

GIVING IS . . . Part 1**Exodus 25:1-9, 2 Corinthians 9:6-16 and other texts**

Intro: In the summer of 1978, my parents were driving my brother and his fiancé to Navajo Mission in New Mexico. Steve and Debby had come east for the wedding of our very good friend, Allen, to Kathy's sister Darlene (you've heard a lot about that wedding over the past 20 years ☺). Now they were returning to finish out their remaining months of service at the mission. The trip included an obligatory stop in Arkansas to visit my mom's brother, Uncle Kenny.

On this particular trip, my Uncle Kenny gave Steve a 1963 Dodge Dart station wagon so that my parents could stay and visit with him and he would have more time with them. It worked well, Steve and Debby continued on to the mission, and then later that summer returned home to Pennsylvania. A few months later Steve refurbished that rusty old car with meticulous sanding and body work and finally a very nice silver paint job. It was beautifully restored. In 1979, Steve and Debby got married and they drove that car back out to Navajo Mission to continue their service there. Fast forward to May of 1981. Steve and Debby were returning to the mission from Farmington, a distance of about 45 miles, when an oil well water tanker truck lost control in front of them, hitting them broadside and snow plowing their little Dodge Dart, with them huddled in it, through the sagebrush several hundred yards before coming to a stop. They were completely uninjured, but, remember, the car had essentially snow plowed sagebrush and sand into a huge pile, which probably cushioned the impact of the truck, but it also completely destroyed the car. Suddenly Steve and Debby were without a car. This was not a huge issue at the mission since there was a relatively sizable fleet of vehicles at there at the time. But eventually they would need a car.

Transition to Oklahoma City later in the summer of 1981. My brother Kent had been traveling to New Mexico to visit Steven and Debby. He was travelling on a Trailways bus, and during a layover in the Oklahoma City bus station, he woke from sleep and saw a familiar figure coming down the aisle of the bus. It was Warren Hoffman. Warren had been the principal of the school at Navajo Mission, he was a rapidly rising Brethren and Christ leader who had recently planted a church there in Oklahoma City. He went directly to Kent and asked "Are you Kent Tyson?" which Kent acknowledged. Warren continued, "*Connie and I heard Steve and Debby had a car accident and have no car, and we have a car that we want to give to them, and we have been praying how to get that car to the Mission. You are the answer to our prayers.*" Kent got off the bus and the remainder of that trip was in that 1967 Chevy Chevelle (with all the gas for the 700 miles paid by the Hoffmans) and Steve and Debby had a car again. A car they drove for a couple more years.

Warren and Connie could have used that car. They could have sold it and had some extra cash. Instead, they had been praying for someone who might need a car. Then when they found out someone who needed a car, they prayed about a way to get it to New Mexico. They've continued that lifestyle for the past 45 years. It was a prayerful and generous lifestyle that was already in place prior to that time, and it continues to this day. I learned from that giving attitude as I observed it in their life and in the lives of many, many other servants of God who have displayed incredible generosity and faith.

Generous people know that giving is so much more than the offering plate. There is so much more that goes into it and so much satisfaction that comes with it. As you might suspect, I'm going to be talking about what giving is this morning and into next week. You've already seen from what Jay has shared with us that there are many opportunities to give and they open up new avenues for us to exercise our faith and experience the joy of generosity.

There is certainly extensive scriptural basis to generosity and I will be using numerous of these from all through the Bible. We already heard from Chris as she read from Exodus 25 about the directive from God through Moses for giving for the people of Israel. Let me read another scripture where Paul is describing what giving is and I will use it and others in my talks this week and next.

(Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-16)

Before I go further, I want to get some negativity out of the way.

For too many people generosity has a negative connotation. You've heard me say it before, but some pastors would rather preach about sex then preach about giving. I've not found that to be true, I found that generally my congregations, and certainly you here at ABC, are very receptive to hearing what the Bible says about giving. But some people think that all we do is ask for money – which is not true. So it can be negative in their

minds. However, that's not what I'm going to cover here as I begin this talk, instead I'm going to talk about what . . .

Giving is not...

- Giving is not under duress. Paul says in that text I just read to you, *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion*. 2 Corinthians 9:7a. Paul was not above some creative manipulation which you will notice that if you read 2 Corinthians 8 where he begins this discussion, but he didn't put the Corinthians on a guilt trip. What he wanted for them was to prayerfully consider what they should give. Think back to Warren and Connie Hoffman praying about who they could give the car to – that is what Paul's talking about here. Notice in the passage from Exodus 25, God tells Moses to . . . *"Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me"*. Exodus 25:2. Giving is not to be under pressure.
- This is because, giving is not a legalistic requirement. Referring back to Exodus 25:2, the motivation is . . . *every person whose heart is moving him*. God is not saying I'm going to zap you if you don't give. Now, mind you, as the law was developed, the Israelites were to give a tenth of their increase every year – it was called a tithe in the old English. But that requirement didn't continue into the New Testament. Jesus never talked about giving a tithe – the fact is Jesus taught that **everything** we have is actually God's. We'll talk about that more when as we get into what giving actually is.
- Giving is not what you have left. As I said earlier everything we have is God's, so that means as we prayerfully consider what we should give, it shouldn't be the dregs of what's left after we get done with all our **"other"** expenses. Thoughtful and considerate giving, which we'll look at further in these talks, does not mean crumbs. You will be wise to consider all your finances and managing your debt, and other obligations, but giving is never to be the last thing you consider.
- Giving is not a God bribe. God doesn't need what we give. We need to give for the freedom that it brings and all its other benefits we'll look at further here. Just know this: God doesn't need to be bribed. He wants to give to us abundantly in so many ways, so trying to bribe him by giving a big donation does not impress him. It just doesn't work.
- And finally, and it's kind of the same thing as what we just talked about, giving is not, "If I do this God will do that". God doesn't wheel and deal.
- So there are some things that giving is not and certainly there are more, but I want to move into what giving is. I'm not going to get very far with the time I have remaining so I'll finish next week.
- So, here is what . . .

Giving is. . .

- Giving is stewardship. Now, there are lots of things that constitute stewardship. As Christ Followers, we steward many things that God provides for us. We steward our time and use it wisely. We steward God's creation and we need to take care of it. We steward our families and our relationships. But when it comes to giving, we are giving what is actually God's. I mentioned earlier that everything we have is God's, we're taking care of it for him. We, ourselves, are God's possession, and therefore we steward what is his.
- Giving is an act of love. *God so loved the world that he gave. . .* John 3:16 and so do we. God gave everything, and so will I. Our giving is completely transformed when it comes from the love we have for God and the love that we have for everything that is his. Jesus told his disciples on the night before he gave his life for humanity, *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*. John 15:13. When there's that kind of love, giving just happens. We saw it from Jesus and we see it from his heavenly Father, and we have seen it through history from the saints. Giving is an act of love.

Conclusion: Well, it seems rather abrupt, but I need to wrap this up here. I'll finish this talk next week as we look at more of what giving is. In the meantime chew on what I've brought thus far. Amen.