

THE COMMANDS OF CHRIST—WEEK 8

Give: Matt. 6:1-4, 19-21

Give. Be honest—does that word make you slightly uncomfortable when you hear it? Do you picture televangelists calling for you to plant a “faith seed?” Or, maybe you picture a one-eyed dog shivering in the snow while Sarah McLaughlin sings, “I will remember you.” I imagine we all at some point have had a negative experience with giving. Yet, Christ clearly commands us to give. In Matt. 6, Jesus does not say, “if you give”; He says, “when you give.” Being generous is a key component of being a true Christ-follower. So, why is giving so important?

True Generosity Reflects a Rightfully Oriented Heart:

To truly understand what Jesus is addressing in the first 4 verses of Matt. 6, you must read the end of Matt. 6. In verse 21 we read, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” In other words, your checkbook reflects your outlook. Whether we want to admit it or not, one of the best indicators of our priorities is how we invest our money. Are we focused on temporal things, or eternal things? Homes, cars, IRAs, and vacations are all good things. They are things to be enjoyed. But, as Tim Keller says, “Idolatry is taking a good thing and making it an **ultimate** thing.” God is the only One who should be the ultimate in our lives. When our pursuit of stuff interferes with our pursuit of Him, then our hearts are off course.

Giving serves as an internal navigator, correcting our course and priorities until they properly align with those of our Heavenly Father. When we give, we necessarily must lay aside something else on which we could spend that money. We are sacrificing our wants and priorities in order to align ourselves with the Father. Additionally, giving pushes us into greater faith and trust in the promises of God. It is easy to trust God when my bank account is flush. It is much more difficult to trust Him when I don’t know how I’m going to pay next month’s bills.

True Generosity Has the Right Motivation:

In the first few verses of Matt. 6, Jesus addressed the motivation for giving. At that time, there was a culture of ungenerous giving. Religious and political leaders of the day made a show of giving, but they were far from generous. They gave to promote their political brand or to increase their community standing. But in their hearts, they cared little for God or others. Jesus called His followers to something more.

Thankfulness is a key theme in Scripture. In fact, the word or concept is mentioned at least 144 times. By its very nature, thankfulness calls us to focus outside of ourselves. It calls us to adore God for who He is and all He has done for us. And, it motivates us to express that thankfulness in generosity towards God and others. It is impossible to be stingy with a thankful heart, and it is impossible to be self-absorbed with a thankful heart.

The amazing part of this passage is that there is a bold promise from Jesus. Jesus promises that if we are willing to trust God and give with the right motivation, the Father will reward us. Jesus doesn’t specify what that reward might be—this is not a promise of earthly riches—but it is a promise of reward, nonetheless. We have a good, good Father. Let’s see how He rewards our thankfulness for and trust in Him.

Questions:

1. Do you struggle with the command to give? Why?
2. Are there good things in your life that you have made ultimate things? How can you correct that?
3. Take turns in your group listing things you are thankful for. How does thankfulness change your attitude?
4. How can you be more generous? Are there things (time, talent, treasure) that you could leverage for the Kingdom that you are currently keeping for yourself?