



The Giving Life



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It was the night of the Last Supper, and Jesus was winding down his final conversation with the disciples. Everything he said that evening was with the knowledge he was about to leave them. So he concluded the gathering with an encouraging prayer about things to come: a church that would overcome and be triumphant; a people whose love for each other would be a testimony to the world; a divine power and authority flowing through his followers; and the glory of the Father resting on his people. These were all things Jesus would give to his church through the Holy Spirit.

Think about what Jesus had already done. In three years of ministry he healed the sick, restored eyesight to the blind, raised the dead, miraculously fed huge crowds, preached the good news to the poor, and taught the masses the truth about their heavenly Father. It's an amazing list of accomplishments by the Son through his obedience to the Father's will.

Christ makes clear that all of this was a result of the Father's giving nature. In his prayer in John 17, one word comes up more than any other: "give." "Father, you have given me...you have given them...I have given them..." In the space of 26 verses, Jesus uses some form of the word "give" 17 times.

The first thing we notice in this amazing prayer is how often and generously the Father gives. It's in his nature to give good gifts to his children. And when he sent his Son, he listed all that he would give him: "I'll give you the power and authority of my name. I'll give you the people of the earth. I'll give you words to speak and works to accomplish. And I will give you my glory."

In turn, we see that Jesus has the same giving nature as his Father. In fact, his prayer recounts all the things Christ had already given his disciples—and the things he would continue to give! This passage powerfully spotlights the giving nature at the center of God's heart.

In a sense, that evening Jesus gave the disciples his last will and testament. He was saying, "I established my kingdom by giving. And here's how I want my kingdom to continue through you." The last thing he gave his followers before leaving was a particular calling—the calling to give. We all have been adopted into a giving lifestyle.

It is the Father's nature to give. And like any child who grew up in a giving home, Jesus shares his Father's giving nature. Now Jesus was calling on us to carry on the family name through a giving life.

To do this, Christ supplies us with a powerful image at the Last Supper. He lifts up the bread and the wine and says, "This bread is my body, broken for you. And this cup is my blood, poured out for you." Note what Jesus then does with the bread: He blesses it, breaks it and gives it. In doing this, Christ demonstrates to us what a poured-out life looks like: It is blessed. It is broken. And it is given away. That's what it looks like to be a son or daughter of the living God.

This is the central difference between the average human being, whose primary aim is to meet his own needs, and someone who has found out life's purpose and pours himself out for others. In Christ, we are called to move from a "getting" life to a "giving" life. Jesus empowers this transition for us in the Spirit, replacing our worldly spirit with

his own godly Spirit. He tells us, “You have been blessed by me. And now you are meant to give those blessings away.”

This is a glorious theology—but it’s the hardest transition we will ever make in life. Over the past few years the top-selling Christian books have focused on the “getting” side of life. Their central theme is how God longs to bless his children. We know that’s true of God because of his giving nature; he wants to open the windows of heaven to pour out his mighty resources on us. He does indeed want to bless our marriage, our health, our finances. So these best-selling books have their place, and I admit I’ve drawn help from some of them myself.

But there’s something missing in these books. It is this: There is something much better than a blessed life of getting—and that is a broken life of giving. A getting life is easy; a giving life is difficult—and rewarding.

Remember: He blessed. He broke. He gave away. Often in the church this process breaks down after the first step. Many Christians don’t get past the blessing part. They don’t allow their lives to be broken before God, so they never make it to the last step—giving. Thus they never see the fulfillment of God’s purpose in blessing us. Jesus first meets us as needy children.

Christ often begins his ministry to us as if we’re children with needs to be met. This happens throughout the gospels as he restores the blind man’s sight, heals the bleeding woman and feeds the hungry crowds. He meets suffering people right where they are and gives them just what they need. This was reason enough for people to follow him. Even some of the Pharisees followed Christ because of his miracles.

I personally was convinced to follow Jesus after he met my deepest need. As a teenager I became uncertain whether God was real. I knew that I had descended from a long line of ministers going back several generations; so how did I know my faith wasn’t just indoctrination from my parents? I wondered, “If I were born in China, would I be a Buddhist?” Jesus came to me in my hurting soul and showed me what I needed to know: that Buddha didn’t love me, nor did Mohammed or Confucius— but Jesus did. He revealed to me the pure truth of his love. And it turned my life around.

Jesus does bless us in our time of need. But, you see, that’s only his starting place in our lives. He takes us from blessedness to brokenness because it’s the only way to bring us to real maturity. The broken path is how we begin to take on his giving nature.

Let’s face it, our flesh hates the thought of a giving life because it requires brokenness. Think about all those bestsellers whose titles imply blessings. Now imagine a different title on the shelves, this one called *The Giving Life*. You think, “I want to be a giver,” so you flip through the pages. You read of Paul, who speaks of being shipwrecked, beaten and stoned because he was called to give. You read of the other apostles who were persecuted because Jesus called them to a giving life. As you read along you soon realize, “This is not going to be a bestseller.”

That much was proven in Jesus’ day. The crowds stopped following him when he began preaching difficult truths (see John 6). When the people turned for the exits, “Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God’” (John 6:67-69).

Jesus’ question puts us in the same position as the disciples: We have to trust that he is good and faithful. You see, we don’t get to choose the agenda for our lives. If we did, we’d all be getters, not givers. That’s why Jesus sets the agenda. And with every hard direction he leads us, we can be sure he does so in love. The agenda Jesus left with Peter was a command to give: “Feed my sheep.”

When Jesus appeared to the disciples after the Resurrection, he imparted one final lesson. It began when he asked Peter whether the disciple loved him. He posed this question to Peter three times, and every time Peter answered yes. In turn, Jesus responded each time, “Feed my lambs,” “Tend my sheep,” “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

The word for love that Jesus uses here is the Greek *agape*, indicating selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love. This kind of love says, “If you despise me, I will give to you. If you reject me, I will still give to you. And if you hurt me, I will keep on giving to you.”

Yet when Peter answered Jesus, he used a different word for love. Each time he pledged his love to Christ he used the word *phileo*, indicating brotherly love. This kind of love is mutual—it gets as well as gives. Peter was saying, in essence, “As you give to me, I’ll give to you.”

That response wasn’t sufficient for Jesus. It’s why he answered Peter each time, “If you love me, feed my sheep.” He was saying, “My people need help, Peter. Tend to them. Feed them. Give your life for them.”

Jesus was commissioning Peter to a giving life. He knew the disciple was up for it because in the preceding weeks Peter had been broken deeply. What Jesus tells him next describes the very crux of the giving life— brokenness: “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.’ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ‘Follow me’” (John 21:18-19).

Jesus was purposefully transitioning Peter’s life.

With this final teaching, Jesus led Peter from a blessed life to a broken, giving life. In doing so, he handed Peter the very keys to the kingdom. Ahead for Peter were pain, anguish and sorrow in the giving life God laid out for him. Yet as John’s gospel tells us here, even Peter’s death brought glory to God.

Friend, you and I may not get to do what we want in this life. We may not have the best life that all those bestsellers promise. But we can have a life that reflects the glory of our Lord’s giving nature. By giving your all for others with *agape*, you may find yourself being poured out painfully like communion wine. But in doing so you will become other-centered, powerful, influential—and the world will see the difference. Your giving life will reveal God’s own glory—a witness to the world of his generous, loving nature. Amen!

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