

How God Taught Me to Give

by Oswald J. Smith

Oswald J. Smith shares how God taught him the principles of giving through personal experiences and biblical teachings on faith promise offerings.

Duration: 1:01:17

Scripture: Proverbs 11:24-25, Proverbs 19:17, Malachi 3:10, Matthew 6:33, Luke 6:38, Acts 20:35

Topics: "Giving"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal journey of how God led him to give towards missions. He recounts his experience of becoming the pastor of a church that held an annual Missionary Convention, despite having no prior knowledge of such events. During the convention, he received an envelope with a message about giving towards missionary work. Inspired by the words of Winston Churchill, who said, 'Give us the tools and we'll finish the job,' the speaker passionately encourages congregations to support missionaries by providing them with the necessary resources. He also shares a testimony of how his own life was transformed when he embraced the concept of giving and experienced God's faithfulness.

Transcript

I'm going to ask you to turn, if you will, to the Book of Proverbs, the 11th chapter. There are just two verses I want to read, verses 24 and 25. Proverbs chapter 11, verses 24 and 25.

There is that scattereth and yet increaseth. I can't understand that. I never have been able to understand it.

It's a paradox, but over 40 years now I have seen it work, and I know it works. There is that scattereth and yet increaseth. How can you give away what you have and then have more left after you have given away than you had before you gave away? That's what this verse says.

There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet. But it tendeth to poverty. You hang on to more than you ought to hang on to, and the result may be poverty.

The liberal soul shall be made fast, shall prosper, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. Years ago I was holding an evangelistic campaign in the great church of which Dr. Paul Reis was the pastor. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, the church seating some 2,000 to 2,500 people.

Again and again I saw that church pack the capacity. One night at the close of the service, after the benediction had been pronounced, I was standing in the pulpit when I saw a well-dressed businessman walking up the aisle, and I saw that he wanted to say something to me. As soon as he got within speaking distance, he cried out, Dr. Smith, I owe you everything I am and everything I have in life.

I looked at him in amazement. I said, you owe me everything you are and everything you have in life? I don't understand. Explain.

Years ago, we said, during the days of the Great Depression, I was living in your city, the city of Toronto, Canada. I was down and out. I was so low that I could hardly reach up and touch bottom.

I had lost my position. I was dressed in rags. I was deeply in debt.

My wife had left me. My two daughters had left me. I was tramping the streets of Toronto looking for a job, and I couldn't find a job for love or money.

One day, he said, I was walking along Brewer Street. I happened to be passing your church. The doors were wide open.

I heard singing on the inside, and having nothing else to do, I went in, and I sat in a pew at the back of the church. He said, you were holding one of those annual missionary conventions of yours, and you yourself, you were in the pulpit. But he said, you were making so many absurd, so many foolish, so many nonsensical statements.

As a matter of fact, he said, you were talking so much utter nonsense that I sat up and listened. He said, you were saying, give, and it shall be given unto you. You were saying, square with God, and God will square with you.

You were saying, you can't beat God giving. You were saying, God will be no man's debtor. He said, I'd never heard anything like that in my life before.

Why, he said, you were talking right up my alley. What I needed more than anything else was money, and you were telling me exactly how to get it. You were saying, give, and it shall be given unto you, just to see whether or not you were telling the truth.

He said, I took my pencil out of my pocket, I signed one of those faith promise offering envelopes of yours, and I promised God a certain percentage of all that he might give me in the future. Well, of course, that was easy for him. He didn't have a cent to his name.

He could promise God a percentage of anything that he might get in the days to come. He said, I handed the envelope to one of your ushers, and I walked out of the church. Then, he said, it happened.

Within a few hours, I had a job, the first I'd been able to get for months. At the end of the week, he said, I figured out exactly the percentage I promised, and I paid it in to God's work. At the end of the next week, I figured it out again exactly, and I paid it in.

Then he said, I got a raise in my wages, and he said it was working so wonderfully that at the end of the next week, I again figured out the exact percentage, and I paid it in. It wasn't long, he said, before I got another position. Then I was getting more money, and again, I figured out the exact percentage that I promised in your church, and I paid it in.

He said, to cut a long story short, it wasn't very long until I threw away my rags. I got a new suit of clothes. I paid off all my debts.

Then my wife came back to me. My two daughters came back to me, and now, he said, we're living here in the city of Minneapolis. I have a splendid position.

I'm a prosperous businessman. We own our own car. It's all paid for.

We own our own home, and it's paid for. We have money in the bank. We have money in our pockets, and he said, we owe it all to you.

I took you at your word back there on Bloor Street that day, and God did what he said he would do. I can't tell you, my friends, how many have come to me with exactly the same story. During the days of the Depression, scores of men came to the people's church asking for a shakedown or a handout.

Do you know, very often, I would ask those men this question. I would say, tell me, when you were earning money, did you square with God? I never had one single man who could answer in the affirmative. Every man answered, no.

When I was earning money, I spent it all on my own family and on myself. Let me tell you something. If you square with God during the days of prosperity, God will square with you during the days of Depression.

If you fail to square with God during the days of prosperity, you may find yourself in the bread line during the days of Depression. God will be no man's debtor. You can't beat God giving.

Square with God, and God will square with you. Give, and it shall be given unto you. I've been asked tonight to tell you how God led me to give the missions.

I've been pastor of a large Presbyterian church here in the city of Toronto, a church seating some 1,800 people when I was in my 20s. After a few years, I resigned from that church, and I became pastor of a church that held an annual missionary convention. Now, I didn't know anything about a convention.

I'd never seen one in my life. I became pastor on the closing Sunday of that convention. I sat on the platform back of the sacred desk.

I sat watching the ushers as they walked up and down the aisles taking up the faith promise offering. Suddenly, one of those ushers had the audacity to walk right up to the platform, step onto the platform, and hand me, the pastor of the church, one of these envelopes. I took it from him.

I studied it. In dependence upon God, I will endeavor to give toward the missionary work of this church. Each month, the amount sets.

By the next year, I had never held one of these envelopes in my hand before. I didn't know anything about a faith promise offering. I had never seen a convention.

And so I closed my eyes and I started to pray. I said, Lord, and this happened in 1921, nearly 50 years ago. Lord, I said, I can't take part in this offering.

This church is only paying me \$25 a week. The First World War is on. I have a wife to support and a family.

We're trying to buy our home. Prices are sky high. I said, Lord, I cannot participate in this offering.

I have nothing in the bank. I have nothing in my pockets. I do not have two cents to rub against each other at the end of the week.

Then the Lord started to talk to me. Now, I didn't know that that morning God was going to teach me a lesson that I in turn would teach to tens of thousands of Christians all over the United States of America in the future years. But so it was.

For presently, God said to me, I'm not asking you for what you have. I said, Lord, you're not asking me for what I have. No, I'm not asking you for what you have.

Well, then, Lord, what are you asking? I'm asking you for a faith offering. How much can you trust me for? Well, Lord, I said, that's different. I've never given a faith offering in my life.

They never taught me to give a faith offering when I was in seminary. The only kind of an offering I've ever given has been a cash offering. Lord, how much can I trust thee for? You'll have to tell me.

Now, I thought God might say five dollars because once in my life, as a Presbyterian minister, during the year, I have managed to give five dollars to missions once in my life. I didn't know what God would say. Now, I'm not going to try to tell you tonight that God spoke to me in an audible voice, but I can remember it as though it were yesterday, even though it happened nearly 50 years ago.

For as I sat there, with my head bowed, my eyes closed, suddenly the Spirit of God said to me, 50 dollars. When I opened my eyes, I looked around in amazement, wondering where the voice had come from, wondering what God had actually said. 50 dollars, Lord.

Two weeks' salary. How can any mortal man give two weeks' salary to missions, let alone a minister? But you know, God never changed the amount. Again, he whispered, 50 dollars.

I can remember as though it were yesterday, taking out my pencil, signing my name, writing in my address, on that faith promise envelope, and checking the amount, 50 dollars. I had never given such a fortune in all my life before. The amount was so staggering that I could hardly think about it.

I handed it into one of the ushers. Every month from then on, I had to get alone with God, and I had to agonize in prayer. I had to exercise faith.

I had to ask God to send me an extra four dollars. And you know, that in answer to prayer, month by month, without one single exception, God sent me the extra four dollars. At the end of the year, I had paid in every cent of the 50 dollars I had promised 12 months before.

But this is what I want to get over to you tonight. I received such a spiritual blessing. It was such an inspiration.

I was so thrilled. My heart was so filled with joy that at the next convention, I doubled it. And by faith, I made it 100 dollars for the year for missions.

And again, God answered prayer. My faith commenced to grow. Once more, God sent it in.

At the next convention, by faith, I doubled it again. And I made it 200 dollars for the year for missions. And again, God sent it in.

And then, the church raised my salary from 25 dollars a week to 40 dollars a week. Now I was on millionaire roll. Now I was on millionaire roll.

Now I was, now I have so much money that I knew I could give more than I've ever given before. At the next convention, I doubled it once more. I made it 400 dollars for the year.

Then there came a day when I doubled it again and made it 800 dollars for the year. And I think I'll never forget the day when I doubled it once more and made it 1600 dollars for the year. And now, I've got thousands upon thousands of dollars in the bank of heaven.

And if I'd waited until I had the cash, I wouldn't have anything in the bank of heaven because I never would have had the cash. I gave it when I didn't have it. I gave it when I didn't know where it was coming from.

I gave it when I had to trust God for it and walk by faith. God sent it in. And from that day to this day, I have been giving a faith promise offering.

And I wouldn't dream of going back to the old method of giving. Now you say, Dr. Smith, what is a faith promise offering? Three things. First, a faith promise offering is not a cash offering.

You do not have to have one single penny in your pocket in order to give a faith promise offering. For instance, suppose I have a dollar bill in my pocket. All I have to do is to tell that hand to go into that pocket, find that dollar bill, and put it on the plate.

I'll never have to pray for it. I'll never have to exercise faith for it. I'll never have to trust God for it.

I've got it. All I have to do is to be willing to give it. That's a cash offering.

I never take up that cash. That kind of an offering for missions. That kind of an offering brings very, very little blessing.

A faith promise offering is not a cash offering. Therefore, if you are here tonight and you have no cash, you can still take part in this faith promise offering. Second, and I want you to get this.

It's very important. A faith promise offering is not a pledge offering. Never in my life have I taken up a pledge offering for missions.

You say, what's the difference between a pledge offering and a faith promise offering? All the difference in the world. A pledge offering is between you and the Church. And if you don't say it, the Church will have a right to send the elders around to collect it because you owe it.

You have pledged it. I never take up that kind of an offering for missions. What is a faith promise offering? A faith promise offering is between you and God.

Nobody will ever ask you for it. Nobody will ever demand it of you. Nobody will ever call on you in order to get it.

It's a transaction between you and God. And if you can't pay it, all you have to do is to give your excuse to God and nobody else. And if God is willing to accept your excuse, then you'll not have to pay it.

It's a secret transaction between you and God. That's the only kind of an offering I've taken up for missions for the last 40 years. Third, a faith promise offering is a Bible offering.

It is a scriptural offering. It is a Pauline offering. And I like to do things according to the Word of God.

Do you remember how the Apostle Paul would come to a church? He wanted money for the poor saints at Jerusalem. He knew the people did not have it. Therefore, he did not take up a cash offering.

He knew he couldn't get what he needed. He took up a faith promise offering. He said, I'm coming back in 12 months.

You have it ready. I'll give you one year to prepare. Then he left them.

About three months before it was time for him to return, he sent Titus, you remember, to remind the church of the promise that had been made when he had been there. And to warn the church that he would be coming along to collect it at the end of the year. And then when the year was up, the Apostle Paul went back to that church, collected the amount that had been promised 12 months before, went to Jerusalem, and relieved the needs of the poor saints there.

You say, where do you get that? Have you ever read chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians? Let me make a suggestion. Let me suggest that when you go back home tonight, you get your living letters. Turn in your living letters to 2 Corinthians.

Read chapters 8 and 9. The Apostle Paul talks about nothing in those two chapters except money. I know of no one who pled for money like the Apostle Paul did. You read those two chapters from living letters.

And you'll find that the Apostle Paul took up faith promise offerings. And that's why God blesses it as he does. It's a scriptural offering.

It's a Bible offering. One last thing. Why is it that these faith promise offerings are so successful? I'll tell you why.

Because everyone, every individual, takes part. If a handful of wealthy people fill in these envelopes, we'll never get the offerings we need. If every individual in the Church, without exception, will fill in one of these envelopes, we'll get the amount that we need for our missionaries.

I don't care if you check the smallest amount on that envelope. Just so long as you participate. Just so long as you're interested enough to do something.

Just so long as you fill in an envelope. What do I mean? Every boy in our Sunday school is expected to fill in one of these envelopes himself. Every girl in our Sunday school is expected to fill in one of these envelopes for herself.

We do not expect a mother or a father to fill in the envelope for a son or a daughter. We want every boy and every girl in our Sunday school to fill in one of these envelopes. We want every member of our choir to fill in one of these envelopes, each one individually.

We want every one of our elders, over 200 of them, to fill in one of these envelopes. We want every individual here present tonight to fill in one of these envelopes. But you say, I'm a wife.

My husband does the giving. You're never going to get the heaven on your husband's salvation. Why shouldn't you do a little giving yourself? Why should you leave it all to your husband? Let him fill in his envelope, but you fill in yours.

And if every individual will do something, we'll get the offering we need for our 300 and more missionaries and for the sending out of these new recruits. It's a question of each one doing something. You remember the last world war? France had fallen.

The United States had not yet come in. Great Britain was standing alone with her back against the wall, expecting almost instant invasion. The Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, decided to speak directly to the American people.

I was driving along the highway with my wife. I drew my car to the side of the road. I turned off the engine.

I didn't want to miss a single word. I tuned in London, England. The Prime Minister only spoke for two or three minutes, but I'll never forget what he said, speaking directly to the American people.

Sir Winston Churchill said this, Give us the tools, and we'll finish the job. Ever since then, I've been facing congregations of all denominations. And speaking on behalf of our 44,000 Protestant missionaries, I have been saying to those congregations, Give us the tools, and we'll finish the job.

And tonight, tonight, speaking on behalf of more than 300 missionaries of the People's Church, and these new recruits, and all these faith missionary societies, I say to you, give them the tools, and they'll finish the job.

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