

THE KINGDOM BUILDER



STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

The Deeper Meaning of Life

If I were to quote the saying, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive,*” would you know who originally said it or where it can be found? It might come as a surprise to you to learn that this statement was made by Jesus. However, it is found in a very unusual place. Whenever you think of the statements of Jesus you immediately think of the Gospels and possibly His few comments in the book of Revelation. But this statement is actually found in the book of Acts 20:35. Paul quotes it in his farewell address to the elders at the church of Ephesus after his three-year ministry with them.

What is particularly interesting about this is that Paul tells the elders to “*remember the words of the Lord Jesus . . . Himself*” suggesting that these words must have been widely known among believers even though they are not recorded in any of the Gospels. The Apostle John does tell us in the last verse of his Gospel, “*Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written*” (John 21:25 NIV). So, needless to say, there is much more that Jesus said and did than is recorded in the Bible.

With that as a background, let us consider the verse itself. This verse is just another example of the idea of human contradictions. Jesus was a master of these. He would tell people if they wanted to be first, they would have to be last. If they wanted to live, they would have to die. If they wanted to be rich, they would have to become poor. This is just another in a long list. And this contradiction is nowhere more obvious than at Christmastime when giving and receiving reaches its annual apex.

Just ask a small child whether it is more fun—“blessed”—to get presents at Christmas or to give presents at Christmas, and the answer will always be the same. In fact, they may even look at you with some degree of disbelief. How could you even be asking such a ridiculous question? What keeps young children up at night with excitement is what they are going to *get* the next morning, not what they are going to be *giving*. There is nothing wrong with a child who is almost delirious with excitement about what he will receive—it is very natural. And that is exactly my point. It is very natural. And Jesus is the master of calling us to the unnatural—like loving your enemies and forgiving those who hurt you.

Almost everything about being a follower of Jesus is unnatural or counterintuitive. In fact, it is a safe rule to follow that however you are naturally inclined to respond to a situation, respond just the opposite, and you will probably be responding the right way. You see, the spiritual dichotomy is between what is natural and what is *supernatural*—which is how we have been re-born to live. The natural man will say, “It is more blessed to receive

than to give.” The *supernatural* man will say, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

If we were completely honest with ourselves, we would all admit that it is a blessing to both receive and give. Notice, Jesus said, “It is *more* blessed to give than to receive.” When the blessing of receiving overrides the blessing of giving, life becomes warped, myopic, and egocentric.

The story of Ebenezer Scrooge is a classic example of the natural man turned into the supernatural man. Ebenezer’s life was consumed with getting and accumulating, while giving was an entirely foreign notion to him. In fact, it could be said he found the idea abhorrent to such an extent that when he was once asked to support the poor so they would not starve to death, he said, “Let them die and decrease the surplus population.”

He would squeeze every penny out of every business deal he could, continuing to pile up greater and greater wealth. Yet, his receiving of more and more wealth failed to give him what he was looking for which was true happiness or fulfillment in life. In fact, the more he acquired, the more miserable he became. Something was terribly wrong with this lonely, old man. And the deceitfulness of believing that receiving was the greatest joy had failed him completely. He was not happy. He had no friends. He had no joy.

But then that one fateful Christmas Eve, Scrooge is forced to face himself through three spirits who visit him, and he becomes broken and changed. I mean totally changed—in just one night. How that change manifested itself was in an immediate transformation of his understanding of the purpose for all his accumulated wealth. He now saw it as a resource to be used for doing good. For the first time in his life he gladly opened his hands to help others as quickly and generously as he could. In all his giving he discovered the one truth that had completely eluded him all the years of his life—that it *is* more blessed to give than to receive.

Now this stingy, odious, crabby, hardhearted old man is changed into a generous, pleasant, kind and caring gentleman who finally found tremendous satisfaction in life—no longer in receiving and accumulating wealth for himself, but in giving that wealth in ways that would change people’s lives and circumstances.

Sadly, King Solomon’s life outcome was not

as positive as Scrooge’s. As one of the richest men who has ever lived on this planet, Solomon reflects back on all his material accomplishments in Ecclesiastes 12:1-11. Read it carefully.

I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves and I had home born slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines. Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

I have always wondered if instead of doing all this stuff “*for myself*,” if Solomon had done these things *for others*, would he have come to the same pessimistic conclusion about his life and his work? “*All [is] vanity and striving after the wind and there [is] no profit under the sun.*” I somehow think not.

With all of Solomon’s wisdom, there is one truth that he sadly missed entirely, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35).

Giving is a natural outgrowth of mature love. We see this so plainly in John 3:16, “*For God*

so loved..., He gave...” And we can all be thankful that His desire to receive our gifts of worship and praise was exceeded by His desire to give us a gift that we could never buy for ourselves. Romans 6:23 reminds us that *“the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

A biblical approach to life cannot focus simply on maximizing what you will keep for yourself and your family. You must also strive to address the deeper issues of your life’s purpose—what can you do to maximize your blessing to others?

It is the introduction of this aspect of giving that brings purpose, meaning, and fulfillment into what would otherwise be nothing more than a set of difficult business decisions that need to be made in order to minimize the damage of taxes. It is this component that gives planning a heart. It is what gives it life.

If you want to experience the deepest meaning in life, let me encourage you to follow the converted Scrooge’s example—and not Solomon’s—in regards to your accumulated wealth.



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