

## **God Will Meet Our Needs as We Give**

Deuteronomy 8:7-18, II Corinthians 9:6-11 and Luke 6:38

Jesus said “give and it will be given to you”. The context of this statement had to do with forgiveness and the way we judge others. We are to be compassionate and generous with our forgiveness of others just as God compassionately and generously forgives us. And if we treat others generously, graciously, and compassionately, these qualities will come back to us in full measure. The same is true for when we give out of our personal resources of money, food, clothing or other items.

During his third missionary journey, Paul had collected money for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem. The churches in Macedonia, (that is Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea) had given money even though they were poor, and they had given more than Paul expected. This was sacrificial giving-they were poor themselves, but they wanted to help. In II Corinthians 8 and 9 the Apostle Paul is writing to the believers in Corinth to remind them of their promise, made a year prior to this, to also send an offering to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. So he was urging them to fulfill a commitment they had already made. And Paul was sending a few men ahead of him to make sure their gift was ready, so it would be a real gift and not look like people had to give under pressure at the last minute. He was holding them accountable to keep their promise, so that neither Paul nor the Corinthians would be embarrassed.

The Corinthian believers excelled in everything-they had faith, good preaching, much knowledge, much earnestness and much love. Paul wanted them to also be leaders in giving. Giving is a natural response of love. Paul did not order the Corinthians to give, but he encouraged them to prove that their love was sincere. We should give out of what we have, not what we don't have. Sacrificial giving must be responsible. We should give generously, but not to the extent that those who depend on us, like family members, must go without having their basic needs met. This takes some discernment because, sometimes, we can allow some of our loved ones to become too dependent on us to their detriment. So we all need to prayerfully discern how much money we should use for loved ones, how much we need for ourselves, and how much we can generously give away to the church or other charitable causes.

There are principles of giving that we can learn from in II Corinthians 8-9. These include 1. Your willingness to give cheerfully is more important than the amount you give; 2. You should strive to fulfill your financial commitments including your promised giving; 3. Each person should give as much as he or she is able; 4. Each person must make up his or her own mind how much to give; 5. You should give as a response to Christ, not for anything you can get out of it; 6. Since God gives to us so that we can give to others, each person should give in proportion to what God has given him or her;

And 7. If you give to others in need, they will likely, in turn, help you when you are in need.

The point of giving is not so much the amount we give, but why and how we give. God does not want gifts given grudgingly. Instead, he wants us to give out of dedication to Christ, love for fellow believers, the joy of helping those in need, as well as the fact that it is simply the good and right thing to do. The kingdom of God will spread through our concern and eagerness to help others. And by joining with other believers to do God's work with various causes, we will increase Christian unity.

People may hesitate to give generously to God if they worry about having enough money left over to meet their own needs. Paul assured the Corinthians that God was able to meet their needs. He talked about sowing sparingly and thus reaping sparingly, and also sowing generously and thus reaping generously. The person who gives only a little will receive only a little in return. We shouldn't let a lack of faith keep us from giving freely and generously.

God gives us resources to use and invest for His kingdom. Paul uses the illustration of seed and harvest to explain that the resources God gives us are not to be hidden, foolishly devoured or thrown away. Instead they should be cultivated in order to produce more crops. When we invest what God has given us in his work, he will provide us with even more to give in his service.

We should not expect to become wealthy through our giving, rather Paul emphasizes the spiritual rewards for those who give generously to God's work. Those who receive our gifts will be helped, they will praise God as a result, and they may pray for us as well. Thus, as we bless others, we will be blessed too.

A couple of weeks ago, I talked about (last week Gary talked about) fully relying on God to meet our needs and I (he) mentioned how the Apostle Paul was so grateful for the way the Philippian Christians had come to his aid and helped him when he was in need. In response to their generosity Paul exclaimed in Philippians 4:19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." That is certainly a rich promise to hold on to. But there are some premises that go along with that promise.

To begin with the verse mentions "glorious riches in Christ", so the premise is that those who benefit from this promise are those "in Christ". From Paul's other letters we can understand that to be "in Christ" means to have a personal relationship with Christ characterized by daily abiding in Him, listening to His voice and obeying His words. To be "in Christ" means to trust and obey. Therefore we can say that this promise of having all our needs provided for is specifically for a trusting and obeying Christian. And that's very important because we live in an age that has mostly forgotten God. Many people seem to live as though they are separate, free, autonomous, self-fulfilling individuals whose lives and futures are entirely in their own hands.

If they accomplish something, it's because their own talents and brains have achieved it. And if they fail, it's because they haven't kept their eye on the ball, or they've been unlucky or the victim of unforeseen circumstances. They believe their days are in their own hands and it's up to them to make something of them. Thus, our society is largely secular with so many living lives apart from the presence of God. They believe God has little hand in what they do or what happens to them. God is absent and forgotten.

This mindset of living apart from God was something that God had specifically warned ancient Israel about. In our reading this morning from Deuteronomy, Moses (speaking for God) warns the people not to become complacent, forgetful and disobedient. Looking ahead to the time when Israel will enter and settle down in the land of Canaan, Moses reminds the people that it's God who will bring them into this rich and abundant land filled with good water and productive land where they'll lack nothing.

But the sad tendency of human nature is to forget God. Yes, we may remember Him and cling to Him during bad times, like when Israel was enslaved or traveling through the wilderness, but when times get easier it's tempting to forget our vital dependency on God. So we don't seek him as earnestly, or we let ourselves be distracted by other things. Then we don't see how we've distanced ourselves from God and we grow to expect abundance and productivity, forgetting to acknowledge that it all comes from God. And we forget to be truly thankful.

When we neglect these things, we lose a sense of gratitude. Instead of finding our joy in God, our joy shifts to things, and instead of a desire to know more of God, we desire more things. So a lack of gratitude can easily lead to idolatry, which is giving something else first place in our hearts instead of God. I think this is exactly what's going on when we begin to question whether God is really providing for all our needs. There may be something that we want so bad that we've been telling God, "I really need that...God when are you going to provide, like your word says?" Of course, God knows our real motives and God won't provide that thing because of our selfish, idolatrous attitude. In that case, instead of complaining because we didn't get what we want, we'd better give thanks that we didn't get what we really deserve!

As Christians we should claim the promise that God will supply all our needs and then ask God to open our eyes to all that he's provided for us. And we should ask God to forgive us from our grumbling, complaining attitude. Gratitude is based on an inner attitude toward life. The Apostle Paul understood this and that's why he was able to be content no matter what his circumstances. He faced all of life with the strength Christ gave him, finding his joy and fulfillment in Christ, not in things. So the principle is, when we are truly "in Christ", God will provide for our needs and we'll be able to recognize it and be thankful.

Philippians 4:19 is Paul's conclusion to his paragraph of thanks to the Philippians for all that they had given him. He wants to assure them that because they had given sacrificially to help him, that God, in turn, will take care of all their needs. So there is a premise to this promise of having all our needs provided for. Within the context of Philippians 4, the premise is that we must first be generous with others. God is not obligated to meet our needs if we're not obeying his commands. In fact, we block the flow of God's blessings by being stingy. But, when we give generously, like the Philippians did, we will find God providing for all our needs.

I remember reading a story once about a young elementary school boy whose class was collecting non-perishable food items to make food baskets to give to needy families for Thanksgiving. Little Tommy took the notice about the food drive home to his mom, and even though Tommy's parents barely made enough to feed their large family, she generously put a few canned goods in a bag for Tommy to take to school the next day. The kids were excited to help pack the food items in baskets for the needy families, and the teacher said she would deliver the baskets to the families the week before Thanksgiving. Just imagine Tommy's surprise when his teacher rang his doorbell and when his mom opened the door they saw that the teacher came to give their family one of the food baskets which contained all the food they needed to prepare a bounteous Thanksgiving feast. Neither Tommy, nor his mom had expected to receive anything after they had generously donated to the food drive, but God had extravagantly provided for their needs.

When was the last time you gave generously, or even sacrificially for the needs of others? How is God calling you to give of your time, money or other resources this holiday season? How ever God is calling you to give, I encourage you to do it generously and cheerfully. We might never fully recognize how God is providing for our needs until we step out in faith and give.