Giving

"If all Christ's things are ours - then all our things must be Christ's." - Thomas Watson

There is a notable difference between giving and the other uses of our money. While spending has an immediate moment of personal gratification and saving is rewarded through anticipation of a similar moment in the future, giving is pretty much the exact opposite. Rather than using money to pursue our own plans, giving is a discipline that moves money out of our control and entrusts it to someone else for purposes beyond ourselves. It is an act that requires both trust and faith.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." - Hebrews 11:1

If you want to know what someone really believes to be true, watch where they put their money. It's easy to talk a big game, but it requires real commitment to put something of value on the line. When it comes to our lives as Christians, we can wonder how convinced we are of God's promises about things we haven't seen or touched. In essence, how much faith do we have and what would our financial decisions reveal on that topic?

Anyone not fully convinced that God's promises are true would never be willing to give up the enjoyment money could buy today. Without faith in eternity and the joys waiting for us there, it only makes sense to try to make the most of this temporary life and devote all our time and money to the pursuit of pleasure. If this world is all there is ever going to be, doing anything else would be foolish. The way non-Christians view and use money really does make logical sense.

While we can understand the actions of the world because we once shared that mindset, the world will struggle to make sense of the financial decisions of the faithful Christian. This should be no surprise since Scripture makes it clear that the world considers the things of the Spirit foolishness[1] (including the cross itself)[2] while God says that the wisdom of this world is folly[3]. Others may consider our desire to give as foolish, but the more we know God and trust in his promises, the more we will gladly exchange temporary pleasures today for an inheritance we know is waiting for us that will never grow old or wear out.

Cheerful Giving

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." - 2 Corinthians 9:7

We can learn a few important aspects about giving from this verse as we strive to build our framework:

1. There is no prescribed amount. Giving is a heart issue, which means we're going to need to individually spend time reflecting on how much we give.
2. We are not to give reluctantly or under compulsion. Too many Christians have been conditioned to give either out of a sense of obligation or guilt. This completely violates the heart of giving.
3. God loves a cheerful giver. This is where faith is a key element. It's going to be difficult to find joy in our giving when we value money and the things we can do with it over the One we're giving to.

When we figure out how to be a cheerful giver, everything else will fall into place. Here are some truths to keep in mind that will help guide us on our journey.

We Give Because We First Received

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God…" - Ephesians 2:8

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." - 2 Corinthians 8:9

As believers in Christ, we already know we have much to be thankful for. We were dead in our trespasses,[4] but God sent his own Son to pay the ransom for our salvation. Jesus willingly "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men", eventually humbling himself to the point of experiencing death on a cross on our behalf.[5] His sacrifice was our gift that didn't just wipe away the debt of our sins, but also passed along His righteousness to us. As a result of His work on the cross, we are not only free from our debts that we couldn't pay but have received the gift of adoption into God's family and have the right to call God "Abba! Father!"[6] and have an eternal inheritance waiting for us.

It takes faith to truly grasp and appreciate the enormity of that gift. We are now children and heirs of the almighty God, the maker and sustainer of the universe. Our father is the owner of everything that has ever been and will ever be. All those fictional stories that caught our imagination and made us dream what it would be like to be heir to a throne or some great fortune pale in comparison to the true story we are living. What makes it even better is that our inheritance is not subject to threat, but is being preserved and protected for the right moment when it will be given to us in a world where even sin and death can't diminish our ultimate enjoyment for all eternity.

When we grasp what we've already been given, we will loosen our grip on the earthly shadow that we have been seeking to enjoy. The fleeting pleasures our money can purchase today pale in comparison to the perfect and eternal joys that await. Like David, it's easier to be a cheerful giver when we realize and acknowledge that God is the owner of everything and we're only offering back to him what He's already given us.[7]

God's Kingdom is Greater

Our great dilemma with money is that we have to constantly choose between building our kingdom here on earth or investing it in God's Kingdom. As Jesus prayed in Matthew 6:10, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven", He showed us that we need to desire God's eternal kingdom and His perfect will over our own. As He says later in this same chapter, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also".[8] Here we see the real issue at hand is the battle for our hearts. Where we place our treasure, our hearts will certainly follow. This again is an issue of faith. Do we believe that God exists, that He is able to fulfill His promises, and that His rewards are worthy of our sacrifices today?[9]

In God's goodness, He's been kind to surround us with a great cloud of witnesses[10] that have gone before us and lived a life of faith as our example. We find a few highlights in the history of great faith recorded in Hebrews 11:

- **Abraham** – (Hebrews 11:17-19)[11] – Abraham was tested by being asked to give up his son, Isaac, who was not only his most precious thing in this world but also the fruit of one promise and the instrument through which God would fulfill His future promises. In faith, Abraham offered up Isaac as a sacrifice because he believed that God could even bring him back from the dead if that was His plan. We should offer up our dearest possessions with such faith and obedience knowing that the sovereign God of the universe will care for us with the same love that he showed to Abraham and Isaac.
- **Moses** – (Hebrews 11:24-26)[12] – "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." Moses had the real-world choice between wealth, power, and pleasure he could enjoy at that time and faith in the reward that God had prepared for him in eternity. In faith, Moses gave up what was before him because he was convinced the promise was real and the guarantor was trustworthy.
- **Jesus** – (Hebrews 12:1-2)[13] – "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." If the examples of other individuals are not good enough, we also

have the example set for us by the One who has seen the other side of death. To Jesus, eternity isn't an unseen promise. He chose to endure the worst of this world because of the joy that was awaiting Him on the other side was worth it.

Our history lesson wouldn't be complete without one more example, but this time one that we don't want to follow.

- **Esau** - A little later in Hebrews 12, we are told to not be "unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears." If you remember the story, Esau sold his birthright for a cup of stew. This is an example of the person that willingly gives up the greater promise of tomorrow for the lesser pleasure they can enjoy today. The problem is that tomorrow will come and with it, we see Esau's tears of regret.

The Heart of Giving

The pages of Scripture paint a clear story of what it looks like to live out a life of faith. However, most of us will still wonder what it looks like to be a cheerful giver in our modern world. We all love to read the stories of faithful saints who have given large sums of money to fund Gospel ministries. While these are great stories, we need to be careful to not get enamored by the fame of the individual or the size of the gift and miss the heart of the giver. Let's consider other examples of faithful giving seen in scripture:

1. God's people selflessly pouring out all their possessions for the rebuilding of the Lord's temple to the point that they have to be asked to stop giving.[14]
2. A widow giving all that she has to live on, not even knowing where her next meal will come from.[15]
3. The early believers selling their possessions to care for their brothers in need.[16]
4. A local body of believers begging for the privilege of being allowed to give out of their own extreme poverty for the relief of other needy believers.[17]

There's a reason why we're told to excel in the grace of giving.[18] With this discipline comes spiritual growth through the active practice of our faith. The real heart of giving has little to do with amount and instead focuses on faith, love, and sacrifice. I can even imagine Jesus telling us to pay more attention to how children give. After all, faith is at the core of giving and we have been told to have child-like faith.

Children give without reservation, fear, or hesitation. They haven't yet been conditioned with the worries of how they're going to pay their bills and they rarely think far enough ahead to fear the troubles of tomorrow. When children are ready to give, they joyfully go all in.

Picture the little one preparing that special present for their mother or father. Just like the faithful Christian, there's nothing they can give that their parent actually needs because everything they have originally came from them anyway. That doesn't deter their willingness to give though. And what is the response of the parent who receives that present from their child? Do they sit back and consider how the gift adds nothing to them or that it holds very little practical value in their daily life? No, every loving parent will receive that gift with pure joy, not because of the value of the gift itself, but because of the heart of the one who gave it.

When we are filled with overflowing love for another, we will give whatever we have in an effort to demonstrate it. We should all long for the unconstrained love of a child and the joy that comes with it. In God's goodness, He receives our gift with great joy and values it not for what it is, but for the heart of the one who gave it. He loves our gifts not because He needs them, but because our hearts desire Him and our giving demonstrates how much we value Him.

Conclusion

Giving is the opposite of our other financial disciplines because it turns our focus outside of ourselves and gives us the opportunity for joyful celebration with others. Look again at how David and the people rejoiced in celebration as everyone freely gave to the building of the temple (1 Chronicles 29:10-18). These examples of generous giving led him to pray "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."[7] David was overwhelmed by the joy of giving that surrounded him and his people to the point that he came to God and admitted that the blessing of giving was more than they even deserved. This is what cheerful giving looks like.

Endnotes: Scripture References

1) 1 Corinthians 2:14 - The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

2) ! Corinthians 1:18 - For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

3) 1 Corinthians 3:19 - For the wisdom of this world is folly with God.

4) Ephesians 2:1 - And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

5) Philippians 2:7-8 - but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

6) Romans 8:14-17 - For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

7) 1 Chronicles 29:10-18 - Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you.

8) Matthew 6:19-21 - "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

9) Hebrews 11:6 - And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

10) Hebrews 12:1 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

11) Hebrews 11:17-19 - By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

12) Hebrews 11:24-26 - By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

13) Hebrews 12:1-2 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

14) Exodus 36:2-7 - And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, and said to Moses, "The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do." So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed

throughout the camp, "Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

15) Luke 21:1-4 - Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

16) Acts 2:45 - And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

17) 2 Corinthians 8:1-24 - We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. But as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you--see that you excel in this act of grace also. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack." But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

18) 2 Corinthians 8:7 - But as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you--see that you excel in this act of grace also.