



A Generous Heart Produces A Generous God

Everyone knows that rewards work. If you are going to train a dog to do tricks, you better have some doggie biscuits in your pocket. If you are trying to potty train a toddler, rewards are pretty handy also. The credit card industry has also gotten the hint and they compete for our credit business by offering rewards to use for free flights, discounts, cash back or some other form of return. And we as consumers figure that since we have to buy stuff anyhow, we might as well get something back. It's our human nature to look for rewards or return.

As we have studied financial giving in God's word, we hopefully felt the need to evaluate our giving, and we probably wondered what would happen if we begin to give what we think God wants us to give. Would anything change for me? Would I be better off financially? Would I simply be better off spiritually? What would happen?

Hebrews 11:6 says that God "rewards those who earnestly seek him." God rewards. It's just the way God is. God is not in anyone's debt.

The rewards we discuss in this study are not a deal we can make with God. He is sovereign and we can't make Him do anything. Our motive must remain rooted in simple thankfulness for His grace. But we can know that when the books of this world are closed someday in eternity, no one will ever say that they give more to God than He gave to them.

A Generous Woman (2 Kings 4:8-37; 8:1-6)

Around 850 BC, a wealthy woman in Shunem, about 5 miles south of Nazareth, one day asked Elisha the traveling prophet to eat at her home (2 Kings 4:8-10). He did so and her house soon became a regular stop whenever Elisha came through the area.

Helping Elisha must have somehow been rewarding to the woman, because she began to think of ways that she might be able to bless him even more. She told her husband that she wanted to build a small addition onto the home to give Elisha his own furnished room when he came. Then he would be able to come and relax there. What a blessing! And that's exactly what they did.

This Shunamite woman was much like several families I have known in our church and elsewhere who have space in their homes that they developed largely to offer it to house missionaries while they are at home in the United States. They have generously spent their money and give their hospitality in the spirit of this Shunamite woman.

Now this woman didn't do this to "get" anything. She didn't make a deal with God that if she built this room for Elisha, she expected certain things back from God. She seemingly just gave as God led her. But what happened? Elisha wondered aloud if there was a way that He could bless her and his servant Gehazi mentioned that she didn't have a son (2 Kings 4:11-13).



Evidently it was a real desire of her heart that so far had not been fulfilled. So Elisha the prophet promised her a son. And God came through as Elisha promised! This woman who had been childless had a bouncing baby boy! God is certainly a rewarder! The blessing of a child was a far greater blessing to her than she had even been to Elisha.

A GENEROUS GOD

Now the story doesn't end here. This child grew and as a boy one day working with his dad in the fields, he suddenly died. Of course the woman was heartbroken – and even angry at God and Elisha. She laid the body of her only son on Elisha's bed in his room and went to find Elisha. In her bitter grief she said, "Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'" (2 Kings 4:28)?

So Elisha went to her house, prayed and laid himself over the body of the boy and God gave her son life again. God gave her a son to begin with and the God raised him from the dead, giving him to her again.

God is a giver. But we learn that when we give to God, there is no guarantee that life will suddenly be wonderful and without pain. When we give, we will still be tested.

There was yet another time when this Shunamite woman was tested – this time financially (2 Kings 8:1-6). Elisha told this woman to leave the land of Israel because God had revealed to him that a seven year famine was coming.

Evidently the Shunamite woman's husband who was older had died by then because now she was a widow. So she left the country of Israel to avoid the famine. But what evidently happened in those days is that if you left the country for an extended time, your abandoned land would become either the property of the king or perhaps of a relative. But whoever had it, evidently it was no sure thing that you would get it back.

So when the Shunamite woman came back to the land, she went before the king to beg to get her land back. This is where God's rewarding character is again obvious. When this woman comes to King Joram, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, just happened to be talking to the king. Imagine that! And the king has just at that moment had asked Gehazi to tell him about his master Elisha's miracles.

(2 Kings 8:5-6) "Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came to beg the king for her house and land. Gehazi said, "This is the woman, my lord the king, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life." {6} The king asked the woman about it, and she told him. Then he assigned an official to her case and said to him, "Give back everything that belonged to her, including all the income from her land from the day she left the country until now."

So how did this woman's generosity work out in the long run? Her gifts to God were initially just meals for Elijah and then she built and furnished a small room for him. God's gifts to her



included the birth of a son, the resurrection of her son, advance warning of a 7-year famine and then God made sure she received her land back – plus seven years income!

God is an incredible rewarder to those who give to Him out of a grateful heart. But along with the principle we find in Old Testament scriptures the principle that those who refuse to give miss out on God's blessings.

Jesus taught the basic principle that God rewards those who are generous not only financially, but generous in spirit. Listen to the words of Christ.

"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. What kind of reward? It doesn't say – perhaps here, perhaps heaven. {36} Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. {37} "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." (Luke 6:35-37)

People who do good to others generally find themselves blessed with the same kind of graciousness with which they treat others. God makes sure that happens somehow. Jesus says next that God gives back even more than a generous merchant.

Luke 6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38)"

A "good measure" meant that when you bought grain in the market, the merchant didn't do to you what the potato chip people do to us. When we open the potato chip bag we often find it half empty when we think it's going to be full. But a generous merchant would fill his measure to the brim and then press it down and shake it so it settles so he could get a little more in before giving it to you as the customer.

Jesus says God is like that generous merchant – only more so! God will reward us in such abundance of blessings that they will be overflowing our basket and filling the robe in our lap. God is just that way! He will not be out-given.

What kind of giving is Jesus talking about? He could mean money, but He could also be referring to anything of ours that we give away – time, concern for others, encouragement, money or other material things. And what kind of return or blessing is Jesus promising? God may give back to us in many ways. In His miraculous way He can choose to bless us financially through finding us good deals, preventing high expenses or by providing raises or more hours and overtime. But it could be also be that God bless our "giving" by rewarding us with unexpected time to relax even though we had given away time to serve others. It could be that God miraculously bless our marriage, restores relationships or health or any number of good things.



Conclusion:

GIVE CONSISTENTLY, PERSONALLY, WILLINGLY AND CHEERFULLY

1: GIVE CONSISTENTLY ACCORDING TO A PLAN

Paul taught the Corinthians to give regularly. (1 Corinthians 16:2) "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money...."

2: GIVE PERSONALLY

Paul states it directly, "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)

3: GIVE WILLINGLY AND CHEERFULLY

There's an old story about a father who gave his son a dime and a quarter. He told his son that he should give one of them in the Sunday School offering and then he could keep the other coin. But the father reminded him, Remember, God loves a cheerful giver. Later, the dad asked which coin the child had given. He replied, Well, Dad, you said that God loves a cheerful giver, and I decided that I'd be more cheerful if I kept the quarter.

We naturally think we would indeed be more cheerful keeping or spending as much as possible on ourselves. But if we have already lived that way – keeping and spending and hoarding – how cheerful has it really made us?

Paul's word cheerful here is the Greek word hilaros which is where we get our English word hilarious. The Greek term does not quite have the connotation of hilarity, but the general idea is that when we give in gratitude for God's grace to us, it should be a happy occasion.

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