

## THE HEALTHY SOUL, PART 4: GIVING

2 Corinthians 8-9 *passim* (NASB)

David Bruce Linn, Pastor-Teacher

17 October 2010

All Rights Reserved

One day when Jesus was passing through the city of Jericho he encountered a man named Zaccheus who was so motivated to lay eyes on him that he climbed a tree to see over the crowd. Zaccheus was a very successful businessman who had arranged a sweet deal for himself with the Romans who occupied Israel in those days. He had, to the anger and frustration of other Jews, become a wealthy tax collector at a choice customs location. Jericho was located on a major commercial route which crossed over the fords of the Jordan to connect Israel with the lands to the east. Everyone who wanted to trade in Israel, or Palestina, as the Romans named it, would have had to pass by the customs checkpoint in Jericho and pay the Roman tax. Zaccheus was not only a tax collector, but the chief tax collector of the region. As far as the Romans were concerned, Zaccheus was free to charge anything he wanted so long as they got their required taxes. And so he did. He had, in short, a license to extort money from vulnerable people.

Zaccheus must have heard something about Jesus before he climbed up in the tree to see him. Who knows how the Lord works on a man or woman's heart? But it seems that Jesus responds to motivation. When he saw Zach up in the tree, he called to him: "Come down. I'm going to your house." The text says that Zaccheus received Jesus gladly. It is possible that Luke, who recorded this encounter, may have compressed the story and that Jesus spent time at Zaccheus' house before we hear an amazing statement of faith from the man.

Just as stuffy religious people were grumbling that Christ was visiting in the home of this notable sinner and hated man, Zaccheus proclaimed: "**Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much**" (Luke 19:8). This is an amazing statement from a man who was like the fictional race of Ferengi from the *Star Trek* series whose entire culture is based on acquisition. Zaccheus would have loved Ferengi Law of Acquisition number 97: "Enough is never enough," and number 261: "A wealthy man can afford anything except a conscience." While the Ferengi are an imaginary race invented by the writers of *Star Trek* we must give those writers credit for having a keen awareness of human nature.

Zaccheus had spent his whole life refusing to trust God. This was proved by his willing violation of the many Levitical laws against exploiting your brother. He had gripped wealth as his god. He was a Mammon worshiper. And when wealth is your god, you never release your hand and give it away, as stated by Ferengi Law of Acquisition number 144: "There is nothing wrong with charity as long as it ends up in your pocket."

And then he met Jesus. This man, whose soul was sick, saw the opportunity for a healthy soul for the first time in his shameful life. Because he chose to trust God, he chose to release his grip on his money. He chose to give half his wealth to the poor and give back four times as much to those he had defrauded. Levitical law did not require that much, but he wanted to make sure that he mended the wrongs he had done to so many others. This offer, if done for all the people he had defrauded, had the possibility of cleaning him out. But because he had Jesus, he did not fear the consequences. For

Zaccheus, he had to give in order to become a healthy soul. And so he did. Jesus responded to his act of fearless giving by saying: "**Today salvation has come to this house...**" Not because he fulfilled some legalistic rule, but because his giving to others was proof of his grasping the knowledge of God as the most valuable thing he had.

## COMFORTABLE IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S CARE

The Apostle Paul included an extensive teaching on giving in his second letter to the Corinthians. The church in Jerusalem was starving due to a famine at the time, and the Corinthians had undertaken to send an offering to them for relief. Somehow the process had gotten bogged down, possibly because a group of self-elevating "super apostles" may have discouraged the sending of funds elsewhere. As Ferengi Law of Acquisition number 1 states: "Once you have their money, you never give it back." Paul had to write the Corinthians to get the process rolling again.

Just as Zaccheus had embraced the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord, Paul urged the Corinthians to remember the same: "**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich**" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Healthy souls are comfortable with giving to others because they have tasted the sweetness of the knowledge of God and know beyond a doubt that he is the best thing they have.

The healthy soul is also utterly comfortable in the knowledge of God's care, as Paul wrote in chapter nine of this same letter: "**Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, 'HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.'** Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:7-11, caps in original).

Cheerful giving is possible because God makes all grace abound to us. When we rely wholly on him for life and everything we discover that we "**will be enriched in everything for all liberality.**" By definition everything we receive from God by his grace is a gift, and it is given not only to bless us but so that we can learn the grace of giving to others out of our own abundance.

My personal testimony is that this pattern has become one of the sweetest things I enjoy in life. Joyful giving makes my soul bigger and healthier, and far surpasses any pleasure I get from receiving things. Even when I am fully justified in buying a new "dohickey" for myself I often find—after the initial feeling of fun—that it saddens me rather than causing me to rejoice. That I should feel that way is not a statement about my character, but about God's blessing upon givers. He is a God of grace, and when we give to others we are being like God. And I confess that I am but a novice at this wonderful expression of God's character when compared to many others.

We also see the sublime reason that God equipped human beings with free will. Many people accuse God of trapping everyone by giving us all free will while knowing that we would use it to sin.

Yet giving to others as an expression of God's gracious character requires free will, as Paul insisted: **"Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."** God is the freest being in the universe, and giving allows us to taste this great characteristic. The healthy soul is a cheerful giver because he or she is utterly comfortable in God's care.

## WILLING TO RELEASE HIS OR HER GRASP ON THINGS

Zaccheus had to come to an inward crisis in order to relinquish his ever-so-tight grasp of material possessions. Every person who wants to have a healthy soul must be willing to do the same. This takes an enduring act of the will by faith. Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians who had originally purposed to help the starving Christians in Jerusalem and then had trouble releasing their grasp on their money: **"I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality--at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality..."** (2 Corinthians 8:10-14).

The importance of helping the starving believers had been clear to the Corinthians at one time, but the clarity had been lost in the day to day humdrum of life. We can always think of something to do with a little extra money. It seems that in Corinth some money had already been given for this relief effort which was being held by the church. There seem also to have been monies intended but not yet given. Neither one had made it to Jerusalem.

Paul gave strong encouragements to release their offering to where it was originally intended to go. First, there is always something amiss when we set a clear purpose before God and then do not follow it through. Were the people not still starving? Secondly, no one need be embarrassed by how much or little they are able to give. God does not set any standard for giving--no set amounts. We give as we are able, and not under compulsion in any way. Thirdly, we have a reason to release our grasp because God's purpose is not to transfer the lacks of others to us, but to spread the blessing of God's provision equally. On one day others will need us to give to them, and on another day we will need others to give to us. Never forget that equality of daily provision is not a divine or civil right in Scripture, but the free act of healthy souls toward one another.

Some years ago I received a set of four reel-to-reel tape recordings of messages which A. W. Tozer preached at a Delta Lake Bible Family Bible Conference in the 1950s. We had just put our first web site for the church and radio program on the internet, and I was eager to put these four messages on the web site for others to hear--right next to mine! I began the search to clear the copyright issues thinking that I would have to get written permission from a family member or perhaps Christian Publishing Incorporated. It took my breath away when I discovered that Dr. Tozer had released all of his audio recordings into the public domain. In his pursuit of God he sought a healthy soul, and he released his grip on any gain he might have had from the recordings.

## EAGER TO GIVE TO KINGDOM WORK

Once we become comfortable in God's care, willing to give, and taste the joy of the Lord in giving we become positively eager to give to kingdom work. Paul began his urging to the Corinthians to follow through on their original desire to help the starving Christians by describing the amazing zeal of the believers in Macedonia to give to the need: **"Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God"** (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). There is no "Sermon on the Amount" which can surpass the example of believers who are eager to give to kingdom work even when they are struggling themselves.

I do not say that we should not invest in ourselves and care for our people. God assumes that we will do the first and commands us to do the second. But without leaving us in the lurch God has granted us the faith opportunity to get great things done with what he has given us. Our needs are all surely met in him as we seek his kingdom purposes first in our lives. The healthy soul eagerly engages the purposes of God's kingdom by supporting them in concrete ways.

A. W. Tozer signed over a substantial part of the royalties from his many books to the kingdom of God. C. S. Lewis did the same. I knew an elderly Christian woman named Mildred who lived in humble surroundings. She sat most of the day in a worn out chair atop a threadbare comforter in her old, unimproved house. When Mildred went to be with the Lord she left forty thousand dollars to the Great Commission Fund in her will.

I know a businessman who heard a missionary describe the critical need for family housing at a Bible school in West Africa. Although he was still developing a new business he gave tens of thousands of dollars to build an entire building for the students.

The fifty million dollar annual budget of The Christian and Missionary Alliance is not primarily donated by a few prosperous people, but by the combined giving of teachers and firemen, coal miners and business people, assembly line workers and family doctors who have caught the vision of God's kingdom.

And this is how our churches run. The thousands of Alliance churches in North America minister because folks who could easily use their money for something else participate in regular percentage giving to their local church to see the kingdom of God advanced on the earth.

Zaccheus would have been a man who dressed in fine clothing, lived in a beautiful home, ate the finest food, and had servants to care for his needs and wants. He would have received a form of grudging respect even from those who hated him for exploiting them and collaborating with the Romans. As Ferengi Law of Acquisition number 181 states: "Not even dishonesty can tarnish the shine of profit." Or as we say: "Nothing succeeds like success." This is the way of the world. We see it in the tawdry reputations of famous people, many of whom seem to become richer and more famous the more disreputably they behave. Even marriages are made and broken on a crass calculation of how much the

deed will promote greater celebrity and wealth.

Zaccheus exploited that world as a way of life until God got hold of him. When he met Jesus he realized that in order to have a healthy soul he needed to grasp the Pearl of Great Price--the knowledge of God in Christ--and release his grasp on his wealth. God loves a cheerful giver not because God needs what we give. In order to become like him we need to give. Do you want to energize the transformation of your broken inner person into a healthy soul? Giving will bring change which nothing else will.

Isn't it time to receive comfort in the knowledge of God's care, release your grasp on your possessions, and engage kingdom work by eagerly giving to see the purposes of God done on the earth? What opportunities to propel God's kingdom are already present in your life? What *kairos* moment is waiting upon someone to catch the vision of the Lord and make it happen by adding necessary resources? This is entirely between you and your Lord. And it creates no conflict of interest to say that the moment you decide that the Lord is calling on you, the release of the joy of the Lord in your life will take your breath away.

If you have not yet become a follower of Christ the first thing the Lord wants you to give him is yourself. No gift can curry favor with God. But the only sensible response to Christ giving himself for you on the cross is to give yourself to him in return. Zaccheus found the key to the kingdom. Have you?