

Generosity is the Path to Happiness!

February 11, 2018 Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

What does it mean to have a prosperous life? I have mentioned that the picture that I was exposed to as a young girl was thought provoking and has always stayed in my mind. Everyone in the nursing home had all the same earthly possessions, basically their clothing and pictures on the wall and some were fortunate enough to have a hand- made crocheted bed covering for their bed. The furniture belonged to the establishment and everyone ate the same food prepared by the kitchen help. At a young age, I was determined to invest my time, talent, and money into others so that I would have treasures in heaven someday. There have been periods of time in my life that I have veered off course, but for the last 25 years, I have striven to be Christ like and to influence people in positive ways by spreading the word of God.

Throughout the Bible, God calls people to give abundantly of their time, talent, money and other resources. Some people get offended by the idea that Christians are to be generous. However, God doesn't call on us to give because He needs anything from us; He calls on us to be generous because of our own need to think of others in order to be a blessing to them and to receive a blessing in return. It is God's idea that to receive, you must first give.

I read about a very successful salesman who rose to be a director of a very lucrative company, before he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. His motto was "Success is a numbers game." The more contacts you make, the more sales you have, the more money you make, and with more money, the more success you will enjoy. He worked to get, accumulate, and keep. With that mindset he accumulated a beautiful home, an expensive automobile, designer clothes, stocks and bonds and more wealth heaped up for him to worry about. He became anxious about the challenge of being able to keep everything that he had earned and accumulated. He focused his attention on his "stuff" and had little thought about the people that he used to obtain all his possessions. God's definition of success is much different than the world's view. He tells us to use money and love people. The world loves money and uses people. What does it mean to live a prosperous life? This man eventually found God's path.

There is a thought provoking story concerning the prophet Elijah in the book of iKings 17. Elijah stood for righteousness and denounced the idol worship and evil deeds of King Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel. Because of Elijah's determination to uphold God's standards to the house of Israel and to tear down the false gods that these leaders had promoted throughout Israel, the wicked queen sought to kill him. God told him to go eastward and hide himself by a brook, Cherith which is before Jordan. God had a plan of protection for Elijah; he would drink water from the brook and God commanded ravens to feed him every morning and evening for a period of time. That was fine but one day the brook dried up. What happens when your resources dry up and you have no idea where to turn for help? We could learn a lot from Elijah; he turned to God for instruction. The Lord had a new

plan for him and it was one that at first sight, makes us wonder how that worked. He told Elijah to go to Zerephath which belonged to Sidon and stay there for he had commanded a widow to sustain him. Elijah didn't ask any questions and he arose and did as the Lord had commanded him to do. When he reached the gate of the city behold, there was a widow gathering sticks. He called to her and said, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." And as she was going to get him a drink of water, he called to her again and said, "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in your hands." She stopped and said to him, "As the Lord your God lives, I don't have a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for me and my son that we may eat it and die." Elijah said "fear not". Think about the anxiety this widow lady had been dealing with as she saw her food supply dwindle day by day bringing her closer to the time that she would have to tell her son, "We have no more food. We are going to die!" And Elijah told her not to worry? And not only that, but he then asked her to go ahead with preparing the last little bit of food that she had, but she was to bring him a cake first and then she could feed herself and her son after.

For the Lord had said that the barrel of meal would not be used up nor the cruse of oil get used up until the Lord sent rain on the earth to end the famine.

This woman was not an Israelite so she referred the Lord as Elijah's God yet the Lord saw her desperate need and reached out to help her by showing his loving care for her predicament and to bless Elijah with provisions at the same time. Verse 15 informs us that she obeyed the voice of the prophet and she, her son and Elijah ate for many days. And the barrel of meal was not used up neither did the cruse of oil fail according to the word of the LORD which he spoke to Elijah. Elijah stayed at her house for two years. God has principles for our lives in place in order to receive blessings from his hand. The principles that are set forth for us in this chapter are these:

When you need something, give something in faith! Are you going to trust God or rely on your own understanding? Proverbs 3:5 says this: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. Your body will be healthy and your bones will be strong. Honor the LORD with your wealth and the first fruits from your crops. Then your barns will be full and your wine barrels will overflow with new wine."

Don't be afraid of lacking provisions because of giving. God will provide for you! He will test you and the blessing will come when you show faith in his provision.

Luke 6:38 teaches this: "Give and you shall receive. You will be given much, pressed down, shaken together and running over, it will spill into your lap. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you." In Psalms 126 it declares that "those who cry as

they plant crops will sing at harvest time. Those who cry as they carry out the seeds will return singing and carrying bundles of grain." Galatians 6:7 warns us not to be fooled. You cannot cheat God. People harvest only what they plant. If they plant to satisfy their sinful selves, their sinful selves will bring them ruin. But if they plant to please the Spirit, they will receive eternal life."

Look at 2 Kings 4:8. There the prophet Elisha went to Shunem where an important woman lived. She begged Elisha to eat a meal with her and her husband. After that, whenever Elisha passed through her town, he stopped there to rest and ate with them. The woman said to her husband one day, "This is a true man of God who often passes through out town. Let's make a small room on the roof and put a bed in the room for him. We can put a table, a chair, and a lampstand there also so when he comes by, he will have a place to stay and rest. Elisha enjoyed the accommodation and one day he told his servant, Gehazi to call the Shunammite woman to his room. Gehazi obeyed and the woman stood before him. He asked what he could do to repay her for all of her kindness. Would she like him to speak to the king or the commanding officer of the army on her behalf? She told him that she lived among her own people and she was not interested in being acknowledged by the king or commanding officer of the army. She didn't have any requests for repayment. Later Gehazi mentioned to Elisha that her husband was older and she had no son. Elisha called her again and told her that about the same time the next year she would be holding a son in her arms. The woman pleaded with Elisha not to lie to her, but just as the prophet had spoken, the following year a son was born to her.

The woman had blessed the prophet with hospitality never expecting or desiring anything in return and God blessed her with a son that she had longed for but had given up hope. There is always a surprise when you give to the Lord from a generous heart. In 2 Corinthians 9:6, it reads like this: "Remember this: The person who plants a little will have a small harvest. Each one should give as you have decided in your heart to give. You should not be sad when you give, and you should not give because you feel forced to give. God loves the person who gives happily. And God can give you more blessings than you need. Then you will always have plenty of everything- enough to give to every good work. It is written in the Scriptures: He gives freely to the poor. The things he does are right and will continue forever."

When Moses led the people out of slavery from Egypt, the Egyptians loaded them down with silver, gold, jewelry and expensive cloth in abundance. Later when Moses was planning to build the tabernacle that God had commanded him to build, he asked for donations of gold, silver, jewelry and expensive cloth for the temple. People gave so generously that they had to be told to stop bringing the items to the collection center because Moses had an overabundance. See Exodus 35:1-36, and Exodus 36:5.

In Malachi 1:8, it speaks about people who insult the LORD by their offerings. The LORD All-Powerful says, "A child honors his father and a servant honors his master. I am a father, so

why don't you honor me? I am a master, so why don't you respect me? You priests do not respect me." The priests asked how they showed disrespect to the LORD. He told them they showed disrespect by bringing unclean food to the altar. They asked for an explanation and this is what God said. "It is unacceptable because you bring blind animals as sacrifices and that is wrong. It is wrong to bring sick, lame, or blind animals to offer to God. Try giving them to the governor. Would he be pleased with you? He wouldn't accept you, said the LO') All-Powerful. With these types of offerings you are not giving me proper honor, says the LO' I. These types of gifts are not acceptable to me and I will reject them. The person who cheats will be cursed. The person who promises to offer a male animal from his flock and then brings one that has something wrong with it is offensive to the LO' P for God is a great king and is to be feared among all nations.

When you come to the house of the Lord, the Bible says for us to come prepared. Look at 1 Corinthians 14:26. It asks the question of what should we do? When we meet together one person should have a song, another should have a teaching. One has a new truth from God and another may speak in a different language and another person may interpret it. The purpose of all these things is to help people of God to grow strong. We are to come together prepared to uplift the body of Christ. Paul stresses that this commandment came from God. Those who ignore this will be ignored by God. Be thankful and share hope with others! Bring God your best gifts! Prepare your hearts for worship by studying his word so your ministry will be effective. See 2 Timothy 2:15. Don't neglect to set aside an offering for the Lord. It is a part of worship! For those who are pressed for time; offer a sacrifice of time to the Lord. Some may be in need of finances; offer a sacrificial offering to the Lord; whatever you are in need of, bring what you have to the Lord and allow Him to multiply it and bless you as well as those that you have shared with in abundance. You may need someone to listen to your problems; offer a listening ear to someone who is sorrowing or having a hardship that needs a friend. The Bible says if you want friends, you must be friendly. See Proverbs 18:24. Give the best that you have to the Lord for He is the King of Glory! He will keep his promise and heap blessings on you. I prayed for God to show me how I could repay Him for all the wonderful things He has done in my life. He opened up the door for us to minister to prisoners and with that blessing, He has given me many brothers in Christ that have filled the void in my life from the loss of my brother over 40 years ago. Only He can do that! He knows our deepest desires and He knows how to supply our needs.

Many people don't understand the concept of "Cast your bread upon the water and it will return to you after many days. Ecclesiastes 11:1

Consider this when you preparing to give something away. Would I offer this to Jesus Christ? I encourage you to think about those who will be recipients of your gifts. I only give things that I would offer to my children or would put it in my own closet to wear. My

children are my jewels and that is the standard that I use. When we buy groceries for the hungry, I buy the same brands for them as I buy for myself. I give to the Lord the very best that I can. When you give to God's children you are loaning it to Him. See Proverbs 19:17. My sermons are written after hours of studying the Scriptures and books that inspire thoughts for the soul. God doesn't need our money or our gifts, but He looks at the motives for our giving. Do for others as you would have them do for you. As you seek to help others, you will find that the giver is blessed over and above that which helps the recipient! God has wonderful surprises in store for you as you bring him an offering of Thanksgiving! John 3:16 says that "God so loved the world that he GAVE his only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life." God is a giver! Everything we have He provided! Give with a grateful heart!