

Survival of the Kindest

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Malachi 3:10

...“I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!”

God is constantly trying to persuade us to let go of our fear and limited thinking and open our hearts and minds to all the good that is planned for us.

This verse refers to God imploring his people bring the entire tithe of grain into the storehouse and not rob from Him. In return, God will bless them beyond measure. As it applies to today's situation, God constantly implores us to give the full measure of what we have: the time, money, talents, our love, sympathy, service, and compassion. We are not to rob God by withholding of who we are and what we have. In other words, God wants us to give.

I want to share a few ideas on giving. It is a huge topic and probably one of the most important qualities we can possess – a willingness to give. I cannot possibly cover this crucial subject adequately, so I will offer a sparse contribution. Being willing to give is the foundational principle of loving God, and of fulfilling the Christ's command to love each other. It is fundamental to applying the golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. It all starts by giving.

There are those who dislike it when a minister starts speaking about giving: they think it is going to be about guilt and giving more money to the church. But if you know me, you know that I am not one to beg for money. Our needs are simple. After paying for the upkeep of the church, whatever is left over is split between me and the charities to which we give. Pretty simple.

So I'm not talking about giving more money to the church, at least not in that respect. What I mean is that if the church is the only place where you are giving of your financial prosperity, then I would like to encourage you to expand your giving horizons. Giving directly to a cause or individual yourself, not through the church, is a powerful source of additional joy.

Giving of money, time, service, our hearts, and talents is part of what keeps us balanced and transforming into what God intends for us to be. There must be an equal amount of giving as receiving. If we do not give enough, we begin to stagnate, to the point where we cannot bear fruit at all, but only fungus and bacteria.

Think of the Dead Sea. It is called that because it cannot support life outside of bacteria and microbial fungi. It is 8.6 times saltier than the ocean because there are no outlets; it is fed by the Jordan River, but does not release any of the water it receives. In a metaphorical sense, it receives, but it does not give, and so it stagnates. There is no circulation.

Nothing is static; there is always a constant movement toward balance. In Luke 6:38 we are taught that when we give, we receive.

Our gift returns to us in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into our lap. The amount we give determines the amount we get back.

St. Francis said: “For it is in giving that we receive.” He knew the correct order of giving and receiving and taught it.

So did Leo Tolstoy, who said: "The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity." It is the giving of ourselves that provides meaning to our life, which is echoed by Winston Churchill when he said: “We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.”

Today, scientific research provides compelling data to support the notion that giving of our time, talents and treasures is a powerful pathway to finding purpose, transcending difficulties, and finding fulfillment and meaning in life.

To paraphrase Darwin, life is not the survival of the fittest, but is being discovered to be the survival of the kindest.

Dacher Keltner, co-director of UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center, writes this, “Because of our very vulnerable offspring, the fundamental task for human survival and gene replication is to take care of others.” "Human beings have survived as a species because we have evolved the capacities to care for those in need and to cooperate."

Darwin speaks of benevolence 99 times, in his book "The Descent of Man," concluding that love, sympathy and cooperation also

exist in the natural world, like the way a pelican provides fish for a blind pelican in its flock.

"As Darwin long ago surmised," said Keltner, "sympathy is our strongest instinct." In other words, our brains are hardwired to serve, to give, to show compassion.

Other studies at the National Institutes of Health by Jorge Moll and Jordan Grafman show that when we give through serving or donating money the areas of our brains that reflect pleasure are activated. So science has determined that when we give we receive joy in return.

Sometimes when we are thinking of giving and receiving our minds can drift to gratitude. We can ask our self, "What do I have in my own life that is truly 100 percent in my possession because of only me and my effort?" Very quickly, we realize the answer to that question is zero. And because nothing we have is through only our own work, it means that we are 100 percent codependent on the world around us. When we realize this we become very thankful for each and everything in our life.

Giving creates an awareness of abundance. When we realize that even in our codependence upon others we have all of our basic needs met, we can release our fears and not hang on so tightly. Abundance of money, love, companionship, and opportunities abound, if we only open our hearts and minds.

It's like trying to scoop water out of a bucket with just our hands.

If we grab it, we get nothing. If we bring our hands together in an open position we can drink our fill.

Giving frees us. When we realize that everything we have is God's we aren't filled with tension, anger, and anxiety to release it and give it away. Nothing that we give away is really ours at all. We aren't bound by our possessions when we can release them and give them away. They hold no power over us.

Now, we don't have to give what we own away. The freedom comes from knowing that we could give it all away and we would be none the poorer for it. Our trust, confidence, and faith that we will always have enough enable us to move past the desire to amass and covet wealth, possessions, and power.

The question to ask our self is: are there any areas of my life where I feel lacking and stagnant? If we can be honest and non-judgmental, we will identify some areas. The solution to healing those areas is to give through them. If we need more money, then we can give to people who are also in need.

I've heard it said, "The window you receive through is made bigger by the window you give through."

Sometimes we stop ourselves and justify not giving. We send messages of lack to our minds by thinking, "There isn't enough," "I won't get any more," "I might need this for an emergency," "I feel safer with this in my pocket." Fear is the greatest blockage for our giving, and therefore receiving. The more we hold on to that

old limited thinking, the harder it is to attract God's good, whether it be money, love, peace ... you name it. Our scarcity mindset simply won't let it in.

Sometimes we can lose ourselves in our fear, resentment, and judgment. Gandhi reminds us, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

Another excuse we use to not give is because we don't know what they would do with the money. I've used this myself. But what I have come to understand is that what I am giving is not mine to begin with, so it is not mine to control how someone else is going to use it. I realize that this person or opportunity has been presented to me by Spirit. It is not my responsibility to judge, but to love.

I used to only give the food packets from church to the person on the corner, but now I make sure to include a few dollars as well. Yes, they may use it to buy booze. But that is my fear speaking. They may use it to buy food, or pet food, or pay the rent. We really don't know. And if we are giving a gift, we can do it without expectation, which includes them living the life we think they ought to live, or using our gift as we think they should.

Kahlil Gibran said, "There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward." When we give from what we have we feel the pleasure of God. I need to remind myself as to why I am giving. If I am giving to help, then my giving may result in my expecting the receiver to do something that I think they should do. I am trying to control them. But if I am giving with joy, there no strings attached;

it is unconditional loving and giving. Giving from joy is based upon faith; it is trusting that God is present in the transaction and love is being served.

2 Corinthians 9:7 addresses this point: *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

There are many ways to give. But I pray that we keep these words of Kahlil Gibran in our minds and hearts: “You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.”

For me, one of the most powerful things to witness is the selfless persistent giving resulting from a commitment we have made. I’ve seen it as caregivers give of their energy, time, and skills to tend their loved ones or patients. This commitment to giving never fails to bring tears to my eyes.

One of my favorite scenes from a movie is in *Chariots of Fire*, when Eric Liddell, a devout Scottish Christian athlete is running for the glory of God falls during a race. He gets up, far behind the others, and starts off again. At one point, he puts his head back and grins, as the joy and power of God flow through him. Miraculously, he catches the others and wins.

I am most inspired by this characteristic of giving tirelessly; beyond what anyone would think is even possible because of a commitment to humankind, God, a cause, or love -- or all of those,

or something else. When the rest of us would just say, “I quit; I’m tired. I’ve done enough,” and that would be true by anyone’s standards ... but the inspired giver keeps going; he is compelled by a different standard and powered by a different Source.

I have another favorite movie to point to; it is Hacksaw Ridge. It is about Desmond Doss, a Seventh Day Adventist pacifist soldier who refused to carry a gun into battle, but was able to serve his country during World War II as a combat medic. If you haven’t seen it, I don’t want to spoil it. But it is inspiring as this young medic pulls injured American soldiers from a gruesome battlefield. Although exhausted by his attempts to save his compatriots and stay alive amidst the ongoing battle, he would get one soldier safe, and then say a little prayer: “Please Lord, help me get one more.” Off he would go again to find another wounded soldier and carry him to safety. Then he would say his prayer again: “Lord, help me get one more.” Ultimately, he saved 75 wounded, including a couple of Japanese soldiers.

With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. I pray that when it is our turn to give, that we call upon the power of the Christ within to give unconditionally and more than we thought possible; that we give willingly, abundantly, and joyfully. Then get ready for the avalanche of good that awaits us.

Let us pray....