

Show-Me Your Gratitude: Give

Hebrews 13:15-16

In the musical *My Fair Lady*, an exasperated Eliza Doolittle bursts into song at one point to chide the men who all talk of love, but will not act: “Don’t talk of stars burning above! If you’re in love, *show me!* Tell me no dreams filled with desire. If you’re on fire, *show me!*”

A hundred or so years earlier in 1805, Jeremiah Ingles had expressed in a hymn the same thought, only about our love for God: “I love thee, I love thee, and that thou dost know; but how much I love thee my actions will show.”

But eighteen centuries earlier Jesus put the same truth just as memorably and with an extra punch: “Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does* the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt.7:21). And John the Apostle echoed in 1 John 3:18, “Let us love not in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth.”

Clearly, the Bible teaches us that we should express our love for God or for other human beings by what we do and not just by what we say. We Missourians are particularly fond of that philosophy of action. We challenge one another and our whole country to *show me!*

God’s command to Christians is just as simply and powerfully put. It is tempting for us to count on the worship hour or our times of personal devotional thought to say and pray words of thanksgiving to God, piling on descriptions of how grateful we are, when what God says to us is, *show me!* And one of the most basic and practical ways to demonstrate our gratitude to God is to *give* to make regular and proportionate offerings to the work and mission of the church.

Hebrews 13:15-16 makes an interesting statement about the heart of the Christian’s response of gratitude to God. Those verses tell us this:

15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

(Summary of verses)

In these verses, Hebrews counsels Christians to offer thanksgiving to God by praising him, by doing good, and by being generous in his service.

(Thesis of this message)

More than simple words, a Christian's thanksgiving must be demonstrated in worshipful acts of love and the ministry of giving.

(Goal of this message)

When we read and understand this message in Hebrews, every one of us should respond to the blessing of God by the return of our lives and means in benevolence and giving. And above all other biblical practices of giving rises the measure of the tithe; giving to the work of the church a tenth of all God blessings.

Giving is the Christian's Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

One of the basic Biblical reasons we should give is that giving is the Christian's sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Hebrews 13:16 says we shouldn't forget to communicate (KJV), or share (NIV). This word *communicate* is *koinonias* in Greek, the same as the New Testament word for *fellowship*. Here it means to be generous, or to give. What's fascinating is that Lev.7:11 uses the Hebrew equivalent of *koinonia* to describe the sacrifice of thanksgiving the Jews were to give God. In both the Old Testament and the New, thanking God by giving to His kingdom's work is a primary way of enriching our fellowship with Him.

Hebrews 13:16 then leaves no debate about the connection between the Old Testament sacrifice of thanksgiving and the New Testament practice of generous giving. It says that doing good and giving are sacrifices with which God is highly pleased.

In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe was stranded all alone on an island after being the only survivor of a shipwreck. Cannibals from nearby islands arrived one day. They had captured an enemy of another tribe and were planning to eat him. Crusoe, who was well armed, killed the cannibals and rescued their captive. In gratitude, the man vowed total and lifelong submission to Crusoe. His life, which was about to be taken by cannibals, became a living sacrifice to his savior, Robinson Crusoe. Crusoe named him Friday because that was the day on which the deliverance took place.

According to traditional reckoning, Christ died for our sins on good Friday two millennia ago, and rose the third day to make possible our salvation from sin's devouring destruction. When the Spirit of God draws us and we come to Christ, He snatches us from the enemy's grasp and plants us in the eternal kingdom of God. We have eternal life. Is there anything less than the sacrifice of our very lives, a vow of complete surrender that will acceptably express our gratitude? And if we sacrifice ourselves, can we withhold generous giving to the mission of Christ - the mission to continue delivering people who, as we were, are caught in the jaws of sin's consuming condemnation?

So the principle behind the Old Testament sacrifice of thanksgiving is fulfilled in New Testament giving. But one of the cardinal truths of Christian living is that we do not simply fulfill laws or regulations. We live by the Spirit, and nothing is more spiritually normal than to give.

Giving is the Natural Expression of Gratitude

For the Christian, giving is the natural expression of gratitude. Christ gave His all for us. It is natural for us to respond by giving to Him.

Giving to show thanks goes deep into Old Testament history. In Genesis 14:20 Abraham *gave* to show thanks for God's blessing of victory in battle. In Luke 19:8 Zacchaeus gave half of his goods to the poor, so thankful was he that Jesus had accepted him.

In Hebrews 13:15, the Bible says that "thanks" is the fruit of our lips if we are rightly related to God. Now, fruit is the natural product of a healthy branch. Jesus said, I am the vine, you are the branches. When we are in good fellowship with Christ, the fruit of our lives will be thankful and sacrificial living. Remember that thanksgiving is not to be words only, but deeds. Hebrews 13:17 specifically calls giving a demonstration of thanksgiving, so giving is the natural expression of gratitude to God for His salvation in Christ.

A deacon of long years of life and service once challenged his church to strive to reach and exceed their financial goals by saying, "One thing I have learned is that you can't out-give God." His point, which by now is a familiar proverb to many people, was simply that if we obey God in giving generously, God will always supply our need and more. In effect, if we give more because of how much God gave us to begin with, God will give more again. This was the promise of II Corinthians 9:8 that if we give cheerfully and generously, God will make certain that we not only have what we need for ourselves, but what we need in order to continue our generosity toward kingdom work.

Sometimes we focus on the subject of giving for several days or weeks; but most of the time, like most churches, we preach the whole Word of God, challenging Christians to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. If we grow spiritually, as we learn more and more about our riches in Christ, we will naturally give our lives more fully to his mastery and service. The casual Christian knows little of the depth of his blessing; but the ardent disciple realizes how much he owes Jesus, and his heart responds in giving.

Ruth Gutmann is one of the youngest survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, but she spent a half century not speaking of her past. Then in a time of crisis, when she was

contemplating suicide, she called a helpline operated by the United Jewish Communities. She discovered that the same organization had touched her life before, beginning with helping her escape the fate of six million other Jews during World War II. Suddenly, she realized she had to live so that she could give back to those who saved her.

She now raises thousands upon thousands of dollars for the support of UJC, and says, "I believe I am doing God's work." She says that "giving back" is its own reward, "How many people can finally say I have a purpose, I have meaning, I make a difference?"

If sparing people's lives from a holocaust deserves a grateful return gift, what does salvation from sin and eternal death merit? The Christian, more than anyone else, should be motivated to "give back" to Christ, who gave His all for us.

Giving is Wonderfully Accomplished by Tithing

If, when our eyes are truly open to how rich we are in Christ, our natural motivation is to give back to Him. Then as we search for the most fulfilling way to give to the Lord, we will find that giving is wonderfully accomplished by tithing. Tithing is the most prominent Biblical standard of worshipful, thankful, proportionate and generous giving.

I Corinthians 16:2 directs Christians to give proportionately. Tithing is the proportion of one tenth, a wonderful starting point for grateful gifts to God.

Genesis 28:20 describes Jacob promising to give a tithe of all for God's provision and protection. Should the Christian do less than the patriarchs, seeing that God has provided for an eternity of life with Him?

Luke 11:42 records that Jesus taught that tithing was expected practice from one who lives a life of both righteousness and love.

Here in our text, Hebrews 13:16 says to share or to be generous. The context of this command is a discussion of the life and worship of the church. The meaning is inescapable; the Christian is to be generous in giving to the ministry and mission of the church. And there is no church whose ability to accomplish its mission and ministry would not be immensely blessed and launched into high gear if today, right now, every one of its members would begin to tithe.

Nowhere in the New Testament do we have a picture of the church as a self-centered group of people who just love each other within their fellowship. They extend their fellowship to others by meeting needs in their community, and by sending the gospel to produce new believers and so enlarge and enrich the body of Christ. Giving is

always about both ministry and missions - the chief purposes of the church.

Ministry and missions take resources. We cannot meet human needs without money. We cannot train ministers and missionaries without money. We cannot send missionaries, supply their needs, do the advance work, plant the churches, print the materials, or support all the planning and preparation, without money. Christians simply must give if the cause of the kingdom is to be carried out.

Long ago, when God created a nation by delivering a slave people from Egypt, He commanded them to tithe to His work, which encompassed everything from the worship of the temple to benevolence in their communities to teaching the truth to the nations around them. There was a perfect, divine wisdom in the system of the tithe. Of the twelve tribes, one tribe ministered in the temple. Their families were to be supported by the gifts of the people in the other twelve tribes. As the common saying goes today, "Do the math," and you discover that eleven tribes tithing to one, and that one tribe itself tithing to the temple, results in the complete support of the temple work, plus the equal support of the Levites, with an added tenth of blessing for those whose lives were spent in the Lord's work.

The specifics have changed, but the principle hasn't: the work of the kingdom involves the church in ministry and missions. God's plan is for the tithes and generous gifts of His people to support His kingdom work.

Christian tithing is an ideal way for believers to fully support the lives and ministries of those who have committed their all to missions and ministry. And tithing is a divinely instituted way of underwriting the mission that Christ began in His coming, to seek and save those who are lost. The Christian who tithes is saying, "Thank you, Lord, for saving me. Here is my gift for reaching many others for your kingdom."

Show me!

If everyone gave with the measure you use, would the work of the kingdom grind to a stop, or go forward full speed? If your living were only ten times your giving, would you be able to make ends meet? What are you saying to God with your life? Are you saying, "Thank you, Lord, from the bottom of my heart"?

God's word says, "Show me!" Show me your love. Show me your thanks. ***Give!*** Commit yourself today to generous, proportionate, sacrificial giving. Give so that if you were to whisper in prayer, "I am grateful, Lord," the Lord would whisper back, "I know."