

Chapter 10

Giving & Receiving

True love gives completely. It is total giving, to the degree that we ultimately reach a point where there is nothing left to give. After we reach that 'zero point,' we will have the capacity to receive much more than we gave. This process of giving and receiving will achieve a balance that continues forever. Relationships of giving and receiving will produce a world where people live for the sake of others centering on true love.

—Sun Myung Moon

All around the world, youngsters love to play catch with their fathers. Teenagers enjoy sitting around talking. Young lovers delight in dancing. The common quality of all these activities—simple give and take between people—comprises the stuff of our lives. Certainly it is the substance of all relationships; what is a conversation but an ongoing exchange of words, what is a marriage but an enduring exchange of concern and support? Through that exchange, heart is transmitted back and forth. Giving and receiving is thus a second universal principle that comprises and sustains true love.

Contemporary Western science is more and more taking on a relational paradigm. The old viewpoint that all things are separate and distinct existences is giving way to a more process oriented view that recognizes that most things arise from interactions. For example, the old “nature versus nurture” debate in psychology has given way to understanding that both factors are equally important and interdependent. Educational theory no longer favors the one-

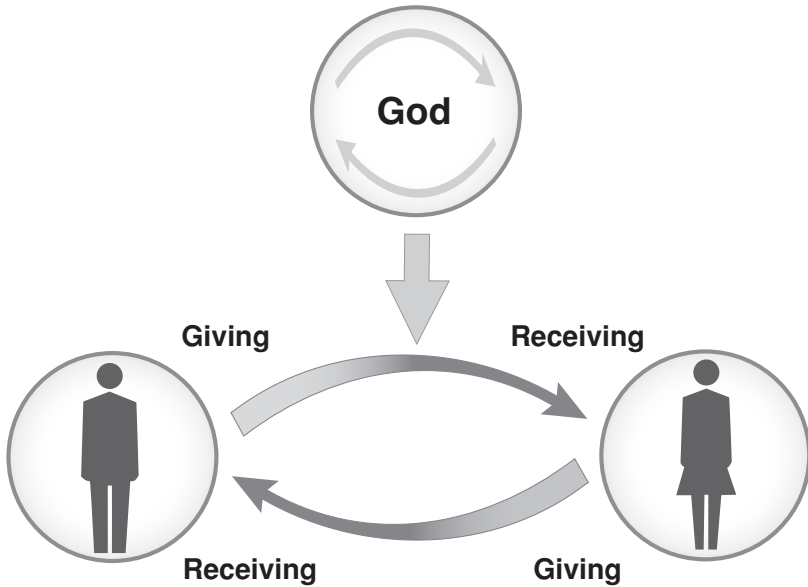
way lecture approach and encourages learners to have active give and take with each other, the material and the teacher. Organizational management similarly leans towards participation and interaction among levels and groups. Words like ecological, synergistic and holistic express this new paradigm.

Interaction is a ubiquitous phenomenon. In nature, entities—from subatomic particles to solar systems, from male and female animals to symbiotic plants—form a relationship and solidify it through giving and receiving elements of themselves. From the nuclear reactions in the heart of the sun to the biochemical reactions in the living cell, this is what powers all movement, development and reproduction. Even the very existence of things depends on give and take; the raging drama of a summer storm would not exist except for the intense give and take between hot and cold, high pressure and low, positively and negatively charged. “All God’s creations borrow from each other,” reads a Jewish Midrash, “day borrows from night and night from day . . . the sky borrows from the earth, and the earth from the sky” (Exodus Rabbah 31.15).¹ Interrelatedness and interdependence abound.

Like everything else, love itself depends on give and take—communication, support, working and playing together. Even the genesis of love relies on it. Interaction inspires affection. Merely exchanging a few words with a bus driver everyday can create enough of a bond that the commuter misses her when she changes routes. Returning to his childhood playground, the young man can wax nostalgic over the misshapen, netless hoop where he played ball. The middle-aged woman is surprised how much she misses the cantankerous, ever-complaining mother-in-law she cared for until her death. Given enough dealings with just about anything or anyone, we develop a bond.

Reverend Moon has observed that Giving and Receiving is thus a principle of true love. It is certainly so universal as to be taken for granted. Yet in human families and society it is neither always flowing nor satisfying. Here we explore several characteristics of

effective giving—understanding reciprocity, unselfish giving, initiating, being truthful and ethical—and also what it takes to receive well.



Practicing True Love

If giving and receiving with anyone can generate love, this principle can be used to advantage. We can learn to like and even love people we would otherwise not choose to be with. Many college roommates and spouses in arranged marriages can testify to the power of daily interaction to give rise to fondness that ripens into love.

Yet we might ask, why does give and take produce energy and love? Marx asserted that movement was simply a property of matter. But of course, it must be a reflection of a quality within the Creator. God is the source of all forces, especially that of true love. Interaction is the medium through which His love is manifested in the material

world. Just as the exchange between the mind and body of a person generates all that she is and does, so the interplay between God's Heart and power brings forth all the beautiful, true and good things in the universe. True love suffuses a warm family because its interactions resemble those within God, as in the Christian conception of the Trinity.

Reciprocity

"I'm rubber, you're glue; it bounces back and sticks to you." So goes a children's rhyming retort to name-calling peers, yet it captures the wisdom of reciprocity in human relations. "What goes around comes around" is another variation expressing the idea of reciprocation, that whatever a person invests will return to him or her. A respectful, polite demeanor will almost always bring out the same in other people. A rude, snarling attitude will almost always elicit like responses. Politeness tends to beget politeness—as someone holds a door open for someone in a crowded station, that person feels inclined to hold the door for the next person behind him, etcetera. Sometimes courtesy in the face of rudeness can turn the rudeness around. Customer service representatives are trained in this; if they are polite and helpful to an irate customer, it is likely he or she will calm down and continue on as a patron.

This reflects the ancient observation that human relations, like all of life, are reciprocal. The Bible observes that "a man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6.7) and "with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6.38). A colorful proverb goes, "Whosoever diggeth a pit shall fall therein." Hinduism calls it karma. Psychologist M. Scott Peck speaks of the "strangely circular process" of love, "a two-way street, a reciprocal phenomenon whereby the receiver also gives and the giver also receives."² It's echoed in the vernacular wisdom, "You'll get out of it what you put into it" and "If you want a friend, be one." Indeed, if one would have respect, wealth, power or any other goal, the trick is to give the same to others.

More subtly, the heart and intent with which we give determines what we receive. Do we welcome a stranger because he is a potential customer, a fellow human being or a fellow child of God? Each brings a different return, as the New Testament affirms: “Anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward” (Matthew 10.41). That is, the more we value others as they truly are in God’s sight, so we shall be valued and blessed.

At the same time, reciprocity means that self-seeking attitudes and actions will also eventually extract their price from the perpetrator. They reverse the principle of good interaction and take away from others without giving back—the basic prescription for evil. The entrepreneur Elbert Hubbard observes pointedly, “Men are not punished for their sins, but by them.” Negative thoughts, curses, uncharitable interpretations of others’ actions and lives will also take their toll on the one who harbors them. “People pay for what they do, and still more, for what they have allowed themselves to become,” wrote novelist Edith Wharton. “And they pay for it simply: by the lives they lead.”³

Yet unloving actions are also repaired according to the law of reciprocity. That is, a wrong is undone by going the way opposite of the way the transgression was committed. Gestures of restitution, reparations and indemnity all involve reversal of the offense and giving back some or all of what was lost (see Chapter 24). Jesus demonstrated this when he deliberately demanded three affirmations of love from his disciple, Peter, to negate his disciple’s three-fold betrayals committed earlier (John 21.15-17).

The Golden Rule

The moral implication of reciprocity is that the active responsibility of a member of a relationship is to contribute positively to it. This appears in all of the world’s religions as the exhortation to treat others as you would wish to be treated—the Golden Rule. Islam declares, “Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother

what he loves for himself" (Forty Hadith of an-Nawari 13).⁴ "Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to benevolence," is the version taught by Mencius (VII.A.4).⁵ The Hindu Mahabharata cautions, "One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself. This is the essence of morality" (Anusasana Parva 113.8).⁶ African folk religion preaches in this Yoruba proverb: "One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts."⁷ The Jewish sage Hillel taught, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah."⁸ Jesus concurred: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22.39).

Initiate Giving

"Giving as a way of living" is more than simple generosity. It means taking the initiative to give first, doing so unselfishly and keeping a commitment to be truthful and ethical.

Giving Well

1. Giving First
2. Unselfishness
3. Commitment to Truth

1. Giving First

True love is generous. It tends to give first instead of waiting to. Such initiative is a boon in human relationships. Families, marriages, friendships, business relationships and the like flourish when participants are more interested in what they can give to each other than what they will receive. A father delights in surprising his son with baseball cards for his collection; an older woman smiles in anticipation of bringing some of her raisin muffins to the new folks next door; a husband always wakes his wife with the smell of her favorite flavored coffee the morning after they've had a tiff.

People lucky enough to have cultivated the habit of giving first

have most likely experienced its rewards. If giving leads to receiving, then the one who starts the process enjoys a greater sense of influence than the more passive person. She also has reason to believe that the future will be brighter and more fruitful. "I hated my boss and my dead-end job," recalls a forklift operator in a warehouse. "And so did everyone else. But I decided that it's less boring if I try to make other people's day a little better." He began bringing in treats for the coffee table, and proposed the idea of a bowling league. "Now I've made a few friends, people are more friendly to each other too, and I look forward to bowling nights. Even the boss has lightened up a bit."

Prime the pump of healing one's own hurts

The value of giving first is also illustrated by the fact that most self-help groups were started by people who were themselves suffering from difficult situations. In seeking to help others cope, or to prevent others from having to endure what they had gone through, these people found their own suffering ameliorated. John Walsh, host of the television show, "America's Most Wanted," that has led to the apprehension of scores of criminals, created the program to direct his grief after his young son was abducted and killed, and the murderer was not found.

A story is told of a severely depressed woman who sought help from a famed psychiatrist. She had a lonely and bleak existence; the one bright spot in her life were her well-tended African violets in her home. The psychiatrist told her to take notice of weddings, births and illnesses at her church and on every occasion she should bring a gift of a flowering plant. This she did, and before long her depression was forgotten amidst the outpouring of gratitude she received as the "African Violet lady."⁹

As helpful as it may be, giving is often the last thing a person wants to do, especially when caught up in his or her own needs. It often takes an exertion of will to overcome the inertia and reach out first, but once the flow of interaction is started, it can take on a

momentum of its own. “I was really mad at Tom after that weekend, and I swore I’d never call him again. He’d have to call me and apologize,” relates Anthony about his best friend. They had parted ways after watching a football game together, when Tom had insulted Anthony’s fiancée and left him to find his own way home. “But my mom told me I was stupid to lose such a good friend. She dialed and got me on the phone with him. Turns out he felt like a jerk and didn’t know what to say to me.”

Giving first brings success even in business. Winning companies go “the extra mile” to serve customers’ needs—the clothes catalog company that employs an excellent phone staff to advise people on garment choices and measurements, the furniture store with a supervised playground so parents can shop relaxed, the department store that offers wheelchairs for the disabled and strollers for infants. Customers buy often from such businesses and recommend them to others.

Initiating love brings blessings to the giver because it resonates with the nature of the Divine and attracts His presence. “We love because [God] first loved us,” the Bible declares (1 John 4.19). God gives to us so we may initiate love to others.

2. Unconditional Giving

For Reverend Moon, true love is generous, unselfish—to “give and give, and forget what was given.”¹⁰ What stretches the heart and makes for moral and spiritual growth is to give for the sake of the beneficiary, with no thought of return, and to keep pushing the boundaries of such giving.

As part of the ordinary give and take of goods and services among neighbors and friends, giving is normally done with the expectation of return. The dinner party thrown to repay previous invitations, the tool lent with the unspoken agreement to likewise borrow if needed, the donation made in exchange for getting one’s name posted in the lobby—these are part of the ordinary economy of peer relationships. This has its place and certainly it is important

to at least return in kind what one has been given, yet such giving is neither particularly reflective of true love, nor especially edifying in character and spirit. It is more like bartering than giving, since there is a sense of trading one gift or favor for another.¹¹

Native American chief Seneca said, "We should give as we would receive . . . for there is no grace in a benefit that sticks to the fingers." When giving to others in need, the Bible puts it, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matthew 6.3). A Buddhist text memorably speaks of "three kinds of persons existing in the world: one is like a drought, one who rains locally, and one who pours down everywhere." The drought person "gives nothing to all alike," the person like a local rainfall "is a giver to some, but to others he gives not," while the third type is like a great rain because "he gives to all, be they recluses and brahmins or wretched, needy beggars" (Itivuttaka 65).¹² Few are so stingy as to be a drought but so too are few of us willing to unconditionally shower our gifts on others outside a small circle of people whom we like or from whom we expect mutual support. To give "with no strings attached," runs contrary to instinctive selfishness. "A man who is out to make a name for himself will be able to give away . . . a thousand chariots," noted Mencius, "but reluctance would be written all over his face if he had to give away a basketful of rice and a bowlful of soup" without receiving credit (VII.B.11).¹³ Most of us find it very challenging to be like God, who "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good" (Matthew 5.45).

Not keeping score

In the best relationships the parties decide to give without keeping track and without expecting anything in return except the pleasure and benefit of the other. In this way they are able to turn a blind eye to the times when the giving is uneven. This is the natural quality of the most cherished of family relationships and friendships. "It's not 50-50," says a husband who has been married 45 years. "If you keep score, you don't make it. You've got to decide

to give more than your share." To be free of conditions and calculations in giving spells freedom. "I'm happy to do it," is the reflexive response when such people are thanked. The Middle Eastern poet Kahlil Gibran describes them thus:

They give as in yonder valley the myrtle
Breathes its fragrance into space.
Through the hands of such as these God
speaks, and from behind their eyes
He smiles upon the earth.¹⁴

Indeed, through such gestures, the divine hand reaches out to feed the hungry and cheer the despairing. How else can He give to those who lack unless those who are blessed are willing to share it? Jesus put it simply, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded" (Luke 12.48).

This brings up another reward of initiating generosity—the avoidance of being indebted. From the moment of our first breath, we have been the beneficiary of the largesse of not only our parents and society but also the creation, countless ancestors and the Creator. To give can be seen as merely the effort to even the score, to repay what one has already been granted. "We couldn't help it. How could we go knowing that family was hurting?," explains Marge and Ron Jackson, a working class couple in Phoenix, Arizona, who donated the money saved for a long-awaited vacation to a local family made homeless by a fire. "After all people have done for us, we wanted to do it."

Challenging limits in unselfish giving then is a secret of expanding the capacity for true love. Just as in weightlifting, such stretching may hurt sometimes as it strengthens and enlarges the heart. Continuous giving can actually transform the recipient into being more worthy too. This is the way God treats humankind; He shines his light upon the good and the bad alike, showers His love and blessings and protection upon everyone as much as He can according to the conditions they make. He hopes that His unremitting

giving will eventually turn human hearts toward the sunlight of His love as an inevitable result of His principle of interaction.

No giving is in vain

“Love God and love people at the price of your life,” exhorts Reverend Moon, “And then you can gain your own life and gain all people also.” Because of reciprocity, no giving is ever wasted. Acts of kindness, generosity, charity, politeness and helpfulness will redound to one’s credit and return as a blessing. Even thoughts and feelings radiated out into the universe—prayer is an example—do not come back empty-handed. Shakespeare’s Portia speaks of how the gift of mercy is “twice bless’d; It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.”¹⁵ “The rose leaves its fragrance” the saying goes, “on the hand that gives it.” Goodness comes back, multiplying goodness and blessing all.

Thus, giving renews, revives, and replenishes its store. This runs counter to the conventional wisdom that inclines people to guard their resources, be sparing in giving—measuring out one’s life with “coffee spoons” as the poet T. S. Eliot put it¹⁶—and invest only in what will surely bring a return. People fear to give lest they become depleted. Ironically, of course, their fears are confirmed. In the case of this kind of giving, one author notes, “the principle [of reciprocity] is not fully activated and the giving does not multiply and return.”¹⁷ A reluctant giver is like a tentative driver on the freeway—he “jams” the universal flow of give and take. Even a radical gesture of giving done conditionally is without true love and so it proves ultimately fruitless. “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13.3).

Literature assures us of the paradox—at the very least, when one gives, nothing is lost and more likely it shall return a hundred-fold. “Consider the flame of a single lamp,” says the Buddhist text. “Though a hundred thousand people come and light their own lamps from it so that they can cook their food and ward off the darkness,

the first lamp remains the same as before. Blessings are like this, too" (Sutra in Forty-Two Sections 10).¹⁸ Another Shakespearean heroine, Juliet, said the same, "My bounty is as boundless as the sea; my love as deep; the more I give, the more I have." Aesop told the fable of the lion who spared a mouse's life, only to have the small rodent save his later on.

Reverend Moon illuminates a deeper dimension of this truth. He explains that when someone sincerely gives that which is true and good and beautiful and the recipient not only does not reciprocate but actually returns scorn and abuse, then something of the recipient's good fortune transfers to the giver. The law of reciprocity will not allow the imbalance and injustice to remain forever. This is one of the dynamics behind the historical phenomenon of misunderstood, selflessly serving individuals being persecuted—yet eventually their enterprise flourishes and its enemies decline over time. Jesus' enigmatic statement, "to every one who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away" (Luke 19.26), is referring to this.

With the assurance that nothing is ever lost in giving, however difficult, it is easier to invest more heartily in one's relationships. For example, Joe was tired one night when an acquaintance called to thank him for his work in a charity event. Joe realized that if he just said, "You're welcome," and remained silent, the conversation would soon end and he could go to bed. However, he decided to invest some energy in the conversation, so he made a few jokes and soon found himself in a stimulating, hour-long conversation. When Joe hung up the phone, he felt energized and uplifted, his tiredness forgotten in thinking about his newfound friend.

Psychologist Erich Fromm elaborates on this: "In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power I experience myself as overflowing, spending, alive, hence as joyous. Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness."¹⁹ The giver experiences potency and vitality as a participant

in the endless reciprocation of the cosmos, an instrument of the boundless benevolence of God Himself.

Return may not be noticed

Reciprocity eludes notice by many people because what comes back may not be the same as what was put out. A monetary gift to a needy family may return as mysterious recovery from a grave illness, but the principle of good for good prevails. What makes it more ambiguous is the frequent time lag between cause and effect.²⁰ The metaphysical machinery of reciprocation works subtly and at its own pace to bring the return, and that result may not be noticed for what it is. That evening spent helping a stranger far from home find his relatives in a nearby city may bounce back as a blessing even decades later. Consider the case of those who have given their lives to save someone; their reward certainly cannot be in this life at all. Or it may pass on even to the extension of oneself—posterity. The Talmud alludes to this when it declares, “Happy are the righteous! Not only do they acquire merit, but they bestow merit upon their children and children’s children to the end of generations” (Yoma, 87a).²¹ This is why, when trying to understand justice in one’s life, it is wise to consider how good fortune may well be the fruits of what ancestors have given, and so one’s own generosity may be simply paying back an indebtedness.

3. *Commitment to Truth*

Give and take need be grounded in virtue. Aristotle’s idea of friendship meant that beyond pleasure and advantage, an essential component of all good relationships is a commitment to ethical truth. True friends hold each other accountable to a moral standard, a shared commitment to the good. “Tim is a special person,” Clive says quietly of his college friend and soccer teammate. “I admire him. And he has a good effect on me; I guess I admire myself more when I am around him.” In contrast, false friends flatter and

amuse their comrades while tempting them to betray their better natures. True love involves unconditional caring and acceptance but not to the point of excusing wrong.

Thus, a constructive interaction is truthful in two ways. First, it is honest and without guile. There is no ulterior motive, no manipulation for some personal advantage. Second, it is ethical, grounded in moral truth. We recall St. Paul's description of true love: "it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right" (1 Corinthians 13.6 RSV).

Authentic and honest interactions, of course, are not automatic. They take commitment. Some people hesitate out of shyness or timidity; some are afraid of hurting others' feelings; some are not skilled in tact. Being truthful may sometimes cost a friendship. Yet more often than not, truthful sharing in a respectful and sensitive manner enhances a relationship.

Laurie, a 28-year-old mother of two, was concerned that her children watched violent videos at their friend's house, but was shy to mention her objection. Hillary, the mother of the children's friend, sensed how evasive Laurie was about the children getting together at her home. When she asked the other mother what was wrong, Laurie decided to plunge ahead and be frank about her concern. Hillary was surprised but relieved at Laurie's honesty. "I didn't know all that," she said, when Laurie cited statistics about media and real life violence. The two had a long, fruitful discussion about standards and values and Hillary was happy to prohibit any further violent movies. The truthfulness of this interaction not only deepened the bond between them but also edified both individuals as well.

Being honest does not mean just pouring out raw, unprocessed feelings at one another. In fact, such interaction is usually harmful. Nor is it sharing that which would unnecessarily burden the other, as when a parent discloses too much of her youthful excesses to their teenage daughter. Giving truthfully means to respect the other, the relationship and the truth enough to bring thoughts and feelings to light and get to the bottom of things, for the sake of true love.

Setting boundaries

This means sensitivity as to when to set limits or withhold something from another—for instance, if one is enabling the other to keep bad habits or behavior, as in co-dependency. “I was torn up inside; it was really really hard.” Boris, 16, remembers clearly that awful moment when he refused to steal any more liquor from his Dad’s cabinet or otherwise get a drink for his best buddy, Vance, who was no longer managing a day without alcohol. “I had no choice but to tell Coach about his drinking, and listen to Vance cursing at me and calling me ‘traitor.’ I realized that if I really cared about him, I had to help him stop, even if we’d never be friends again.” Fortunately, Vance was able to thank his friend later, but it is not always that way. “Tough love” like this tests one person’s commitment to the other person’s welfare.

As always, God is the exemplar of truthful giving. Not only is He unfailingly honest, He will never indulge our immaturity and give what is not good for us. Like any caring parent, He is careful to give to his children only what they need, not always what they ask for.

Receiving Well

We have been elaborating on the qualities of giving but the other side of any interaction is receptivity. Being able to receive well—gracefully and appreciatively—is an art and skill as vital as that of giving. What receiving well means is clear from anyone’s experience of having someone appreciate a gift. “It’s a pleasure to sew my mother something,” Alicia says. “Her eyes light up, she oohs and aahs and shows it off endlessly. She’s an expert in sewing so she really understands what I put into it.” Such a reception inspires the giver to want to give again. At the same time, it renews the recipient’s capacity to be able to give in return. “Her friends at the nursing home say my mother gets a lot more outgoing and friendly every time I bring her something nice to wear,” Alicia adds. “She’s even started a sewing circle with the other ladies.”

There are two common missteps people make regarding receiving. The first is to fail to sufficiently receive what someone is giving, to not fully value it and therefore be appropriately responsive. The other is to not let themselves be in the receiving position in the first place.

Receiving Well

1. Appreciation
2. The attitude of gratitude
3. Receptivity

1. Appreciation

To receive a gift seems easy and passive, but in fact it does require effort. Receiving is a creative act, because we have to exert ourselves to find a way to identify and empathize with the giver so to appreciate the heart and effort invested. This is why, for instance, wandering through an art museum for an art lover is exhilarating yet it is also exhausting, because appreciation of each painter's emotional and technical investment requires an investment on the viewer's part as well. Consider the energy it takes for busy parents to stop what they doing and fully take in their young child's awkward story telling or musical offering. Or contemplate how much effort is required to really listen empathetically to one's spouse or colleague in the midst of a disagreement.

At times the recipient simply cannot grasp the fullness of what is being given because of having little in common with the heart of the giver. A wealthy tourist may take his meal for granted, unable to fathom all the sacrifices involved for his impoverished host to serve such meat. The motorist is annoyed by the police checkpoint slowing traffic, just as he is also oblivious to the hardships the cops are enduring to protect him.

Sometimes it takes time and a change of circumstances to gain enough resemblance to appreciate what someone has invested for

our benefit. This is the basis for the universal experience of understanding one's parents' sacrifices only when becoming a parent too. "Only now, in middle age, do I begin to understand what kind of sacrifices my father made for me," notes one middle-aged man. "For example, I'm surprised how much it costs to feed my three kids, and my wife works. But my Mom stayed at home and Dad somehow paid for all of us five kids by himself, including a lot of college expenses. And I remember how he even bought me a fancy bike for my high school graduation. He must have been sweating it out, like I am now, but it never showed."

2. *The Attitude of Gratitude*

Gratitude is an automatic response at times, but it is also a discipline to learn to enhance the ability to receive well. The practice of gratitude is vital because it means adopting a stance of positive, anticipatory receptivity. It is like wearing a "blessing filter" that opens our eyes to the gifts we are receiving and already have. Gratitude alone can transform an impoverished looking situation into an abundant one. "I had nothing to live for, absolutely nothing, after she died," remembers an elderly man who survived a tragic car accident but his wife did not. "But then I realized that if I had died first, my dear wife would have been as lonely as I am now. So now I thank God every day, that she could go before me, that I could have the hard time, not her. And I'm finding other things to be thankful for too."²²

In the book *In This House of Brede*, the head of the Abbey trains herself to say, "Thank you," whenever someone comes to her office and interrupts what she is doing, even if the visit is inopportune or from a person she has a hard time dealing with. Practicing gratitude, even for the things we are not grateful for at the time, helps us to see and receive the gifts God is trying to give us.

Gratitude takes humility. We have already mentioned the self-centeredness that can prevent people from even recognizing another's generosity. Another side of the humility needed is to rec-

ognize when something possessed is undeserved—a gift, not an entitlement. “When I was a kid, I’d brag about my father’s position and its privileges,” recalls a diplomat’s daughter who grew up in a third world country. “But as I got older I realized that it was our great good fortune, a blessing. I didn’t deserve it and had a responsibility to use it to help others less lucky.”

3. *Receptivity*

Receiving itself is an inverse way of giving. Embarrassed by his uncle’s generous and frequent monetary gifts, a young man protested that he was giving him too much. “No, no, no,” the older man said to him. “You give to me by letting me give to you.” Receiving another’s gifts with appreciation, whether they are material, gifts of time, or gifts of expertise or kindness, is a present in itself to the other.

Particularly in the mature years, people have a need to be needed. Walter, a retired cook, found little motivation to prepare his favorite dishes just for himself, so he often made quantities of soups and stews and brought them across the street to a younger family. This was a good arrangement for both. The older man found it satisfying to cook for someone who appreciated it; and the younger family, low on time and money, benefited too. The children of the family would always return the cleaned and polished pot or pan to Walter with a warm “Thank you” note inside and sometimes a little handmade gift. These visits and notes and gifts, he said, “make my days.”

Sometimes people have a hard time letting go of the giving role to allow themselves to receive. They may enjoy always giving partly because it keeps them in control; they can determine the nature of their transactions with others. They can avoid being vulnerable, dependent and having to recognize their own weaknesses and needs. Rachel, a mother and customer service representative, is well-known in her community as the one to call when something is needed. She is active in various committees at school, at temple,

and the block association. Other parents go to her for advice and she spends many nights on the phone checking up on her aging Dad or other family members or friends, as she bakes something for her co-workers or a school reception. Yet she feels uncomfortable asking for help herself. "It took me years to notice that my annual collapse with the flu was my body's way of getting a rest," she confides. "And I know my 'self-sufficiency' makes my family feel useless. Now I am working on noticing when I need something and asking for assistance."

Considering these matters of receiving helps us to recognize how humble and receptive the Creator is. He always seeks to receive our offerings graciously, despite their inadequacy, their timing usually based upon our convenience and our frequently mixed motives.

In conclusion, giving and receiving well are the lifeblood of loving relationships. Just as one empties us and makes us receptive, the other replenishes and prompts us to give more. Giving sets up a cycle of more giving, because the joy it generates is its own reward. With this in mind, we may not hesitate to be generous, take the initiative, give truthfully, and graciously receive the soul-satisfying rewards. Yet the interaction that generates and sustains love comes more readily and flows more smoothly as participants know and fulfill their proper roles.