others. A gift no longer belongs to us when it is given. We should release (die to) the seed we have sown and also not expect an immediate harvest.

*Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others – ignoring God! – harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! **But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.***

Galatians 6:7-8 (MSG)

However, it is important to be led by the Spirit when we give and to ensure, as much as we can, that we are sowing our seed in good soil. This is known as **good stewardship**.

Good stewardship also applies to who an offering is distributed. To mistreat an offering is a very serious offence in God's sight. This was the case with the two sons of Eli:

*Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD. The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw." And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force." **Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.***

1 Samuel 2:12-17 (ESVUK)

According to Jesus' teaching, people who cannot be trusted with material wealth should not be trusted with true spiritual riches:

*He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. **Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?** And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?*

Luke 16:10-12 (NASB1995)

Paul went to great lengths to ensure that the gifts for the church in Jerusalem arrived safely:

But thank God! He has given Titus the same enthusiasm for you that I have. Titus welcomed our request that he visit you again. In fact, he himself was very eager to go and see you. We are also sending another brother with Titus. All the churches praise him as a preacher of the Good News. He was appointed by the churches to accompany us as we take the offering to Jerusalem – a service that glorifies the Lord and shows our eagerness to help.

*We are travelling together to guard against any criticism for the way we are handling this generous gift. **We are careful to be honourable before the Lord, but we also want everyone else to see that we are honourable.***

We are also sending with them another of our brothers who has proven himself many times and has shown on many occasions how eager he is. He is now even more enthusiastic because of his great confidence in you. If anyone asks about Titus, say that he is my partner who works with me to help you. And the brothers with him have been sent by the churches, and they bring honour to Christ. So show them your love, and prove to all the churches that our boasting about you is justified.

2 Corinthians 8:16-24 (NLT)

4. Forms of giving

Giving can be to different people:

- **Giving directly to God through church offering:** this is considered to be for His house and work
- **Giving to God's servants** (or serving them)
- **Giving to those in need** – this was how Job demonstrated his righteousness and status in society – he had become a blessing. However, when Job lost everything and was no longer able to bless others materially it did not change his standing with God.

It is good for us to use our wealth to further the Kingdom of God – this stores up for us treasure in heaven that cannot be corrupted. However, it is also fitting for us to provide for our families – a righteous man leaves an inheritance for his children's children.

Tithing is a principle but it is not a law for Christians who are under the New Covenant. We should give from our hearts first of all. Tithing is a form of giving. Some churches distinguish offerings from tithes. There is also a teaching encouraging believers to give their **first fruits** to the Lord (see Deuteronomy 26:1-11). Again, it is not clear how these Old Testament practices should be interpreted and applied to our context today. They should certainly not be made into rules. We should not yield to pressure out of guilt or fear or become proud out of self-righteousness and legalism or have an inner attitude of greed. On the other hand we should not have a proud attitude that we have a 'correct' interpretation of Old Testament Scriptures in order to justify our meanness or lack of compassion. We should instead be thankful, generous in spirit, concerned about our relationship with God and others in need, and obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The teaching in Malachi 3:6-12 is best understood in this context – it is by being generous that we demonstrate our full obedience to the spirit of the law and which will open the floodgates of heaven over our lives.

Publius Syrus once said, "he gives twice, who gives promptly". Paul encouraged the Corinthians to make good their pledge and not delay in giving to relieve the needs of the famine victims in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:11).

5. Giving and serving

Isaiah 58 encourages us to give in the context of true fasting, especially to give of ourselves:

Isn't this the fast that I have chosen:

*to release the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and that you break every yoke?*

*Isn't it to distribute your bread to the hungry,
and that you bring the poor who are cast out to your house?*

*When you see the naked,
that you cover him;
and that you not hide yourself from your own flesh?*

*Then your light will break out as the morning,
and your healing will appear quickly;
then your righteousness shall go before you;
and the LORD's glory will be your rear guard.*

*Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and He will say, 'Here I am.'*

*If you take away from amongst you the yoke,
finger pointing,
and speaking wickedly;
and if you pour out your soul to the hungry,
and satisfy the afflicted soul:
then your light will rise in darkness,
and your obscurity will be as the noonday;
and the LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your soul in dry places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
and like a spring of water,
whose waters don't fail.*

*Those who shall be of you shall build the old waste places;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
and you shall be called Repairer of the Breach,
Restorer of Paths with Dwellings.*

Isaiah 58:6-12 (WEBPB)

Volunteering is a good way to give back to society. It is also good to be in relationship with the poor.

Jesus often gave of Himself when it was inconvenient:

- He ministered to the woman with bleeding (Luke 8:42a-48)
- He fed the five thousand after receiving the shocking news of John the Baptist's death (Matthew 14:1-21)
- He made provision for His mother (John 19:25-27) and a thief when He was being crucified (Luke 23:40-43)

Serving is giving, especially when the recipient is a servant of God:

Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward.

Matthew 10:42 (WEBPB)

6. Questions

1. What is giving?
2. What are the different forms of giving?
3. Why should we give?
4. What matters to God most in our giving?
5. What is the most precious gift we can give?
6. Is God a giver? How generous is He?
7. To whom should we give?
8. Should church leaders also give? To whom?
9. How much should we give? Are there rules or principles we should follow as New Covenant believers?
10. Once we have given, can we use the rest of our finances etc. as we please?

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11. If we give, should we expect to receive back? How keen should we be to follow this principle? Are there any dangers in giving in order to receive back? Does an over-emphasis on this doctrine put some people off becoming Christians?
12. Should we always give to others when they ask us? Should we feel responsible for the poverty in many places in the world? How do we overcome compassion fatigue? What about the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (Ezekiel 16:49)?
13. Are we allowed to own valuable things or have treats?
14. Should we follow our gifts after we have given?
15. Are there major cultural differences in giving? Should they affect the way we interpret what the Bible says on the subject?