

# *God is So Good!*

## *The Grace of Giving*

A Message Offered by  
Jeffrey W. Gibelius, Pastor  
Second Presbyterian Church  
Carlisle, PA 17013

October 11, 2009

*Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.*

*I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.*

*And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified.*

*I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

## Acts 20:28-35 NRSV

What do we do 18 times a minute, 1,080 times an hour, and almost 26,000 times a day, more or less? Breathe. And unless we're having respiratory problems, we take every breath for granted, don't we? Yet without the gift of breath we could not live more than a few minutes. If you're at least 40 years old, you have already taken about 375 million breaths. And each of those breaths was a gift from the same God who first breathed life into Adam.

Isn't God good? The more we experience God through the ups and downs of life the more we see just how gracious, generous, and giving God is. God can't help but give to us. That would be like asking a grandmother to stop spoiling her grandchildren. *It ain't gonna happen.* It's probably not supposed to. Giving is what God does. Think of the first part of what is perhaps the most famous verse in the New Testament, John 3:16. "God so loved the world that He..." He what? He "gave..."

And wasn't Jesus a giver? He gave up a place in heaven to come to the stable of Bethlehem. He gave up the comforts of home to be a traveling preacher and healer. He gave time to teach, heal and feed. In the end, all Jesus had left was a simple robe. And he gave that up as they nailed him to the cross. Jesus gave his last breath for you and for me.

That's why Jesus could say with such authority, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). He knew the truth of this statement from the first-hand experience of a life laid down for others, a life given for us.

But we're not always so sure about the "blessedness" of giving. I remember when I was a kid our teachers trying to convince us that instead of trick or treating on Halloween to collect candy for ourselves we should go door-to-door to collect money for UNICEF and give it to poor kids. We knew it was the *right* thing to do, but we weren't at all sure it was the *blessed* thing to do, no matter what the teacher said.

A lot of us aren't convinced that it really is "more blessed to give than receive." So let's look at it in parts.

Can we all agree that it is blessed to *receive*? Sure! I love getting gifts, don't you? What gifts have you received in your life? Perhaps a gift of

money in a time of crisis. Perhaps a gift of grace and understanding after you really messed up. Maybe a gift of help when you were in trouble. Aren't the birth of a baby, the love of a parent, the rainbow after the rain, the majesty of a sunrise in the mountains, or the intricate composition of a symphony all gifts from God? When we open ourselves to receive these gifts we feel so rich and blessed.

Every gift comes from God. Whether health and family, work and play, resting and eating, forgiveness and patience--all the good things in life come from God. Even when life is tragic, we know God is still good. Arthur Ashe inspired millions with his conduct on and off the tennis court. About fifteen years ago he died from AIDS, caused by an infected blood transfusion. Ashe could have become embittered in the face of his illness, but he made an incredible statement: "If I asked 'Why me?' about my troubles, I would have to ask 'Why me?' about my blessings. Why my winning Wimbledon? Why my marrying a beautiful, gifted woman and having a wonderful child?" We all face challenges in life, don't we? Many of us are painfully aware this morning of what we lack right now—a job, a spouse, a child, a sense of peace—yet in our hearts we know that we have been blessed with so much in other ways.

If God's job is to give, then it's our job to receive. Life itself, every moment of every day is meant to be received by us as a free and wonderful gift from our Creator. Stop for a moment and think about your next breaths. Thank God for them. Think about a person who loves you. Thank God for that person. Think about this beautiful building and this magnificent instrument: gifts to us from generations long ago and from the people around you. Thank God for the people who funded and built them. Now think about God's son and what he did on the cross. Thank God for his amazing act of generosity. Doesn't it make you feel rich? Doesn't it make you want to go out and do something good?

As wonderful as it is to receive, Jesus says there's an even greater blessedness in life. It belongs to those who also know the joy of giving. The biblical word "blessed" should not be confused with the English word "happiness." Happiness depends upon outward circumstances, and that is a very chancy thing. *Blessedness* is different. The New Testament word we translate "blessed" comes from the Greek noun *makarios*. The Greeks called the island of Cyprus *makarios*, or the "blessed" isle, because that island

produced so much food that it could export food to others out of its own abundance. The blessed life is the life of “more than enough.”

Giving changes us and our perspective: the more we give the more we realize how rich we are. A man touring a rural area in the Far East saw a boy pulling a crude plow while an old man held the handles and guided it through the rice paddy. The visitor commented, “They must be very poor.” “Yes,” said his guide. “When their church was built, they wanted to give something to help but they had no money left. So they sold their only ox. This spring they pulled the plow themselves.” I bet that man and that boy didn’t think of themselves as poor.

The person who gives with joy always seems to have more than enough, enough faith, enough friends, enough love. But the person who can’t bring themselves to risk true generosity, who mainly takes, grabs, and receives never has enough. They are perpetually starving in the midst of plenty. Look at the lives of people you remember as grasping and greedy. No matter how much they had in their bank account I bet they were living “poor” lives.

Receiving and giving are opposite sides of the same coin. If you want to receive more, give more and you will receive the transforming joy of giving. If you want to *give* more—and I think most of us wish we could do more to help God and others—then *receive* more of God’s grace. Get more in touch with God’s abiding goodness and his overwhelming love for you: you’ll find the faith to rise to the next level of giving. Can you see how both receiving and giving are equally important for Christians? They need to be in balance throughout our entire lives.

Bruce Barton has observed that

*There are two seas in Palestine.*

*One is fresh and fish thrive in it. Bright flowers and lush grasses adorn its banks. Trees spread their branches over it, and stretch out their roots to drink its sweet water. Children play along its shore.*

*The River Jordan flows south from this sea into another sea.*

*Here there are no fish, no trees, and no children's laughter. The air hangs above its waters and no living thing can drink of it.*

*The River Jordan empties the same good water into both seas. What accounts for the difference in these neighbor seas?*

*One thing: The Sea of Galilee receives but does not keep the water of the Jordan. For every drop that flows into it another drop flows out. The giving and receiving go on in equal measure. The other sea is shrewder, hoarding its income jealously. Every drop it gets, it keeps. The Sea of Galilee gives and lives. This other sea gives nothing. That is why it is named the Dead Sea.*

(Adapted from his parable)

Like the Dead Sea, sometimes we're afraid to share the precious resources that God has blessed us with; we're afraid we'll run out, especially in difficult economic times like these. But the truth is that we feel most wealthy and secure not when we cling desperately to God's blessings, but when we let them flow through us back to God and God's children.

A few weeks ago I spoke about Sir Edmund Hillary. What is he most famous for? Climbing Mount Everest, of course. But if you had the chance to ask him before he died what accomplishment brought him the most joy, he wouldn't have said it was being the first to summit Everest. He was just lucky that he happened to be first. That was a blessing that fell into his lap.

What brought him far more joy in his life was the sight of children in Nepal attending the schools and being cared for in the hospitals he's started there with the proceeds his climbing fame brought him. Given a choice he would have chosen the schools over the summit. But that would have been a false choice. It was the fact that he received fame and accolades that allowed him to give generously to people in great need. In the 56 years after he stood on top of the world, he learned the great lesson that *he* had been blessed to be a blessing to *others*. *Giving* not *climbing* was his true mission in life.

What's been your experience with giving? How do you feel after bringing food to a sick neighbor? Or giving a week of vacation on a mission trip? How does it feel to give food to the hungry? Doesn't it feel great? Most giving people I know say they've gotten back much more than they've ever given.

If you haven't yet tried to follow Jesus' advice on giving, what are you waiting for? Why not find out for yourself if it really is more blessed to give than to receive? Giving is the only instance in which God asks people to put Him the test. In the book of Malachi God says,

*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test... see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.*

*Malachi 3:10 NRSV*

Test and experience the truth of Jesus' words for yourself: what have you really got to lose? There's overflowing blessing to *gain*.

In the weeks ahead, take some time to think about how you have been blessed by God. Count your blessings one-by-one. Think about how you've experienced God's goodness and consider how you might begin to share more of God's blessings with others. Imagine what a difference your giving could make in your life. More importantly, imagine what a difference it will make in the lives of others.

When you make a serious commitment to give to God and God's work you have God's ironclad promise that your giving will not be in vain: as surely as Christ gave his life for you and me, you will be blessed as you bless others. Amen.

*Note: This sermon was based heavily on materials provided by Resource Services International for the In the Light of Grace Stewardship Campaign.*

*Dear Friend,*

*I hope you have been blessed by this message. You can request a free audio-tape or CD recording of this sermon by contacting the church office. We also have a complete sermon archive (including audio-files and PDFs) on-line at [www.GrowWithSecond.org](http://www.GrowWithSecond.org)*

*Second Presbyterian Church is a thriving congregation celebrating over 175 years of service to God and God's people. It would be our joy to help you grow in faith, hope, and love. Please consider being our guest for Sunday worship at 8 or 10:30am. Children's Church and infant and toddler care are always provided.*

*Jeff Gibelius, Pastor*

***Second Presbyterian Church***  
*528 Garland Dr.*  
*Carlisle, PA 17013*  
[www.GrowWithSecond.org](http://www.GrowWithSecond.org)  
*717-243-4571*

© 2009 Jeffrey Gibelius

This sermon is intended for personal use and distribution. If you want to use it for anything else, I'd be honored. Just call for permission. No claims of absolute originality are made for this material. As one man said, "I churn my own butter, but I use milk from other men's cows."