The Gift That Keeps On Giving  by Jeff Strite

Romans 12:1-12:8

OPEN: One preacher told of the time he found himself in a situation where he truly needed to announce publicly what he was giving to a special church offering. "This wasn’t for the purpose of boastfulness, for I was only giving $25, although, at that time, that was significant to me. It was just an awkward occasion and my only recourse was to announce that I was giving a $25 check to the cause. No big deal.

That Sunday afternoon, I asked our church treasurer how much the congregation had contributed to the cause. He mentioned that it was a good offering but then added, “There is something unusual about the offering.”

When I asked what he meant, he explained, “We got an unusually large number of $25 checks.”


Now notice what took place there. A preacher felt uncomfortable about saying how much he was giving for special offering, but in that situation he felt he had to.

How much did he give? ($25)
What effect did that have on the congregation? (Many gave the same)

As we’ve mentioned in an earlier sermon – God gave certain people in each congregation... special gifts. These are not so much miraculous gifts as they are motivational gifts.

In this case Paul writes: “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift ... is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously.” Romans 12:6, 8

Each gift is not only to motivate the giver but ALSO to motivate the rest of us in the church. When you have a giver in your midst they motivate YOU to give as well.

There’s a story in Acts that illustrates that. Acts 4:34-37 tells us
“There were no needy persons among them (Christians in Jerusalem). For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

Notice what that passage is saying. There were people in the church that sold their properties to supply for the needy. Then it tells us about Barnabas doing the same thing.
Why did Barnabas sell his land?
Because he’d seen others doing the same and was influenced by their actions.

ILLUS: Back in 2009, a Gallup Poll that those who attend religious services are more likely to be generous in how they use their resources and time. Of those who had attended a religious service in the last seven days:
• 34% Donated money to a charity.
• 26% Volunteered their time to an organization.
• 50% Helped a stranger

According to a recent survey by Barna,
• 79 percent of evangelical Christians gave money to a church or charity last year,
• 65 percent donated items and
• 60 percent volunteered their time.
• Only 1 percent of evangelicals say they donated nothing at all, which beats the national rate (13 percent) and the rate among those who claim no faith at all (25 percent).

My point is this: God places givers in our midst to challenge the rest of us to help the needy.
And it works.

There’s only 7 gifts listed in Romans 12. And that would imply that these 7 gifts are a high priority for God and thus a high priority for God’s people.

Proverbs 14:21 “… blessed is he who is kind to the needy.”
Proverbs 22:9 “A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.” Proverbs 19:17 “He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.” (He’ll repay with interest)

But God is very clear on the fact that this is NOT OPTIONAL for us
Proverbs 21:13 “If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.” (If you turn your back on the poor… God will turn His back on you.)

In fact, Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus.
Do you remember where does the rich man ends up? (Hell)
Do you remember WHY he ends up there? (didn’t have mercy on Lazarus)
“Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.” Luke 16:25

Later, Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats. He tells the sheep they’ll be welcome in heaven. Do you remember why?
Matthew 25:35-36 tells us “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”
When the “sheep” ask when they did this for Jesus, He replies: “When you did it to the least of these my brethren – you did it to me.”

Then He tells the goats... they’re going to hell WHY?
“For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.” Matthew 25:42-43

When the goats ask when they neglected Him Jesus replies: When you did NOT do this to the least of these my brethren, you didn’t do it for me.

Now this isn’t to say that “good deeds” will save us.
It is a consistent teaching throughout the New Testament that it is only the blood of Jesus that can save you. HOWEVER, what Jesus is telling us here is: if you’re thinking you can claim the blood and ignore the poor, you’re kidding yourself big time.

God takes this very seriously.

But now, let’s say you don’t have any spare cash to help the poor.
Well, you’re in luck, because God has devised a way for you to raise the funds.
Do you know what that way is?

Isaiah 58 God tells us all about it... it’s called fasting.
Do you know what fasting is?
It’s doing without food for a period of time.

In Isaiah 58:6-11 God says
“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to SHARE YOUR FOOD WITH THE HUNGRY and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.”...
“...and if you SPEND YOURSELVES ON BEHALF OF THE HUNGRY and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”

What’s God saying here?
He’s saying if you want to give your prayers a booster shot... try fasting.

You see – the food you eat costs money.
A regular meal at home can cost about $5.
So, let's say you decide to FAST for one day - that's 3 meals = $15
But let's say you fast for 5 days (and each meal costs $5) = $75

What God is telling us in Isaiah 58 is this: if you LOVE ME enough to deny yourself food, and then you “invest” the money you saved from not eating in taking care of the poor... you can't imagine the cool stuff I can do for you.

God’s essentially saying: “If you do this for me, I’ll put your prayers on speed dial.”
It doesn’t mean you’ll get everything you want... but you’ll get MORE than you would have otherwise.

“if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”

I WANT that!
Don’t you?

Like I said in an earlier sermon God gives these gifts to certain individuals, and those individuals then serve as inspirations to us to meet a higher standard of giving.

ILLUS: A woman wrote: “When I was ten, I found a wallet. There wasn’t any money in it, but I knew how these things worked. I couldn't wait to return it and get my reward! My dad drove me to the owner’s address. Once there, we found a modest military housing unit with a torn screen door. As I rang the bell, my dad took three $20 bills and tucked them into the wallet.
Turns out my reward was getting to see one of life's true heroes in action.
(Ann Douglas Vaughan, Newport News, VA in R.Digest 7/14, p. 22)

Those with the gift of giving inspire us to greater works of service.
And certain people DO have this gift
They give to the needy... because that’s their passion. (2nd nature)

How do you know if YOU have this gift?
(http://www.mulock.org/media/Gifts%202012.pdf p. 16)
• Able to see resources around them
• Invest self with gift.
• Desire to give high quality items to the needy
• They have a hope that their gift answers prayers
• They desire to give what they give secretly
• They have a concern that their gift might corrupt the recipient
• They exercise personal thriftiness (more money to help)
• Use gifts to multiply gifts
• Confirm amount with counsel

But as with all the gifts listed in Romans 12, there are weaknesses for these folks
• They can tend to hoard resources for themselves
• They can use their gift to control others
• They can accidentally force the recipient to higher living standards
• They can feel guilty about personal assets
• They tend to reject appeals based on pressure
• May give sparingly to their own family
• They can end up giving to projects rather than to people
• They can cause people to look to them rather than God
• They can wait too long to give to a need

This gift of giving is highly important, But the danger for those with this gift is to shine their light on THEMSELVES. As with all of these gifts, we should remember Jesus’ words

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works... (and what?) and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

The point here is that giving to the poor is a high priority for God. That’s why GIVING is one of the 7 gifts God gives to individuals in the church. He’s placed this EXTREMELY important gift into the church so we’d be inspired.

And God isn’t concerned with HOW much we give... as with the fact that we DO give.

ILLUS: It's not what you'd do with a million - if a million were your lot.
It's what you are doing at present with the dollar and a quarter you've got.

CLOSE: I once heard the true story of a couple who learned of a young family in their church who had decided to enter the ministry. But this young family’s vehicle was in such sad shape that it seemed it might not survive the trip to Bible College.
The husband and wife of this other church family determined that since they needed to buy a new car anyway, they would have their old car fixed up and give that to Bible College student. They went to the car Dealership, which was owned by a new convert to their church. The owner’s name was Boone Fields.
They explained to the car salesman their intentions and that they desired to buy a brand new Chevy Caprice Classic.
As the papers were being drawn up for the car they had chosen, the husband was suddenly struck by the thought that this was not giving of his best to God, but only giving God his leftovers.
He leaned over to his wife he shared his conviction and discovered she was of the same mind.
Suddenly, they told the salesman that they had changed their mind
They decided right then and there that they should give the new car to the student and fix their car up for use for another couple of years.
The salesman was astounded and questioned them to be sure they knew what they were doing. Then he shrugged his shoulders he drew up the new paperwork. They left their old car with the dealership to be repaired and got a ride home.

When the dealership called to tell them their car was ready, they came in and were greeted by the towering 6'4″ Boone Fields himself. He beckoned them into his office and told them his salesman had related to him what they had done for the college student. Never in all his days as a car salesman had he ever seen anything like it.

He talked on for several minutes and then took them out to the lot directing them to a new Chevy Caprice Classic much like the one they had originally chosen but with an additional $3700 worth of extras. He handed them the keys and said that it was theirs.

He left them with this statement:
"The same God who led you do what you did is giving this car to you."

Now I’m not trying to preach a health and wealth doctrine here. I’m not trying to say that if you give to the poor you’ll get your heart’s desires. But I am saying that God is so committed to this concept of giving to the poor that He has promised that when we do so He regards that as a personal loan to Him… and He will repay with interest. You may not get your “heart’s desires” but you will get way more than you could have otherwise because this is such a critical concept to God.

God calls us to be a people who give to the needy.
And God does that because He wants us to become like Him.

For God so loved the world that He … (GAVE)