

Giving: A Sign of Spiritual Maturity



The Bible addresses money and possessions on numerous occasions. Due to the sheer volume of passages in Scripture that speak to this subject, I feel compelled as a minister to mention it often in sermons. When God speaks about one subject that many times, He must be trying to tell us something.

In Acts 20:35 (NIV), we have the famous statement from our Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." While our Lord was not only speaking about money, it is interesting how many people take that passage and apply it to every area of life *except* giving financially to the work of the Church. Of course, there are countless ways in which we can give, and those ways can be to God's glory, but the most obvious and straightforward way is giving to the Church.

Giving is part of who we are, and our attitude toward it should cause us to consider our spiritual maturity. While no one "progresses" in a uniform manner through these stages, I think there are at least four stages of spiritual maturity that are clearly displayed in our attitude toward giving.

Stage 1: "I won't."

Some never really are in this stage, but many are. We refuse to give, because we are still holding too tightly to the things of this world. Maybe we think that giving to the Church is only furthering some type of scam, or maybe we are just skeptical of the Church. For many, these are perfectly natural feelings.

For others, however, they know the work of the Church well, but they refuse to give because their hearts are hard. They refuse to give because their trust is still in themselves, and they can't really stand the idea of just giving away money. In fact, they may think they are just throwing it away.

Stage 2: "I will, but I won't like it."

Paul addressed this mindset in 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV), when he said that we should not give "reluctantly or under compulsion." Some write their check or pull some paper currency out of their

wallet only because they know it is expected of them. There is no joy whatsoever in the giving, because their mind is still thinking about what else they could have done with those dollars.

In reality, this is a common problem for many in any area of worship. We can get caught up in going through the motions and not really having a heart in the matter. When it comes to giving, however, this problem is amplified, because our minds are focused on ourselves, and what we could have done if we hadn't dropped those few dollars on the plate.

Stage 3: "I will because it helps out."

Now we begin to see the heart changed. While we may not fully understand the deepest of reasons to give, we are starting to see that, when we give, we get. We are noticing that the poor are helped. We see that children are taught about Jesus. We see that widows and orphans are given good care, and that ministers are paid so that they can dig deeply into the Word of God.

We may not necessarily increase the amount we give at this point, but our heart is starting to change. We feel a connection to where the money is going and the good it is doing.

Stage 4: "I will because I want to thank God."

This is a totally transformed person. This is the person who realizes the true joy of giving (2 Corinthians 9:7). We feel so moved by what God did in our behalf through Jesus Christ that we cannot help but give. We know we could never repay God for what He did, but we can still give out of gratitude.

Conclusion

At times, each of us will be at various stages. We may move up and down at various points in our lives. Our goal, however, should be to focus on Christ and to pour our gratitude to God for the amazing plan He put in place to save us. When our minds are focused there, we will thank Him in many ways, including in our giving.

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