

## God's Way of Giving

Tis' the season of giving. Whether it be for the observance of Christmas, Hanukah, or purely secular reasons, this is the time of year when most Americans and the rest of the western world observe a season of giving. This is the time of the year when merchants offer their best prices and newest products. This is the favorite time of year for many with memories of their childhood, family and joy. It is even a time when some reflect on plain 'ole goodness and goodwill toward others.

Whether you observe Christmas or don't, everyone seems to be in a gift giving and receiving mood at this time of year. For some, Christmas is the epitome of giving. Christmas stories are generally about the lessons of giving. The classic tale from Dickens about Ebenezer Scrooge declares that ugly, mean people can become good ones if they learn to give. I'm sure you have heard the classic sound bite, "It is better to give than to receive." Or, how about this one, "The best gifts come in small packages." Jewelry merchants love that one. Which, by the way, brings us to the whole concept of packaging the gift. Packaging has become almost as important as the gift itself for some people. Virtually everyone has seen some child get a big present only to watch him play with the box more than what was in it.

One of my favorite stories about gift giving at Christmas was written by O'Henry. It is the story of a young couple getting gifts for one another at great cost for themselves individually. The young man had a beautiful watch; his wife had beautiful hair. The young man sold his watch to buy gold barrettes for her hair. She, on the other hand had her head shorn and sold her hair to buy a gold chain for his watch. The irony...

If you were to pulse each person, everyone probably has a story about giving or receiving that is touching and heartwarming. Some of the stories are even about loss and loneliness. We don't like to hear about those, do we. We don't like to hear that this time of year is also the time with the highest rate of suicide. This is a time of expectation for most; it is also a time of increased despair and depression for others.

Then, there is the whole Santa Claus thing! This is a classic. We tell this fanciful story to little children about how Santa rides a sleigh to your house, slides down the chimney and leaves presents under the Christmas tree, stuffs the stockings hung at the fireplace and makes it to everyone's house that night. To add justice and truth, gifts are given to good little boys and girls. Switches and coal are left for bad ones. You ought to see the faces of some children when I walk through the mall in December with my 50 plus years and a full white beard. It is especially acute when they come to get their picture taken with him. Then there is the trauma each child experiences when they discover it is all made up. There is no Santa Claus. Eventually, those children grow into teenagers who believe their parents have always been lying to them. But, that's a whole other problem.

Then, there is the "Grench" thing. Wait a minute! I don't get it on this Grench thing, or is it Grinch? This thing looks like and acts like a green demon. Am I missing something here? How did that thing get into the wonder of Christmas?

Then there's the Christmas tree thing. Let's not get into the parallels between a Christmas tree and idolatry. Jeremiah was a very negative kind of prophet to Israel and still is to the church today. Jeremiah described an idolater very similar to the Christmas tree thing.

*For the customs of the peoples are delusion; because it is wood cut from the forest, the work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. They decorate it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot walk! Do not fear them, for they can do no harm, nor can they do any good.*

*Jeremiah 10:3-5*

But, let's try to stay focused on the goodness of giving.

The fact is that Christmas is not the teaching of giving we should follow. For all its hoopla, Christmas results in false expectations, vanity, materialism, loneliness, lying, deception, green demons stealing things and idolatry. Christmas is really becoming a red and green version of Halloween.

Okay, Okay, I know there are some out there who will have a fit with that last paragraph. You will try to correct me that you are celebrating the birth of the Messiah. But, you are wrong again. Any person with half an effort will discover that the Messiah was born at the fall Biblical holidays. If there was any truth to that motive, then correct the birth date and observe the giving of God's greatest gift – His Son. Just for a moment, consider how well the true date would be received. The merchants and the church wouldn't change the date even with the proof of his birth date. You see, it is not about the birth of Jesus, it is about tradition and the world's way of giving. It is the classic definition of how spiritual deception leads to great disappointment.

So, let's talk about God's way of giving, as He describes it in the Scriptures, that results in peace, unity, goodwill, humility, forgiveness, loving kindness, and life. Let's drink from the cup of understanding and eat of a true feast of wisdom and truth.

God's way of giving is presented in four ways. Actually, they are four levels, and they reflect our maturity in the Lord as we learn to give. The four levels are:

1. Making a sacrifice
2. Obeying with the tithe
3. Giving from the heart
4. Giving of your life

If a person is going to spiritually mature, then they must learn these levels of giving. You can not skip any of them.

**Making a Sacrifice**

God gave us some very specific instructions about all offerings made to Him – they must have value – they must be a sacrifice to the giver. If a man wished to give God a gift of an animal, then he had to select the animal from the clean category. It had to be the best of the flock. There could be no spot or blemish. It could not be lame or sickly. If his gift was from his grain or fruit, it had to be the first portions, the best part. It had to be a SACRIFICE to him to give it. It had to have value from the giver's point of view. God said that the gift would be rejected if it was tainted, falsely gained, or inappropriate.

*Now when you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted.*

*Leviticus 19:5*

*And when a man offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord to fulfill a special vow, or for a*

*freewill offering, of the herd or of the flock, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it.*

*Leviticus 22:21*

*"But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the Lord of hosts.*

*Malachi 1:8*

*You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep which has a blemish or any defect, for that is a detestable thing to the Lord your God.*

*Deuteronomy 17:1*

Have you ever heard of the guy who prayed that God would help him win the lottery. In exchange, the man would offer to give God half of it? This is not a prayer that God is going to answer, because the gift does not qualify at the first level of giving. It is no better than finding a lost lamb or road kill and trying to put it on God's altar. It is unacceptable because it has no value; therefore, it is not an acceptable sacrifice.

The Bible says there are many types of offerings. In fact, there are thirteen in specific name.

1. Minchah – a meal offering of grain, flour, bread, or cakes.
2. Olah – a whole burnt offering (given only to the Lord).
3. Chattaah – a sin offering (unintentional).
4. Neseq – a drink offering (wine).
5. Tenuphah – a wave offering (usually loaves of bread or leafy branches).
6. Asham – a guilt offering (an unintentional mistake by a leader).
7. Millu – an ordination offering (dedication of leaders).
8. Shelem – a peace offering (particularly with other parties).
9. Todah – a thanksgiving offering (usually at the completion of something).
10. Nedabah – a freewill offering (to celebrate with the Lord).
11. Neder – a votive offering (a vow).
12. Terumah – a heave offering (a contribution).
13. Azkarah – a memorial offering (a remembrance).

All of these offerings were called Qorban (Corban) which meant that these were "brought near" when you approached the Lord. Each of these offerings were sacrifices (zabach) and they would become an offering by fire (ishsheh). Only two of these offerings have anything to do with sin (the sin offering and

the guilt offering) and they did not address intentional sin. There is no offering made by a man for intentional sin, that must be made by God for man. The daily, Sabbath, new Moon, and other festival offerings were made by the priests in combination with many of these offerings.

Yeshua taught us an important aspect of Corban at this first level of giving.

*He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."*

*Mark 7:9-13*

In Yeshua's day, religious men claimed that an offering to the Lord and things dedicated to be an offering to the Lord could not be used for any other purpose, even helping one's own parents. Yeshua pointed out that God's commandments concerning parents supersede any teaching on making gifts. Today, religious men do exactly the same as they did in the past. Contributions and offerings to the church take precedence over helping poor brethren, widows, orphans, helping family, etc. They teach that all offerings must go to the church (or at least the first ten percent). This is the church's version of corban today.

Did you know that only a rich man can give a cheap gift. When a poor man gives something it has great value. But a rich man can give a great thing and it mean nothing to him; therefore, he gave nothing. This illustrates the first principle of Biblical giving. The giver determines the value of the gift.

There is another matching principle that also must be learned at this level of giving. Simply said, "You must learn to receive before you can learn to give." To assess a gift for giving properly, you must learn the value of gifts. This is generally learned by your receipt of gifts, including gifts that are timely and meet your needs. A lot can be learned by just observing the giver. A gracious receiver will be a gracious giver. A man who has received much and knows it will become a giver of much. A man who has been given much and does not value what he has been given will not give to others. This concept goes to the heart of the Golden Rule. Give unto others as you would like to receive yourself.

Even rich men can learn about things given them: friendship, kindness, encouragement, praise, and thanks. An offering does not have to be gold or silver, but it must be things of value.

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High; Psalms 50:14

*He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; and to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God.*

*Psalms 50:23*

*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.*

*Hebrews 13:15*

To praise or offer thanks with your lips is an offering. When praise or thanks are offered to God, they are sacrifices (valuable things from the giver) put upon the altar in their heart. God receives these gifts

(corban) as you approach Him. Praise and thanks to another person also works wonders in building a friendship and relationship. Shallow praise, such as vain flattery, will get you nowhere, but heartfelt and specific praise will lift anyone up.

Altars and sacrifices are really about learning the first level of giving. They teach how to approach another (great or small) with a gift. They teach how to prepare a specific type of gift; how to present a gift properly; and how to humble one's self in giving.

How many of you have seen someone give a gift and then expect gratitude and special thanks for it. It diminishes the gift. The gift of a humble man can only gain in value, but a proud man will lower the value of his own gift. Yeshua taught it this way.

*When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.*

*Matthew 6:2*

The giving of alms (money) for an offering is the most common of all gifts. Sadly, many men don't realize that there are a host of other things that can be given with even greater value.

The first level of giving, therefore, is an offering. An offering must have value; it must be a sacrifice to the giver. Therefore, the giver determines the true value of the gift.

Obeying with the Tithe

A tithe is ten percent of your increase. A tithe is a commanded gift. A tithe is presented like a gift but illustrates obedience and duty far more than a offering. A tithe is really what already belongs to God.

*You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year.*  
*Deuteronomy 14:22*

*Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord.*

*Leviticus 27:30*

A failure to tithe of your increase is called robbing from God.

*Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, "How have we robbed Thee?" In tithes and offerings.*

*Malachi 3:8*

There is much teaching in the Bible about tithing. However, the church tends to only speak of one verse.

*"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."*

*Malachi 3:10*

From this verse, the church teaches that all tithes should be brought to the church, then the church will divide them up properly. Even further, some church leaders teach that giving and tithing to them will bring a great blessing. They teach that faith produces the blessing. Instead, it is obedience that produces blessing. It is also true that tithing is an obedient act which produces blessing. However, tithing is not the singular key to your spiritual walk to fulfill all of your fantasies of prosperity and blessing. I find it ironic that the very men who preach this verse will not teach that you should keep His other commandments that produce blessings.

The Bible says a lot more about tithing than just this one verse. For example, tithes are to be distributed first to the widow and the orphan (or the poor of the brethren). Tithes are to be paid to the Levite (the priest) who teaches you. Finally, if those needs are met, then you are to take the remaining amount to the temple storehouse to support public worship.

Let's examine each of the areas where a tithe is to be distributed further, first with helping with widow, the orphan, and the poor of the brethren.

God has commanded that widows and orphans should be cared for directly and deliberately. In fact, if a widow or orphan is not cared for, the men of that community are positioning themselves to have their own wife and children to become a widow and orphan. A Godly man knows his life is on the line by how he helps a widow and orphan.

On this same subject, farmers and vine dressers are told not to glean their fields, orchards, groves or vines. The corners of a field are not to be harvested. Those crops are for the widow and the orphan, and travelers (strangers) along the way. If they want a bountiful crop, then they will freely share with others in this way.

Sometimes the poor of the brethren is the tither himself. Many people do not tithe because they do not believe they have enough to meet their needs and tithe. They think their need nullifies God's command. This is false! God commands even the poor to tithe. The tithe is commanded to be from the first part of the increase, not from the last if there is any left over. Besides this, God knows that the poor man doesn't have enough. So, He has a special provision in the tithe for this. It is called redeeming the tithe. A tither who is the poor of the brethren can redeem the tithe for his own need. However, the Torah says that it doing so, the tithe must be paid later with one fifth added.

*If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it.*

*Leviticus 27:31*

*You won't find this teaching in the church. Poor brethren do not realize this, but if they would tithe (even redeeming it for their need) God would bless them. By managing God's resources, they would learn how to manage their own resources better. Eventually, they would have enough to tithe and not be in need. Even further, they would trust God by obeying Him first and watching God pour out His blessing. This is what the prophet Malachi was talking about. "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."*

*Malachi 3:10*

When does this redeemed tithe have to be paid back? Every three years in the month of Adar (usually February/March).

*At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year; and*

*shall deposit it in your town.*

*Deuteronomy 14:28*

*When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns, and be satisfied.*

*Deuteronomy 26:12*

What about people who are working for the Lord just like the Levite priest? Should they tithe on what tithes were given to them? Yes!

*Moreover, you shall speak to the Levites and say to them, "When you take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present an offering from it to the Lord, a tithe of the tithe."*

*Numbers 18:26*

What about those who have businesses? Should they tithe their business or just their salaries? The tithe is to be on the increase. For a farmer, this would be the grain harvested. He should not discount the harvest for the seed, nor the expenses of the crop; the tithe is on the gross increase. The same principle applies to any business. But, this is my opinion. Each person is accountable to the Lord to render stewardship with what is the Lord's tithe. Therefore, each person must determine for themselves what is their increase.

Tithing teaches an important lesson beyond a simple offering or sacrifice. The Lord desires obedience more than a gift (sacrifice). Samuel, the prophet, and others have clearly taught this.

*And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams."*

*ISA 15:22*

*To do righteousness and justice is desired by the Lord rather than sacrifice.*

*Proverbs 21:3*

*For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

*Hosea 6:6*

Sacrifices and gifts are good and a necessary part of our spiritual walk, but the walk of obedience exceed even the gifts. Some, however, think that obedience is the greatest and that tithing is the epitome of giving. This is wrong as well.

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.*

*Matthew 23:23*

Tithing is the second level of giving; it is commanded giving. It increases our service for God and causes us to look to the needs of others. Instead of just giving gifts, we begin to care for the welfare of those around us.

Giving from the Heart

The weightier provisions of the law really have to do with the important things of life. Life is more than the enjoyment of giving and receiving gifts. Life is more than just meeting needs and having the essentials to live. Life, worth living, has to do with the things of the heart. It's about faith, hope, and love. Therefore, learning to give from the heart is obviously the next level in giving.

Yeshua made reference twice to the words of Proverbs and the prophet Hosea.

*But go and learn what this means, "I desire compassion, and not sacrifice," for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*

*Matthew 9:13*

*But if you had known what this means, "I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice," you would not have condemned the innocent.*

*Matthew 12:7*

Traditional Christian teaching emphasizes the motives of the heart. While this is headed in the right direction, they tend to skip the important steps toward understanding the work of the heart. Yeshua's statement is not an effort to abolish sacrifices and sacrificial giving. Instead, He is relating the importance of the heart to the subject of service and giving.

*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

*Deuteronomy 6:5*

The greatest commandment speaks to the matter of the heart. Therefore, giving from the heart is reflective to one's walk before God. Doing things wholeheartedly is recognized by all as doing them the best way possible. Gifts made from the heart are therefore the best as well. This was the instruction of the Apostle Paul.

*Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

*II Corinthians 9:6-7*

This is the kind of giving that Israel accomplished in collecting the materials for the tabernacle in the wilderness. The Scripture takes particular note of how the heart of the people helped to accomplish this activity.

*Take from among you a contribution to the Lord; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the Lord's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze,*

*Exodus 35:5*

*And everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the Lord's contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments.*

*Exodus 35:21*

There is another important aspect of giving from the heart. It has to do with secrecy. The heart of a person is not known by others unless the person allows others to see it. Paul made this point drawing comparison with how we know God's heart.

*For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit [heart] of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.*

*I Corinthians 2:11*

Sometimes the heart hides ill feelings toward another. This can happen even while a person is giving to another. Therefore, Moses gave instruction about giving to a brother to guard against this kind of mistake.

*You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings.*

*Deuteronomy 15:10*

Yeshua spoke of this same issue (the secret aspects of the heart) but spoke of it in a positive context.

*But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. M*

*AT 6:3-4*

One of the most enjoyable aspects of giving is doing it in secret. It produces some interesting results. The person who receives the gift has no one to thank except the Lord. This is giving above a sacrifice or a tithe. All credit goes to the Lord!

I'm sure each of you has seen a secret gift given or maybe you have received such a gift. You know that the joy of that gift is far more than the value of the gift. It, sometimes, can be life changing for the giver as well as the receiver. Therefore, the third level of giving is from the heart. It is a gift of generosity, joy, cheerfulness, and sometimes secrecy.

### Giving of Your Life

Both Mark and Luke record a particular event with Yeshua and disciples in the temple. It is called the story of the widow's mites. Here is Mark's rendition of the story.

*And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the multitude were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. And calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."*

*Mark 12:41-44*

Very few believers come to understand the last level of giving. Some believers do become martyrs and give their mortal lives in the service of God. However, this story illustrates how gifts of that level can be made without the loss of mortal life.

Yeshua made the direct observation of both rich men and the poor widow. He correctly noted that the rich gave from their abundance. Offerings, tithes, and even gifts of the heart are made in that manner – from the abundance that they have. There is nothing wrong with those gifts. But, the greatest level of

giving comes from your own need – your own life.

Most people look at this story this way. The rich man gave many shekels; the widow gave two mites. How could her contribution be valued as more? I remember several years ago in a Baptist church where they attempted to teach this point, but fooled themselves. In that instance, a man presented a jar of multi-colored gum balls to some children. Each child was permitted to reach into the jar and get as many as they could. Next, another man offered them some gum balls but he only had one for each child. They asked the children who gave the most – the man with the jar or the man with only one each. You guessed it. The man with the jar was their answer and there was no way they could be talked out of it. I sat back and chuckled to myself. This is how most people see the story of the widow and her two little mites.

However, you will understand that the widow gave more if you just compare the previous levels of giving. It comes down to the value of the gift made by the giver. Who gave the more valued gift? The man with the jar with the abundance or the other with just one – his last one? Who gave a tithe? We don't know if the man with jar gave a tenth, but we do know the other gave 100 percent. What about the heart? Who is to say where the heart of the first was, but the other man gave all he had. He wholeheartedly gave.

Maybe the previous argument has not satisfied your logic. Consider this. The widow's mites is really an example of God's gift of His Son for us. The rich man certainly doesn't illustrate it. The Messiah gave all He had, including that which He needed to live, as a gift for us. He truly was a sacrifice. The value of His gift is not determined by the world; it is determined by Him. He is worth far more than all the profit of the world. He was commanded by His Father to lay down His life for us a lamb. He obeyed. He came with mercy and compassion. He offers us forgiveness of sins with grace (we don't deserve it). Finally, He gave of his own need and life. There is no greater gift.

Consider this... Yeshua's sacrifice was for all of us; however, had only one person received His gift of life... let's say that one person was you. Would Yeshua have still made Himself a sacrifice and given Himself just for you? The answer is yes.

At this season of giving, I encourage you to watch how others give and receive. I believe you will discover that the world has a very shallow understanding when it comes to giving. I encourage you also to examine your own giving. What value do you place on your gifts? Do you obey the Lord in tithing from your increase? Do you give from the heart? Have you ever given a secret gift? When was the last time you gave out of your need because you preferred the need of another? Where are you in your spiritual growth when it comes to giving with the Lord?

The Apostle Paul encouraged the believers many years ago on this very subject with this:

*I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

*Romans 12:1*

You learn to give by understanding what you have received, and in the way it was given to you. Then you give something of value. You make a sacrifice. You make an offering. You give a gift. At this season of giving, let us not give the way the world gives. Let us give the way God gives.

By the way, for those of you widows who send this ministry your offerings of "mites." Thank you and God bless you. Your reward will be exceedingly great!

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