

## SPIRIT OF GIVING

Dec. 22, 2002

Christmas is a time that the world sets aside to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Although we realize the date is incorrect, that it really was about Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, we can still join with all whose hearts are in the attitude of love and appreciation toward God for his gift of sending his beloved Son Jesus, to be our redeemer.

In addition however, we realize it was about this time of year that our Lord as the Logos left the glory of the heavenly courts when his life principle was transferred to the womb of Mary. What a sacrifice for him who was the fathers delight for billions of years, to leave his fathers presence, his glorious spirit nature to become a babe in Bethlehem.

As Paul expressed it in 2 Cor. 8:9

“Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

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This season has become a time of joyful family gatherings, beautiful music, children laughing with excitement, and a time of gift giving.

The habit of giving little remembrances one to another seems especially appropriate. For it's a reminder to us of how God is the great giver of every good and perfect gift. That he is continually giving and we are continually receiving.

So we thought it would be well for us to consider today this principal of giving which is one of the very foundations of God's being.

God's laws reflect His generous character. Notice going way back in Lev. 19:9-10 God's law to Israel:

“When you harvest your crops, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners who live among you, for I, the Lord, am your God.”

He was teaching Israel to share – to give to others – to be generous.

Notice as we reflect on a few scriptures how it is God's desire for all of us to more and more manifest this same spirit of giving – of sharing.

Ac 20:35 ...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Mt 10:8 Freely ye have received, freely give.

Pr 11:25 NAS The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.

Prov. 21:26 The righteous man giveth and spareth not.

There are many other scriptures – in all of them we see God's strong admonishment of how he would be pleased for us all to live lives that ever strive to be aware of others needs, having a desire to help if we can. The spirit of giving of our selves to help others, is what agape love is all about.

The spirit of giving has many forms. We can give a gift. We can give of our time. We can give of our means. We can give encouragement. We can give a pleasant smile. We can give our shoulder for one to cry on. We can give our hearts. We can give our prayers. We can send a card. We can give a phone call. We can send flowers.

But in all these forms of giving, what is implied, is it takes conscious effort of thought on our part. One must be contemplative, ever watching and then choose to be an instrument to help bless another, or be used in God's service.

It's something that just doesn't happen by itself. It's something we must gradually develop. Our fallen flesh by itself has a tendency to be thinking primarily of ourselves, of our own well being, our own happiness or lack thereof.

It's so easy if not careful, for the flesh to want to dwell just on ourselves, our families, our material needs, our finances, our happiness. Or again our flesh could dwell on our loneliness, our lack of funds, our heavy work schedule, our lack of a nice home or car, our many aches and pains; - and if not careful, the flesh can become so engrossed in itself, or in a form of self pity, that rarely does it want us to think of others.

Here is where the new creature must step in and take control. To grab hold of our flesh and give it a shaking and reprimand. To remind our flesh though our lives may not be all sunshine, we have oh so many countless blessings.

God wants us to dwell on the positive not the negative. To think of our blessings. To think about countless others that have less than we, or greater hardships than we, and then become involved in helping and encouraging them.

Having a concern for others, followed by the spirit of giving of ourselves to bless them, is not only a beautiful manifestation of Christian Love, but it brings us a rich blessing as well.

Even as Jesus told us, "To Give is better than to receive!" Oh, how nice it is to receive an unexpected gift or encouragement. But to be the instrument of bringing the blessing to another, is even so much grander.

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In Ps 50:10 we're told God is the owner of everything he has created throughout the universe.

"For every beast of the forest [is] mine, [and] the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field [are] mine."

Since God is the owner and giver of all things, we realize we all are but stewards or managers of **His** Goods. God has placed us as stewards over all the things we have. It is not OUR home, OUR car, OUR money. It would be best not to think of these things as OUR possessions. They all belong to God. God has only placed us as stewards over them. Thus he expects us as his stewards to utilize what we need for our basic needs, and then as his stewards to use the excess to be the means of blessings others of his children.

A beautiful example of this is found in 2 Cor. 8 The brethren in Jerusalem we're evidently very poor and suffering need. Notice how the brethren in Macedonia who were in poverty themselves exercised their stewardship over what God had placed in their hands.

- 1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.
- 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.
- 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,
- 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

Then in verse 7 he adds “But just as you excel in everything— in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

Verse 12 “For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

13 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.

Paul continues in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter, “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

What a lesson. Though in poverty themselves the brethren in Macedonia pleaded for the privilege of sharing what little they had, to help their poorer brethren. Paul commended them richly for it showed it was a test of the sincerity of their love.

As the occasion demands may we follow their example. For just as in the natural body, so in the spiritual, when one part of the body has a need, we all have a need until that part is supplied through the giving of others.

God literally gives and blesses others through his children, through one another, yes through each of us. Notice how the next two sets of scriptures bring this same thought to our attention.

James 2:14-17 NAS

- 14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?
- 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,
- 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?
- 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead.

1John 3:16-18

- 16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
- 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?
- 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

If one finds themselves absolutely unmoved by the spiritual, or temporal needs of their brethren, then it's a danger sign, somehow the love of God is not being manifested in their heart as it should. As John says, “Our love must not be just in word or tongue, but in deed and truth.”

God does not intend for us to only be concerned with ourselves, or with stockpiling material “treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and

steal,” but rather God intends for in reality what are HIS possessions, to flow out from us towards where there is a need. Whether it be for his children or for letting the light of truth to shine throughout the earth, to bless others with a knowledge of God’s wondrous plan for all mankind.

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I read a **true** story once about a little boy that well illustrates the principal of giving I’d like to share with you.

There was a little girl who was suffering from a rare and serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her 5-year old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness.

The doctor explained the situation to her little brother, and asked the little boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. He hesitated for only a moment before taking a deep breath and saying,

“Yes, I’ll do it if it will save her.”

As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister he smiled, seeing the color returning to her cheeks. Then his face suddenly grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, “Will I start dying right away?”

You see, being young, the little boy had misunderstood the doctor; he thought he was going to have to give **ALL** of his **blood** in order to save her.

A beautiful true story that illustrates the spirit of giving in but a 5 year old youngster.

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The concept of giving of oneself to help others is a divine principle that’s applicable to everyone in this room, from children, to young people, to adults and seniors. We all have something we can give of ourselves to help others. Whether it be to our friends, our family, our brethren, or and at times to the world.

Lets consider how we can be instrumental in teaching this principal to children at an early age, for you recall how Prov. 22:6 tells us:

“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

At this time of year in particular most children’s minds dwell mostly on getting gifts, rather than giving. Our society as a whole has developed an almost frenzied atmosphere to give children at Christmas time as much as we possibly can.

Many parents may think back to their childhood when times were much harder. Economic conditions were such that we were happy even though our gifts were only clothes we needed. But oh, how we wished we could have had some toys and recreational things as well.

Because of this, there may be a tendency to feel we want to give our children so much more that what we received. Loving our children dearly, we want to show them how much, by giving all that we can, at times even till it hurts to make them happy.

Sometimes, pressure of what other parents do for their children can contribute to our having feelings of a bit of guilt if we don't do likewise. And so the process can continue year after year thru the teen age and college years.

May we be careful and judicious in our gift giving, so as not to go overboard to such a degree at times, as to actually be detrimental.

Is that possible? I think so. If a child comes to expect they will continually receive their **every wish**, it could easily give them an unrealistic outlook, of what the reality of life will actually be for them.

Speaking now as one who was raised in the depression era, I can tell you we rarely if ever had a toy unless we made one ourselves, or purchased one with our own money from the paper route we had. But I can honestly say the hardship in no way was detrimental. But rather, I believe it actually had a positive effect. It taught us that If we desired certain things, we would have to work for them and it helped us appreciate the value of money.

Thus contrary to general belief, a measure of hardship can be beneficial, while the opposite of being given our every wish, is what could be detrimental.

Think carefully as to whether granting your children's every wish is what is really best for them.

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What could be a help for children to develop the spirit of giving while they are still young? With this thought in mind let me make a suggestion.

Periodically, perhaps weekly, give them something that you want them to give to someone perhaps less fortunate. It could be a quarter, a cookie, a piece of fruit, a coloring book, or what ever.

Then at the end of the day, have a discussion with them about who they gave it to, the reason why, expressing your approval for their desire to help others.

A touching example of the spirit of giving, is a Hallmark Commercial where a little boy comes home with a card from his teacher. His mother notices the card and inquires of the boy as to what the card is for. He says "it's nothing." The mother opens the card and it reads something like "Thank you for what you did, you didn't have to do it." - signed by his teacher. The mother inquired as to what he did and he said "I've been staying in at recess time with Johnny who cannot go out to play because he cannot walk."

The little boy gave of himself – he shared his time to make someone else happy.

Another suggestion might be - this Christmas you may want to offer two wrapped gifts to your children, with the understanding that they are to choose only one without opening them, and the other they were to give to another, their neighbor or friend or who ever, perhaps one less privileged than themselves.

If the present they have to give to another happens to be the play station they always wanted, it will no doubt hurt a little at first,

But notice how you will be giving them a start on the road that leads to a different type of joy, the kind that can only come from living a life of caring about others, and exercising the spirit of giving.

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Encouraging the spirit of giving of oneself would also apply to our young people and young adults. We are blessed to have so many of you in our Class. It lifts the spirit of us old-timers to be with you and see your love for the Lord. Perhaps we do not express it often enough, but we love you for it, and it is a joy to have you with us.

At this time of your life I'm sure many of you are wondering what career you should choose. What we choose to do with our lives, is a very vital question. We all know and sympathize with you; it's really a hard decision.

But try to remember, as important as making a living is, it's only incidental to what this life is all about, which is developing a heart disposition, a character that will be yours for not just a few years of this life, but for all eternity.

We pray God will help you in choosing what would be good for you and pleasing to him.

But what ever career you choose, do strive to have as an underlining principal of your life, a spirit that cares about others, a spirit of giving of your self to help others in need. As you do you will be richly blessed.

Start now with the little things. You know, some of our society frown on politeness. We pray it will never be so with any of you. Stand up for the principals you've been taught. Show the proper spirit to others. Politeness is a form of caring, of giving of your self, for the benefit of others.

Hold the door open for others. Help in carrying someone's packages. Giving up your seat on a buss for someone elderly or handicapped. When going to the store, stop at your elderly neighbors to see if you can get them something. Help someone having difficulty climbing the stairs. Be a mentor 1 hour a week to one of your younger school mates having difficulty with math or learning to read or whatever. Give one your favorite things to the youngster who has next to nothing. When you see his face beam, you will be blest.

Be sensitive to the needs of your parents – give of yourself - whether it be to help with tasks around the house because both parents need to work – whether it be to help financially with college expenses, or just general expenses when times are a little harder. They have given you much – this gives you an opportunity to give to them. Be aware of their needs – surprise them by giving them of your time and talents and consideration of the financial circumstances of their lives.

If you keep your eye open to look for opportunities of giving of your self, you will find them all about you. As you gradually develop more and more the habit of giving, you will truly come to the realization that "To give is truly better than to receive." That "He that waters others will be watered themselves," oh, not from a standpoint of material gain, but from an inner satisfaction that comes, when you know you've done something that helps another and pleases your creator.

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Thus far we've been considering mostly the giving of temporal needs. But there are many other forms of giving. In fact we might be inclined to say the very best and most memorable gifts of all, are the intangible gifts of the heart.

They are the gifts that come from within ourselves and would cover all age groups. They are gifts of time, love, kindness, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, smiles, gifts of listening, gifts of giving just a shoulder to cry on.

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Let's consider a few of these other ways in which we can give of ourselves.

Someone becomes sick. Perhaps they're in the hospital. We can send them not just one card, but periodic cards to cheer them up. We can visit them. When they come home from the hospital, we can bring them a pot of chicken soup, or lasagna, or what have you. Anything to show them "You care, you love them, you wish them God's blessings.

And when there is a long prolonged illness, the caregivers are often the ones worn out the most. How nice to offer them to be a caregiver for a day or more, so they could have some time of rest.

Think of those who have no means of transportation. What a blessing to have someone offer to take them to the store, to the doctor or dentist or what have you.

I've often thought it would be nice if we had a volunteer list of those who were available and at what times of the day or week, who would be willing to help in ways of transportation for others who are shut in. Then those who had need would feel free to ask those who were available for help.

You know for the most part, Christmas is a happy occasion especially when there are young children filled with laughter and excitement. But you know for some it's not so happy. Especially when one is alone or lost their spouse and only memories linger of past blessings.

Try to remember them in little ways of giving them a call, inviting them to dinner and home gatherings, talk about past blessings you shared with their loved one. Make them feel as being a part of your enlarged family in the Lord.

Not only at Christmas times, but throughout the year.

We're not saying we have to do big things – they can be little things for we are all in different circumstances. We recall the story of the widow's mite.

The lesson is the amount we give is not what is important. Those who were rich gave from their abundance and it cost them next to nothings. She put in only a penny, which was really next to nothing, but from God's standpoint it will never be forgotten, for it was all she had.

What matters most in the eyes of God is the hearts intent. If there is a burning desire of caring and wanting to be a blessing to others, that is what counts above all else.

And when we give to others let us remember "Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting."

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Another way of giving of ourselves is in witnessing.

Free tracts are available in however many tens of thousands you would like. And as Bro. Bruno Hack once said, tracting is sure is better and cheaper than going to a health club.

Something the brethren may not be aware of is the Dawn is making available 4 of the color booklets we print to be available to any brethren free of charge for personal distribution.

The booklets are "Hope For A Fear Filled World," "Why God Permits Evil," "When A Man Dies," and "How God Answers Prayer." We'll have a large supply here shortly. We would encourage brethren to have booklets with them where ever they go and to profusely distribute them as far and wide as possible.

Send one with each Christmas card. Send one with each gas, electric, phone and insurance bills you pay. Pin up a "Take one holder" on the grocery bulletin boards where you shop, and keep it filled with booklets.

At Christmas time you may be thinking of what kind of gift to give to your teacher, neighbor, or relative not in the truth. What could be better than a gift of truth? The First Volume, - only a dollar. A set of Volumes, or another nice gift could be the Photo Drama Of Creation that was recently reprinted with all 4 pictures illustrating each page of truth.

Another avenue of witnessing is helping to provide the witness materials. If anyone would be interested to work at the press one or more days a week feel free to volunteer. We have all types of work. We have some older sisters in their 70's and 80's who never worked on machinery, but greatly enjoying coming in to work in the harvest field.

Others types of work are more complex for which we could use some additional help as well, such as folding, binding, printing and video editing. We especially have a need for someone who would be willing to learn to operate our 2 color printing press one day a week.

And brethren what benefits. Free training will be provided, and the pay is fantastic! The initial weekly pay is really great, but the bonus to follow is absolutely out of this world.

Seriously we could really use a pressman or I might even say a press person.

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Every act of giving whether large or small, we are assured is being taken account of in the courts of heaven, and will have a compensating blessing.

Jesus said in Mt 10:42 NIV "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Pr 11:25 The liberal soul, shall he enriched, and, he that refresheth, shall himself also be refreshed.

Pr 22:9 NIV "A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor."

Lu 6:38 NAS "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, [and] running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.

Jerm. 32:18-19 O great and powerful God, whose name is the LORD Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve.

"Thus every act of giving whether large or small, God takes note of, and will bless.

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We might digress here for a moment to consider the opposite aspect of Giving, which is to be at times a gracious receiver.



You know for most of our lives we find ourselves being somewhat self sufficient, giving to our children, our families, our brethren. Then almost suddenly you realize things are starting to change, things you used to do easily are getting harder, arthritis starts taking it's toll, hearing gets poorer, eyesight begins to dim. Could it be I'm growing old?

Others want to carry a package for you, help you out of the car, buy groceries for you, and somehow it doesn't feel right. I shouldn't need help, I want to help others as I've always done. Why are they doing this? I'm perfectly capable.

When this time comes for you, don't reject it. Don't deprive others of the great blessing they receive of expressing the "Spirit of giving" to you. For indeed if you do refuse it, you would actually be depriving them of one of life's richest blessings. For indeed as Jesus said, IT IS more blessed to GIVE than to receive."

So accept it graciously. Think of it as one of the blessed side effects, of having entered into "The Golden Years," when you could be a blessing, by merely being the recipient of others bouquets of love.

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Though the scriptures are filled with many admonishments about having a spirit of giving, they also have one caution.

Matt. 6:1-4

- 1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
- 2 Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
- 3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:
- 4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

What our Lord is saying, is that it's important to have the right motive in our giving. If the motive is one of pride to show others how great we are because we give to others, to call attention to ourselves and our great generosity, then the giving in the sight of God is of little value.

Our Lord is suggesting that it may be well to avoid any tendency in this direction to actually give our gifts anonymously, so not even our left hand knew what our right hand did, that is no one could ever know what we did.

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The year 2003 is just ahead of us. How much of ourselves will we be willing to give in the New Year? As we consider this year and take inventory of our past and present giving of self = we need to ask ourselves "Am I happy with it? – Is God happy with it?"

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Finally we would like to speak about the greatest gift of all that you can give.

God's admonition to each of us:  
"My son, give me thine heart."

Some of us in this room Love the Lord, are living a righteous life, are teaching your children the principles of Gods word, are even living a life of giving, but there's one more step required to have the full spirit of giving.

The giving of ourselves, our hearts, in full consecration to God

Perhaps you've felt of late our heavenly father calling you, whispering in your ear as it were, "My Son, my son give me thine heart."

With the words of the apostle Paul we encourage you.

We beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, [which is] your reasonable service.

May God help each of us to fulfill the spirit of giving in this fullest sense.