

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 - Desire the Gift of Giving

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: You've probably seen a child leaving someone's house with a toy from that house and the parents then say: "It is time to go. It is time to put back the toys." And sometimes you might hear that child say: "It's mine." You don't have to teach a child to be selfish and be a receiver. It comes naturally. King Solomon received many gifts from others. Many gave gifts because they loved his wisdom and came to listen to him. Other gave gifts from fear and in order to pacify 抚慰 him. But as gifts dwindled 日渐减少 when Solomon turned from God he started to oppress the people to accumulate possessions. What a contrast from what the Lord teaches...and what Solomon himself realized later in life. In our passage, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Solomon started to teach about giving...how it was necessary, and how it was good, and how it was a most desirable gift...as opposed to be a receiver.

Our headings are: Sow into the Lives of Others, and Excuses against sowing into the lives of others.

Our goals are: Because you realize the wealth you already have in Jesus Christ, wealth than none can take away, you then will learn to share with others.

Sow播种 into the Lives of Others

1 Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days.

1. When Solomon said: "Cast your bread upon the waters." Solomon was calling on his hearers to invest in the lives of others **by sharing of the bounties that God had provided** for them. I like the idea of describing this idea of sharing as "sowing." Sowing means spreading the grain that God has given you. I like this idea because it connotes 意味着 the idea of making an investment. If I had to say this in today's culture, I might say: "Invest in others with the resources God has given to you." **But your investment must not be limited to money.** Your resources expand to your time, your words, and your energies as well. Whatever thing with which the Lord has blessed you, you must use it for the blessing of others...to share with those who have less. This was always a custom in Israel – **especially during hard times**. Consider 2 such times in the Bible.

Nehemiah 8:10 Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this day is holy* to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." **12** And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. Esther 9:22 as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning 悲楚 to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor.

When times are tough, you must especially remember the needs of the poor or needy. Yes, it might be tough on you as well, as things are right now in North America, but imagine how bad hard times are to those who are already poor...before the present economic problems.

2. Let me be clear: **Solomon was not against enjoying the benefits and blessings of God. And he was not advocating 提倡 that everyone must have equally.** He wasn't a socialist. He said that it was good for a man to enjoy the fruits of his labor. And you shouldn't feel guilty if the Lord blesses you with much. But Solomon was advocating a willing, loving sharing of the niceties 细微 that God has provided for you so other people's lives would be blessed. (By the way, notice Solomon said to cast **your** seed corn – your bread – not another man's. Socialists who believe that the government must be generous with other people's money are inherently thieves. Sadly, this is often an accurate representation of Christ's church.) Historically, when Henry III sent cloth to some friars, they returned it saying that they didn't want stolen property. In Canada, our Ontario government has legally stolen from our children and maybe our grandchildren...so we could enjoy it today. This is a serious sin. Instead of saving up, we are more in debt than bankrupt California.

3. But what about the phrase "You will find it after many days"? It means if you give to the poor or needy (planting in their lives) God will return to you a blessing **at the appropriate time** – when God is good and ready...maybe on earth...or maybe in heaven. (By the way: "Needy" doesn't always mean poor. It may mean there are other areas in which the person needs help.)

Proverbs 22:9 He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor.

Proverbs 19:17 He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given.

Proverbs 28:27 He who gives to the poor will not lack, But he who hides his eyes will have many curses.

4. What a warning this is to those who will not help their brothers but want payment for everything they do! There is no sense of “kingdom.” They argue: “We give our tithe. That’s all we are to give.” I don’t doubt that Solomon tithed, but he started to become selfish. And live became all about him. He lost the generous spirit that God had given to him. And so too you are prone to forget of all the incredible riches you have... A home in South France is nothing...not even peanuts...to the home you have in heaven. Being saved from a terrorist attack is nothing like being saved from sin, death, and hell, forever. So why be selfish of the small things. Don’t hold too tightly to things as they are likely to squirt 喷出 out of your hand. So Amos can’t bake cookies. Who is the first one to bake him a batch and bring them to him?

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

5. Notice also the call to generously give. You are to invest in many lives...or “cast your bread upon the waters.” Notice the plural “waters.” “Waters” refers to people. Revelation 16:5 points out that “waters” refer to multitudes of people. Henry: **Give a portion, not a pittance.**

Job 31:16 "If I have kept the poor from their desire, Or caused the eyes of the widow to fail, 17 Or eaten my morsel 佳肴 by myself, So that the fatherless could not eat of it 18 (But from my youth I reared him as a father, And from my mother’s womb I guided the widow); 19 If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, Or any poor man without covering; 20 If his heart has not blessed me, And if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; 21 If I have raised my hand against the fatherless, When I saw I had help in the gate; 22 Then let my arm fall from my shoulder, Let my arm be torn from the socket.

So give to seven, or give to eight, or give to nine...who knows the condition of men, how severe they are. Who knows what your life might be in the future when you might need help? And your bread will come back to you. Seed corn (bread) will return a harvest. Seneca: “I possess nothing so completely as that which I have given away.” What you give you have! When you entertain strangers you are not losing food, you are gaining treasures in your heart and in heaven.

Excuses Against Sowing into the Lives of others

3 If the clouds are full of rain, They empty themselves upon the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

1. I want to keep everything I have to myself. But giving for the Christian should be a normal natural action. As a Christian you should feel the need to give...just like clouds will give their rain with certainty. Jesus taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

James 2:15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute 穷困 of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

Take warning from the fool, Nabal.

1Samuel 25:11 "Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers 剪板机, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?"

And remember the Apostle Paul’s warning to the Corinthians.

2Corinthians 9:6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly 很少地 will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully 丰厚 will also reap bountifully.

2. I can’t help everyone. Even if you can’t save the world, you can save people where you are, just like the tree falls in one place will provide lumber for those in that place. The fact that you can’t help all is not a hindrance to helping others.

Proverbs 3:28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it," When you have it with you.

Now you may not be a big cloud, but maybe you are a watering can and you can spread blessings upon others in your limited area.

4 He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the clouds will not reap.

3. Some people might abuse the help I give them or I might be accused of having ulterior motives if I give. While you must be responsible in your giving, you must not let potential abuse of your gifts hinder you from helping. Ultimately, God will judge the receiver of your gifts if he misuses your gift. A farmer does not refuse to sow seed because there is a dry desert wind. A farmer does not stop reaping because he sees some clouds coming down the mountains of Lebanon.

5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.

4. I don't see any payback from my giving. Sometimes it is true that you don't see any return from your sowing into the lives of the needy, but you have to trust the words of the Lord that seed-corn (bread) will come back to you at the right time. God knows what is best. And God's Holy Spirit (wind is Spirit) works for his good pleasure and for your good. And you have to trust God even when you don't see things clearly, just as you trust that broccoli will turn into bones for your baby.

6 In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.

5. I don't know which charitable work will be profitable. It is true you don't know the outcome of your sowing in people's lives. It is true you don't know yourself whether you will have food or drink for tomorrow. But you are called to trust in the Lord that he will use your efforts to accomplish much good. Keep in mind that God might use your giving as a basis of judgment. He will say to the one who received your goods and misused it: "I gave you so much but you misused what I gave you; now you must face my severe judgment." So do not let opportunity to help fade away. Persevere even in hardships to help. Help, even if you have little, as the Philippians gave out of "deep poverty" to the needy saints in Jerusalem.

Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do
2Corinthians 8:3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, not lose heart.

Conclusion:

Solomon called on his readers to learn to invest into the lives of others by giving to them. He illustrated this by virtually saying: Plant seed corn in peoples' lives. It is good for them and it is good for you. God will bless them and God will bless you. Sadly, God's people often make up many excuses why they shouldn't give to the needy and plant seed corn in their lives. They might say: I want to enjoy my own labors. I can't help everyone. Some people might abuse the help I give. I don't see any payback for my giving. I don't know if my giving is profitable. But Solomon addressed all of these excuses. Give because it is a command to give.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Your God is rich in mercy to all and he gives liberally. He gave you your eternal salvation and a heavenly hope – things you can't buy with all the money in the world. You are rich. Learn to give. Give of your substance and give of yourself. Give of your works and give of your words. To whom much is given, much is expected. Do not spurn the command of the Lord. And yet, what blessed rewards waits for those who give!

Finally, if you have tried to give in order to earn your salvation and please God, your giving is in vain. It will earn you nothing...nothing at all. If you receive what Christ offers, you will have eternal life. He offers you the forgiveness of sins and a restoration of your relationship with the Heavenly Father.