

1 Chronicles 29:1-3, 10-16 October 6, 2019
(Ephesians 3:20-21)
Matt. 7:7-11

Our Giving God

Two weeks ago I spoke about The Lord's Prayer and what it teaches us about God and ourselves. *"Give us today our daily bread"* really describes a lifestyle. This prayer request teaches us that everything we have comes from God. Everything: clothes, food, friendships, education, the mind we use, the words we speak, *everything*, directly or indirectly, comes from God. Everything of value that you possess, including the very breath you are breathing, comes in one way or another from the hand of Almighty God.

Our Great Fortune

God is a giver and that is to our great fortune. Creation itself is a gift from God, this earth, our abode, brings forth life and all that we need to live. And even when humans turned their backs on God and all His goodness, He gave His one and only Son to sacrifice His life for the sake of all. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life,"* John 3:16. Let's never forget that.

Jesus revealed the giving nature of God, when He said: *"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"* Matt. 7:7-11.

Made in His image we have actually been designed to be givers as well so that we might be conduits of blessing to one another, to our families, our community and beyond. And so that we might have the joy of giving as does God.

Former US Congressman Bob McEwen from Ohio (1981-93) told a story about his brother taking his son to McDonald's. The dad bought the son a large order of fries. While they were sitting at the table, the dad reached over to take a couple of fries. He was shocked when his son pulled the fries away and said, "No. These are mine!" He began to reflect on his son and the fries, thinking, "My son has no idea that I am the source of his fries. I paid for them and the server gave him fries. I am the reason he has these fries. Not only am I the source of the fries but, being the dad, I have the power to take those fries away from him. Or, I can go back to the counter, give the server \$50 and tell him to bury my son in fries. My son doesn't understand I don't need his fries. I can buy a large serving of my own."

Dad further reflected, "As a dad I realized that I didn't want his fries as much as his willingness to share with me."¹

Can you relate? God sends us gifts or takes from us or asks us to share and we pull back and saying, “No, this is mine!” And God must be thinking, “They don’t understand I am the Source. I have power to give or to take. I don’t need their gifts, I want their willingness to share.”

The Bible makes clear that God wants us to give/share, not because He is needy, but because it is for our growth and good. God wants us to give/share because in our giving we become more like Him. It’s all about our relationship with God. Giving to God and giving for God is not a formality, or a hobby (until something better comes along), it is not something we do when it’s convenient or easy. And it’s not even about receiving. Giving and sharing is about experiencing the Presence; the Power; the Provision; the Partnership; and the Praise of God.

We can give directly to God, as did King David and the people of Israel when they brought their wealth together to build the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. Or, we can give indirectly to God, remembering Jesus’ words: *‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me,’* Matthew 25:40. God has entrusted us with many blessings. As we learn to give – to God and to others – we are being transformed more and more into the person our Lord intends us to be.

A Place to Worship God

All of us want to build something with our lives...to invest in that which has a lasting nature. That thing of enduring value is the church, which Jesus Christ established, as His instrument to extend the kingdom of God the farthest ends of the earth. Now, we know that the church is really those people who have confessed their sins, found forgiveness in Jesus Christ and are now being transformed by Him to perform the good works God has in store for them. The church is really the family of God, disciples of Jesus. Yet we also know that we are flesh and blood with material needs and God knows this as well. Christians want a place to gather for God, a place to come together to encourage one another to continue in the life of transformation in Jesus. We need a place to worship God together.

The location and the buildings are tangible expressions of our desire to follow Jesus and expressions of our faith in God. We invest our tangible assets in the place – knowing that it is where the Body of Christ gathers, while realizing that the buildings are not the purpose of gathering. This is not a home to simply provide a spiritual family with comfort and convenience. It may serve that purpose in some fashion, but it’s for God and His purposes: which take us beyond our own needs.

Where we worship today actually began somewhere else: The first Methodist congregation in Bakersfield began in 1870 and built a place of worship in 1874 on donated land at the corner of Truxtun and H. In 1971 the

church moved to this location. We have this beautiful campus because of the vision and generosity of those who came before us.

I Chronicles tells the history of ancient Israel and the people's relationship with God. History can teach us a lot as well as provide guidance. The passage read this morning is about King David's plans for building the Temple in Jerusalem ... a place for all the people to worship God. This had been David's vision.... God had now called David to turn it over to his son Solomon. David had to give his dream over to someone else ... a decision to give beyond himself... to give to that which would outlive him. It's a challenge to give to something when we don't see immediate return, isn't it?

David not only "served his own generation" (Acts 13:36), which every child of God should do, but he also served generations to come. He provided the materials to build the temple from the kingdom's treasury; he organized the temple ministry; he wrote songs for the temple singers; and he even designed musical instruments for the Levites to play. In addition he said, *"I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple..."* 1 Chronicles 29:3. He gave what amounts to 110 tons of gold ... 260 tons of silver... and more. He wasn't afraid to state these amounts publicly... because it wasn't a reflection of self-righteousness ... it was a communal calling that he was now giving as a call to all the people.

I cannot stand up here and talk to you about giving to the Lord, and giving generously, giving sacrificially, if I am not doing so myself. Although my family has financial challenges just like most of you, we have always given our tithe to the Lord's work and so I encourage you. And now, when leaders of our congregation are asking us to add \$35 a month on top of whatever we already give – well, it's another stretch, but we can do it. We can trust the Lord. King David's words again come to mind: *"I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing,"* 2 Samuel 24:24.

A Heart to Give

David is an illustration of how the heart of a giver develops. This same spirit of sacrificial giving was found in the early church. Paul writes to the church at Corinth, telling them of the generosity of the churches in Macedonia, *"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 Lord's people,"* 2 Cor. 8:3-4.

Those who best understand what's truly meaningful at the end of life tell us it's about what we give beyond ourselves... towards that which will outlive us. We cannot really grasp the significance of our giving until we've looked into the eyes of the next generation... and our community. That is the heart so

many had that gave regularly and substantially at this place to make it possible that future lives could gather around Jesus in this place.

“The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord,” 1 Chronicles 29:9. ... 'willing'... 'freely'... 'wholeheartedly.' The word “whole hearted” comes from the Hebrew “shalom” = complete peace, joy, contentment. That’s how God gives, freely and without compulsion. That’s how God hopes we will give so we can experience contentment and joy.

God has blessed this church in the past through the generosity of those gone before us and my prayer is that such a desire will be ignited in us today. I pray as did King David, ***“O Lord, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you,” 1 Chronicles 29:1-20.*** The heart of generosity is being challenged more than ever before by materialism and narcissism. So we need to develop God's heart of generosity among us... the heart of generosity that builds God's Kingdom.

Drive around ... look at all the lives navigating life here in Bakersfield... look at all the misguided longings for love... and meaning ... and purpose. We’re right smack dab in the middle of it. Grasp the significance of Christ being here in His Body.

God is a great giver ... He gave His only Son that we should not perish. And He has made us to be givers. Though we cannot out give God, we can give like God.

Long ago King David said it so well, ***“But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you and we have given you only what comes from your hand.” 1 Chronicles 29:14.***

You won’t find rest until you really know that God provides.

¹ From “Substance Use” by Perry Greene, Feb 12, 2019; Sermon Central.com.