

21

Give Cheerfully

“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:7-8)

What is your first recollection of giving a gift? For me it was when I was seven years old. It was Christmas time. The family would be gathering together, and I wanted to give some gifts. I went to the local hardware store in town with money burning a hole in my pocket. I remember searching the aisles—not an easy task for a seven-year-old’s budget, especially considering that there were ten gifts to purchase. Finally, there was the perfect gift—# 2 pencils. (Have you ever wondered why, if they are the most popular pencil, they are still # 2?) Sorry—anyway, those pencils would do the trick. I can remember like it was yesterday coming home with my gifts. I was as pleased with my purchase as if I had just purchased a new car. I wrapped them up individually, and on Christmas Eve night gave them to my family. I was laughing with glee and delight. It was just so much fun.

That picture is the one that God longs to see within us when we offer Him or His people our gifts.

“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Greek word for “cheerful” is where we get the word “hilarious.” God loves hilarious giving. The joy and delight I had in giving those #2 pencils is what He looks for in the gifts I offer Him and others today.

I would imagine that this is the type of joy He saw in the Magi on their journey to find the Christ born in Bethlehem. Of all those

involved in the birth of Christ, those who we traditionally place at the manger, I find myself increasingly intrigued by these “Magi from the east.” How long was their journey? As they followed that glorious star—a star that apparently moved along with them as it would eventually “*stop over the place where the child was*” (Matthew 2:9)—what was their expectation or, better said, who was their expectation?

Somewhere along the journey the star either parked over Jerusalem or was hid from their view. I wonder if they were surprised when they asked for directions and the religious leaders of Jerusalem knew nothing about this. Even more so, when they gave directions doesn’t it surprise you that not one of the religious leaders went with them? It was only a seven-mile journey. Yet, I find this detour in Jerusalem to be enlightening.

In the end, what guided them to Jesus was not the star but the Word. It was the Word to which the chief priests turned in determining the location of His birth. That says volumes to me. It is the Word of God, ultimately, that reveals the Christ. Other things in the world can get us curious, but in the end it is the Word that will guide us to Him.

Given these directions, they set out on their journey. The star appears again. Seeing it, they are overjoyed. I could even picture them laughing merrily as they realized they were so close. Never mind the fact that Bethlehem is a small, insignificant town. They had probably imagined Jerusalem. This news would not lessen their joy.

Then the star stopped right over the house. (What kind of star is this? How close does it have to be to the ground in order to be so pointed in its guidance?) At long last, they arrived. Their journey covered thousands of miles and who knows how many months or even years. The knock at the door. Can you imagine the surprise? There before the Magi was a young, relatively poor couple, not the royalty they might have expected. Now at their door, standing in front of them, are Magi. Gentiles. Dressed in full regalia with caravan in tow. Gentiles wanting to come into the house of a Jewish couple to see and worship the child.

It may not have been easy for Joseph to invite them inside. No upright Jewish man would easily invite a Gentile into his home. They would be the first of a long and continuous line of “outcasts” who would want to see Jesus. Joseph would be the first of a long line of believers who would open his heart and home to those wanting to worship Christ.

As they entered,

“ . . . they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh ” (Matthew 2:11).

What they discovered was probably different than what they expected. The disinterest of the religious leaders of His own nation may have discouraged them, but when they saw the star reappear, “*they were overjoyed*” (v. 10). Nothing would hold them back from worshipping the King and presenting Him with their expensive gifts. They had followed a star that held out glorious promise. What they discovered may have been different than what they expected. Yet, they gave of themselves and their gifts with overflowing joy. They gave with hilarious cheerfulness.

This is a lesson I want to apply to my life this day, and each day for that matter. There are times when it feels the daily journey of life

is long. Sometimes, at the end of the journey, it is not always as I expected. Things are not as glorious as they might have appeared. The reaction of those around me can be discouraging and negative. In those moments, I want to be like the Magi—overflowing with joy. I want to hold nothing back and fall down before Him and worship Him and offer Him my gifts. Then, like the Magi, I want to go on from there another way—my life changed and different for having worshipped Him, my heart filled to overflowing with joy.

I believe that our life in Christ, as Christ intended it, is to be filled with joy. Jesus said,

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11).

God loves cheerful, hilarious givers because it is a reflection of a life that overflows with joy, even when life is not what we expected. Dallas Willard wrote,

“How many people are radically and permanently repelled from The Way by Christians who are unfeeling, stiff, unapproachable, boringly lifeless, obsessive, and dissatisfied? Yet such Christians are everywhere, and what they are missing is the wholesome liveliness springing from a balanced vitality within the freedom of God’s loving rule. Spirituality wrongly understood or pursued is a major source of human misery and rebellion against God” (p.80).

Who of us has not seen enough of grouchy, unhappy and complaining Christians? Spirituality rightly understood, as it is rooted in His abundant grace and mercy, is the source of abounding joy and hope. It is not about having a positive attitude, as though we can effect the change. He is the One who provides us with the joy, the resources and the opportunities to be hilarious in our life and in our giving.

One last thought about those pencils. The money used to buy them? Mom and Dad.

They gave me the money that I used to buy them their gifts and gifts for the rest of the family. That is precisely what God is willing and waiting to do for us today. As Christ lives in each of us, His love will transform our hearts and fill us with joy and provide us with opportunities for hilarious giving to Him and to others.

Prayer: Jesus, throughout this day, help me to be filled with joy. No matter the moment, be it disappointing or better than I ever expected, let me know the joy of your presence in my life. When you provide me with the opportunity to give of myself to others, let my cheerfulness in giving border on a holy hilarity that will call their attention to you. I want nothing less, Jesus, than for you to receive the glory and praise for anything that I accomplish or give in this day. **Amen.**

Challenge: Where in your life has God been asking you to give of yourself but your offering has lacked a cheerful spirit? What impact would it have if your spirit in giving were to be changed?

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 8 and 9

From the Book of Concord: “In other cases (as in 2 Cor. 9:7, in the Epistle of Saint Paul to Philemon, and in 1 Peter 5:2), ‘from necessity’ means what is wrung from people against their will, through coercion or in some other way, that they act outwardly, as a pretense, but indeed without and against their own will. For God does not want to have such hypocritical works. Instead, the people of the New Testament are supposed to be a willing people (Ps. 110:3), and ‘to sacrifice with a free will’ (Ps. 54:6), not reluctantly or under compulsion, ‘but from obedient hearts’ (2 Cor. 9:7; Rom. 6:17). For ‘God loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Cor. 9:7). In this sense and meaning it is right to say and teach that those whom the Son of God has freed do true good works freely or from a free and willing spirit . . .” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article IV, p. 577.17-18).

In Your Own Words: Write below or in the margins the key thought or lesson you have learned in this chapter on Give and/or a thought you would like to explore further.