

“The Joys of Sharing”

10-11-15

As you might remember from last week, although I may not like to talk about money and some of you may not like to hear about money in church. But if you look at three of the four Gospels, 1 out of every 6 verses deals with money! Of the 29 parables Jesus told, 16 deal with a person and his money. Someone has counted over 2,300 references to money and possessions in the whole Bible!

If every church member gave joyfully according to their time, talents, and treasures, in how they've been blessed by God, there wouldn't be anything we couldn't accomplish because of a lack of money or people's service!

But, that's where the difficulty comes. George Barna in his research on giving in churches today found some interesting things. More people claim to tithe than actually do! Of all the people who claim to be born-again Christians, ¼ of them give no money to the church. Of all people who give donations, only 3-5% gave a tithe of their income. The average donation by adults per week to a local church is \$12.50 or \$648.00 a year!

Our giving is an expression of our trust in God's provision and our total surrender to Him. But our life in God isn't limited to money. Listen to Romans 12:1, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”*

Paul is saying, **“Give Yourself to the Lord!”** In other words, volunteer to GO where He wants you to go, DO what He wants you to do, and BE what He wants you to be! Jesus said in Mark 8:34, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”* Jesus has set a wonderful example for us to follow!

C. S. Lewis put it this way: *“Christ says, ‘Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think are innocent as well as the ones you think are wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: my own will shall become yours.’”*

So if you're unsure about what God has done, and continues to do, see what He's done through His Son, Jesus Christ. Trust Jesus as your Savior. Invite Him into your life and catch a glimpse of who He truly is; the One who died on a cross for your sins and rose again. Then you'll have no trouble giving yourself completely to Him!

Give Your Songs to the Lord! Praise Him with your whole heart. Make a joyful noise to Him being filled with Thanksgiving and Joy! As you pray and have devotions each day, read a Psalm out loud. Rejoice, as the people in the Old Testament did. Realize how God is with you every step of the way, no matter what!

In Nehemiah's day as the temple had been destroyed, but as the rebuilt temple was being dedicated, two choirs walked on top the wall singing and praising God all along the way. They were singing so loudly that people from far away could hear them! They were so full of joy! Everybody sang, not just the professionals!

A church researcher once said, *“Somehow, about forty percent of churchgoers seem to have picked up the idea that ‘singing in church is for singers.’ The truth is that ‘singing is for believers!’ The relevant question isn't, ‘Do you have a voice?’ but ‘Do you have a song?’*

You see, when you give yourself to Jesus, Jesus puts a song in your heart. You may sing way off key, but it really doesn't matter, because if you know Jesus you have something to sing about!

Give Your Substance to the Lord! You need to bring your offerings to God with gratitude. You need to gladly offer to God whatever He's placed in your hands. That's what this church has continually done in the past along with believers forever! We can give because our hearts are full of joy!

Believers give because they're happy, and that's how God wants us to give and share! 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, *"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver!"*

Don't give or serve because you HAVE to. Do it because you WANT to! Do it because your heart's so full of joy you can't help but generously share and be filled with joy!

Excel With a Generous Spirit. A generous spirit acts graciously in love for others in response to the generous acts of Jesus Christ! I have a poster that I just got this week. It says, *"He came to pay a debt He didn't owe because we owed a debt we couldn't pay!"* Jesus came to earth to take our place and pay the price!

Sometimes, a Generous Spirit is a Challenge. Open to 2 Corinthians 8. Sometimes it's hard to be generous when we're facing struggles in our own lives with retirement, illness, and the high cost of living. Sometimes it's a challenge as we try to provide or look around us and judge ourselves and our action against others. Verses 8-10, *"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."*

We don't need to compare ourselves against each other, but we need to do what God calls us to do! We need to look at Jesus and follow His example and have a generous spirit just like His!

Have Your Generous Spirit Be a Joyful Thing. Verses 11-12, *"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."* This joyful thing needs to be marked by eagerness. The implication here is that in giving or sharing, our attitude is more important than the gift itself.

The tension here is the tug we feel when we're asked to be joyful and eagerly share what we have with others. But there's an inner reluctance in us to not think of others who have less and instead think only of ourselves.

God has blessed you in so many ways. He gives and continues to give you so much. You really can't out give God! All you have comes from Him. All He asks is that you share what He's given you: **Willingly!**
Joyfully! **Completely!**

As you do this, God blesses you and will continue to bless you beyond measure!