

A little boy wanted £100 so badly that he prayed for one week but nothing happened. Then he decided to write God a letter requesting £100. When the postal authorities received the letter addressed to GOD UK, they decided to send it to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister was so impressed, touched and amused that he instructed his secretary to send the little boy a £5 note. He thought this would appear to be a lot of money to a little boy. The boy was delighted with the £5 and sat down to write a thank you note to God, which read:

*Dear God, Thank you so much for sending the money. However, I noticed that for some reason you had to send it through 10 Downing Street, and, as usual, they took most of it.*

As is becoming the norm, it is at this time of year that I speak on giving...alternating time and talents with financial. This year it is the latter... So firstly why is giving so important - a quick look at various bible passages to help us out.

**Reason #1 - Giving makes me \_\_\_MORE LIKE GOD\_\_\_.**

*"God so loved the world that He gave his only Son ..."* (John 3:16). As I said last week, if we want to be disciples, our aim is to become more like God. God is a Giver! He gave us life. He gave us this world to enjoy. He even gave us his only Son so that we might have a relationship with Him. That most famous of verses, shows us the connection between loving and giving. Amy Carmichael, the missionary, used to say *"You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving!"*

**Reason #2 - Giving draws me \_\_\_CLOSER TO GOD\_\_\_.**

*"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6:21). Where I put my money, my time, my efforts, my thinking, my life... that's where my heart will be! So where do I want my heart? If I want to be more like God, then I'll also want to be closer to God. When I give out of a heart of love and compassion, I'll find that I'm also next to God's heart.

**Reason #3 - Giving strengthens my \_\_\_FAITH\_\_\_.**

*"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, do not rely on your own insight. Honour the LORD with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce."* (Proverbs 3:5,9) as we heard in our first reading. It requires faith to give the way God gives and wants us to give and it is not easy. I have seen with my children and others - those who depend entirely on the Lord to provide - that the more they give, the stronger their faith becomes.

**Reason #4 - Giving is an investment \_\_\_FOR ETERNITY\_\_\_.**

*"... Give happily to those in need, and always be ready to share whatever God has given you. By doing this, you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven - it is the only safe investment for eternity."* (1 Timothy 6:18-19) You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead!

## **Reason #5 - Giving reveals where my SECURITY is**

*“But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness... - see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”* (2 Corinthians 8:7) Ultimately giving is more about what our security is in than it is about the actual gift. Our finances are the last part of our personal life that we will release in trust to God. We hold on to our money and our wealth as a form of security. It is hard to trust in God AND trust in our money at the same time. Giving is the discipline of learning to trust God. These principles behind giving were important to Jesus and he sums it up in the parable of the talents. Because in it we find 7 underlying principles of a *giving lifestyle*! We'll cover the first 4 this week and then finish the rest next week.

### **Giving Principle #1 - It all belongs to the Master.**

*“For it is as if a man going on a journey, summoned his slaves (servants) and entrusted his property to them.”* (Matthew 25:14). Our whole sense of perspective is off base when it comes to our possessions and our wealth. We may think that we are the owner and that we give - or not give (our choice) - out of what belongs to us. Any sense of such ownership is an illusion. We are not the owner. God is! Everything was created by God and returns to God. Jesus - as God's son - knew that he only had days left in his earthly life, when he shared this parable. He is the *“man going on a journey.”* We are his *slaves* or servants as another translation puts it” He (God) has *“entrusted his property”* to us. We are caretakers. Stewards. Managers. Everything belongs to the Master. We have been given the opportunity to manage his property here on Earth for the short period of our lifetime. Will we manage it in a way that reflects the values and priorities of our Master Jesus? Will we manage it in way that demonstrates His love, His compassion, and His selflessness?

### **Giving Principle #2 - We receive equal to OUR ABILITIES not equal to ONE ANOTHER.**

*“To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability.”* (Matthew 25:15) No where do we find anything about *fairness* or *equality* in this parable. The fact is that different people receive different talents - one 5, one 2, and the third only 1. What is a talent?

talent = 6,000 denarii

one denarii = *one day's wage for a common labourer or worker*

so each talent would be worth *20 years of labour!*

This issue was so important that Jesus explains why. Each receives *according to his ability!* We shouldn't worry if anyone else has received more than us. Instead we should be focused on what we are doing with our own!

### **Giving Principle #3 - What am I doing with what I've been given?**

*“The man who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them and gained five more. In the same way, the one with the two talents gained two more.”* (Matthew 25:16,17)

Do we have a sense of **URGENCY**?

The servant went *at once* and put his money to work. He didn't know when the master would return. It could be any day. Do we have the false sense that we have a long time before we need to

worry about this? Or do we make the most of every day and every opportunity?

Do we have a good **WORK** ethic?

Don't gloss over this idea of trading or putting "his money to work." There is work involved in the kingdom of God! The principle here is that not only do we work in the kingdom - our labour - but that even our money labours for the kingdom too, if we have the right attitude of being a steward and not of owner.

Do we have the objective of **GROWTH**?

The five gained five more. The two gained two more. Even though different servants received different amounts, *the same growth happened with both!* In God's kingdom it is normal and expected that growth happens. Why? Because healthy things grow! God's first instructions to mankind were to "*fill the Earth and multiply!*" Think of it this way - are you growing in your desire to give to God's kingdom? Are you growing in seeing the opportunities? Our financial *abilities* will not be the same - from time to time or from person to person. But growth can be present in whatever it is that we are doing for God and with His help!

**Giving Principle #4 -STEWARDSHIP** - managing during the Master's absence.

*"After a long time the master of those slaves came .."* Money is a bad master, but a good servant! Remembering that can help us be God's servants - his steward of all He has entrusted to us, OR do we have the attitude of being the owner? I know I have quite a lot of the time. I have already found this quite challenging as I have been thinking about it. Giving is not a tax nor a tip - It's a tithe - the first tenth given to say to God: "I know this is all yours. You have entrusted it to me. I am managing it for you and for your kingdom. Here is the first fruits of my labour. Without You, none of this would be possible."

**Conclusion:** Illustration -

Some say the greatest violinist who ever lived was Niccolo Paganini, who lived in the mid-1800s. He lost his own violin in a gambling wager. **(Do we value our gift so little that we gamble it away?)**

A businessman lent him his violin. Paganini played it so masterfully that the businessman refused to take it back. The businessman showed he was a steward. **(Do we value our gift so much that we give it away to where it is needed the most? Are we unselfish with our gift and use it for God and others?)**

Paganini played on this gift for the rest of his life. When he died, he willed it to the city of Genoa, on the condition that it must never be played upon. Paganini forgot he was a steward. **(Do we use our gift for others only with strings attached? Or do we share it freely - literally giving ourselves and our possessions away, knowing they were given to us in the first place?)**

But Genoa takes it out of the case once a year and played upon by a young musician, who has won a contest. Genoa knows it is a steward of this great musical instrument. **(Do we know we are a steward of all that God has given to us?)**

We'll consider the next 3 principles next week. **Let's pray.**

