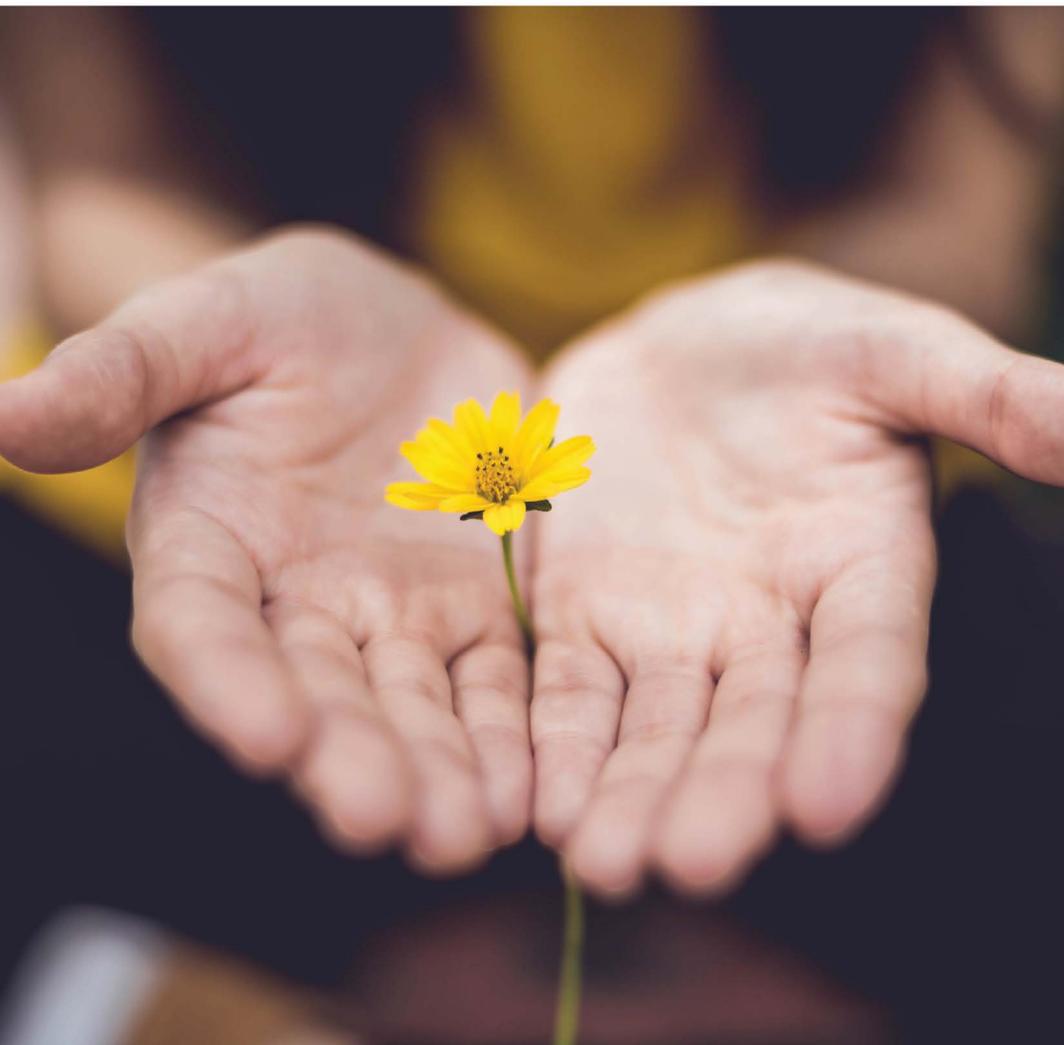


GIVING IS...

A seven session small group study



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New Apostolic Church USA

GIVING IS...

A seven session small group study

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Getting the most out of this study

Below you will find a few ideas to get you started in preparing for and participating in your small group.

Personal Preparation

1. Read the chapter and start to think through some of the questions. Jot down a few initial responses.
2. If you can, watch the corresponding *Giving is* video on the NAC USA YouTube channel. Write down any thoughts you have.
3. Read the Psalm at the end of the chapter, perhaps even more than once. Highlight or underline inspiring phrases in your Bible that you'll want to share with your group. The Bible references in this booklet are from the New King James Version, but feel free to read a different translation if you would prefer.
4. Take advantage of the *Family Worship* sections. If you have children that attend your small group, use the materials to involve them in the discussion. The materials can also be used during a family worship time, or as a discussion topic over dinner. The thoughts and activities could also be used by anyone for further reflection and study.

Group discussion

1. Come to the study prepared.
2. Be willing to participate in the discussion. If you are worried about speaking in public, just read the answers that you have prepared ahead of time.
3. Be sensitive to other members of the group. *Listen* attentively; you may be surprised by their insights. *Observe* body language so you can properly gauge emotions and feelings. *Validate* and encourage one another. *Engage* in the discussion and connect your responses to what others are saying. Many questions do not have “right” answers, but could have a variety of answers.
4. Be careful not to dominate. Sometimes we might get a little over eager to share our ideas! By all means participate, but be sure to allow others to also.
5. Expect God to teach you through your reading of Scripture and your discussion with others. Pray that you will be open to His teachings and that He will show you how to change and grow.
6. Remember that things shared in the group are confidential and should not be discussed outside of the group, unless permission was given to do so.
7. If you are a facilitator, you will find additional suggestions at the back of the guide.

Foreword

As Christians, we are called to witness and testify of God's presence in our lives; we are called to worship Him; we are called to serve Him by serving those around us; we are called to give - give of our life, our time, our money, our love.

This small group series on giving will explore some important questions: *How should a Christian, steeped in the gospel, view the subject of giving? What in our lives can we give in order to praise and offer thanks to God?*

Before we begin, let's acknowledge that a search for simple, easy rules by which to live our life may leave us a bit frustrated. We won't find a checklist in the Bible. Jesus intentionally moves away from strict definitions and easy-to-apply formulas in favor of self-responsibility, self-discipline, and the condition or attitude of the giver's heart. Not surprisingly, just like the limitless generosity of God towards humankind embodied in the sacrifice of Jesus for our salvation, the gospel is quite open-ended on the subject of giving. However, we know that it is rooted in the commandments of love towards God and our neighbor.

We pray that these articles will serve to inspire a new understanding of Christian giving and a new desire to demonstrate God's love to the world through a renewed willingness to share what we've been blessed with.

1

Giving is love

Our desire to give begins and ends with God. John wrote in 1 John 4:16, *God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.* It is love that has brought us from the brink of despair into fellowship with God. It is the love God has shown us that fuels our passion to share with others what we have been given. When we recognize that we are unworthy to receive all that God has given us, we must respond in love towards our God and our neighbors. This love prompts us to give freely from what we've been blessed with.

FOLLOWING GOD'S EXAMPLE

We're often told to hold on to the things that are most precious to us, and for good reason. Whatever we consider most precious is very valuable to us – it is instinctual for us to safeguard these things. Because of this, we may be reluctant to share what is precious to us out of fear that we will not get them back or have our generosity reciprocated. But let us understand that *giving is love*. And our guiding example for how to love is God, Himself, who is love. We must strive to love as He loves – unconditionally and without concern for reciprocation. So how do we learn to give unconditionally from those things that are most precious to us, our very best? Follow God's example.

In John 3:16, the Bible says,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

God's creation is sin-filled and broken. And yet, this has not deterred His love from us. Instead, He further proved His love by giving the

very best He had to all people: His son, Jesus Christ. The sacrifice of His Son was not given for just the people of that time, but rather for all people in all times. And so, we can feel that God continues to look upon us with love.

In Romans 5:8, Paul wrote, *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while** we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* This verse speaks to the unconditional nature of God's love for humankind. The sacrifice that Christ brought on the cross for sinners showed that there was no activity, no good work, which anyone could do to receive God's grace and reprieve from their sins. It was only by the gift of Jesus Christ that redemption could be received. *While we were still sinners*, Jesus gave His life for us. God's love is unconditionally given to His creation and we are called, as disciples of Jesus, to share this unconditional love we have been given.

GIVING REFLECTS THREE COMMANDMENTS

We know that meeting the needs of others is important to Jesus because it serves both God and His children. This importance is laid out in three commandments that Jesus gave:

Matthew 22:37-38 - *Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment.*

Matthew 22:39 - *And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

John 13:34 - *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

Throughout Jesus' life, we see the compassion that He had for the needs of those around Him. He gave beyond what the law required at that time because of the compassion and love He had for people, and because of His desire to do His Father's will. Out of this same desire, we see that a Christian gives beyond the tithe to honor God and to provide others with what they need because we feel compassion for the needs of others. Jesus gave beyond the law. He gave everything, including His life, because He loved God, and thereby became the

embodiment of God's love towards us. It was what God wanted and what we needed. Christian giving is a function of our love towards God and each other, and is our response to meet the needs of others.

Jesus teaches further, through the parables, specific attitudes and actions that connect giving with serving others. In Luke 10:30-35, you can read the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan saw the need of another and responded with the compassion and love of God. But he didn't just do the minimum and take the injured person to a place to receive help. Instead, he bandaged him, set him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and then he established a plan with the innkeeper so that the man would be fully cared for even after the Good Samaritan had moved on. When we give out of the love of God, we will go beyond the minimum of what is expected and we will try our best to fully care for a person's needs. You may be saying to yourself that it's not possible for you to do that. And this is true; this kind of compassion and love is impossible when you rely on only yourself. But, when you are fully surrendered to God and moved by the Holy Spirit, **you can love and do beyond what is expected.**

Believers give with the confidence that their reward is assured by their belief in Jesus Christ, and it awaits them in the kingdom of God. But this is not why we give. When our giving is a response prompted by the love we have received, no thought is spared for what we have given or what we will gain as a reward.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO GIVE?

Those who *have* give to those who *have not*. This is what God wants for us. In a sense, it is why we have been given what we have, in order that we may give it away. We receive God's merciful love through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, both freely and undeservedly. We can express God's merciful love to others when we give to them. 2 Corinthians 8:9 reads, *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.* We are only rich through Christ because of His love for us, and we can share that wealth with others. In some way or another, most of us have experienced a period of poverty – whether that meant having little money or receiving little love. These

experiences help us to be compassionate to those we see in a similar state. If you can relate to someone in need and be empathetic of their circumstances, then let your love for them be genuine. Work hard to meet their needs because you already have all that you need to do so. And if all you have to give to a person is the love of Jesus, that is the greatest gift that can ever be shared!

Who are the needy that we are called to give to? Engage the Holy Spirit to lead you towards those who are in need of help. They are all around you, in your neighborhoods, workplaces, families, congregations... Believe that you have been placed and equipped by God, and are in position to serve a purpose for His kingdom each day. Strive to live with your eyes and heart open, and be Spirit-guided as you seek to share the love and compassion of the Lord. You don't have to do this work alone. As Paul taught the early church, the community of believers together can identify the needs of others and utilize their shared gifts and resources to aid groups of people who are in dire circumstances.

Giving is love. God is love. Our desire and willingness to give is rooted in the love that has been showered upon us by our God. Giving what we have is a reflection of this love back to Him and to all around us. Our heavenly Father has led the way in showing us how love drives giving when He sent His Son to redeem humankind with His sacrifice. Through Jesus Christ, we have been made rich, and God has supplied us with the things we need in order to be able to care for the needs of others. Let's be captured by the love of God and unconditionally share our love for Him and for those in need by sharing and caring for others.

We demonstrate our love, for God and others, when we give.

1. Discuss how moments from Jesus' life or teachings of His have influenced or encouraged you to give out of love.

2. What is something that is precious to you? If you had the opportunity to give this thing to someone in need, would you? What would hold you back from giving it away?

3. Describe unconditional love. How have you experienced unconditional love? Are humans capable of loving unconditionally?

4. What needs do you see around you (in your family, congregation, and/or community) that inspire compassion in you?

-
5. *In a sense, it is why we have been given what we have, in order that we may give it away.* What do you think about this idea? Does it change the way you think about your life?

-
6. How does being loved adjust your capacity to give?

-
7. How have you been made rich through Jesus Christ?

-
8. When have you given unconditionally, without thoughts towards compensation or receiving something in return? How did it make it you feel?

9. How is giving love?

VIDEO:

Watch the *Giving is love* video. Discuss the phrases *giving is love* and *love is giving*. How are they connected? Discuss the idea of reflection presented in the video.

A PSALM REFLECTION:

Read Psalm 136 together. Why do you think the author repeats “*His faithful love endures forever*” so many times? How did you feel reading that over and over again? What does it mean to have *faithful love*? How could the faithfulness of God’s love for us influence how we show love to others?

FAMILY WORSHIP

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16

Discuss:

1. The Bible verse above summarizes the gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. It also makes clear the reason for Christ's sacrifice on the cross. What was behind the sending and sacrifice of Christ? Take a moment to talk about the result of God's love shown through Jesus' sacrifice – *everlasting life*. What does this mean?
2. Think about the love of God. How would you describe it?
3. God's love is to inspire our own love toward Him and others, and, in turn, our giving. How can we be sure that our giving is motivated out of love? What are some signs of this?
4. Consider the following truth: "The greatest gift that can ever be shared is the love of Jesus. If this is the only gift you can give to someone else, then you've given enough." What are some ways that we can share the love of Jesus with others?
5. Through Scripture, we know that love is the basis for giving and giving is of great importance to Jesus. Read and discuss Matthew 22:37-38, Matthew 22:39 and John 13:34.

Sing together!

Think about His Love (Hymnal 397)

Magnificent, Marvelous, Matchless Love – Keith and Kristyn Getty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgEn6ftrT-4>

Put it into action!

Talk about something you can do for the people you love (and then do it!). It could be as simple as giving someone a hug, doing some chores around the house, reading to each other, visiting a grandparent...

Giving is love

A TESTIMONIAL BY SUE W. FROM GRAND RAPIDS, MI

I've always believed in the old saying, "It's better to give than receive." Sadly, due to some unfortunate life situations, I became a single mom of two at an early age. As a single mom, I was often the recipient of help instead of being the one who could give. During this time, my church family made sure we never went without. Although I was grateful for the kindness extended to me, I've made it my life's mission to repay the love and generosity I received by helping others. Fast forward twenty-six years to 2013, when the opportunity came up to participate in a humanitarian trip through re Charitable Ministries, my husband and I knew we had to go. We were hooked the first year we worked at the King's Children Home (KCH) in Belize. We have been back every year since (minus 2020, due to Covid-19).

Throughout the years, we have completed many projects to make the home functional and safe for the children it houses. We've worked on painting, tiling, fencing, concrete (and more concrete), a water filtration system, planting coconut trees, and many other projects too numerous to count. While all this was necessary to sustain the home, the real giving came from our relationships with the children and staff. Each evening, we were fortunate enough to head back to the home to spend time getting to know the kids and play games with them. This, for us, was the highlight of the trip. The smiles, the laughter, the memories, and the emotional connections we've made with each one of them have lasted for years.

So why do we give of our time, our sweat, our love? Because the small sacrifice we give is nothing in comparison to the long-lasting friendships we've built. It is a privilege to work with re Charitable Ministries and KCH.

If you would like to participate in a humanitarian trip to Belize, please email re.charitableministry@nac-usa.org for more information. If you would like to donate to project fund (General Donations), or specifically to our Scholarship Fund for the children of KCH, visit <https://recharitableministries.weshareonline.org>



A Charitable Ministry of the
New Apostolic Church USA

2

Giving is faith

So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow.

1 Corinthians 3:7 NIV

Disciples of Jesus Christ put their faith and trust in Him, and follow His teachings. Jesus teaches us the following in Luke 6:38:

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosoms. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

In this teaching, Jesus is directing the listeners to have a willingness to give, and He assures them that if they are obedient in their giving, they can be confident that God will always care for them. For the one who is generous, they will receive back what they need in full measure. Are you willing to put your faith in that teaching? Be reminded that Hebrews teaches us that *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*. When Jesus is the One you are looking to and who your hope is in, He will give you the strength to walk by faith and give without the worry that you will not have enough for yourself.

When we follow God willingly and obediently in our giving, we demonstrate our faith. All that we have, whether it is a little or a lot, is a gift from God. It is by His grace alone. Just as God has been generous and faithful to us, we are called to be generous with all that we have received. But sometimes fear overwhelms faith. With the uncertainty of the time we live in, the concerns that many have over their employment and the economy, fear of insecurity can be

an obstacle that diminishes one's desire and willingness to give. Be encouraged during those turbulent times of life to steady your faith in Jesus, who is the author and finisher of faith (Hebrews 12:2). He has done all things necessary for us to endure in our faith. He will always be faithful to us and the Scriptures are proof of this. Read about the Israelites, and the experiences of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, etc... Through their experiences, we see how God fulfilled His promises and remained faithful to them all. And just as Jesus taught the disciples not to worry about what they will wear and what they will eat, we should take this encouragement to heart and hand over our worry and fear to Jesus (Matthew 6:31).

Paul taught the following to the believers in Corinth:

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:7-8

If the question wells up within you about whether or not you can afford to give of your money, joy, time, etc...keep this lesson from Paul in mind. If one who is obedient and faithful with what one has been given and shares it as the Spirit guides them, they will experience how God continually provides.

Think for a moment about the work a Sunday School teacher does. They give their time and use their gifts, passions, and energy to teach young students. They share what they have been given. They don't know exactly what the child will grow up to be like, but they have hope that their work will inspire that young person to grow up with a thirst for the knowledge of God. Or think about the work of parents. Parents give to their children out of what they have received. They set an example and, in faith, hope that their children will grow up and follow their lead. This goes beyond the material things and extends to the giving of time, a listening ear, compassion, and so on.

Again, parents do not know exactly what their children will grow up to be like, but they give of themselves in faith, hoping that they make a positive impact. God knows our good deeds and when we act according to His will, we believe He will bless all that is done, bringing us closer to Him and others. In this way, *our giving is faith*.

When we give by faith, then what we share with others will be acceptable to our God. In the story of Cain and Abel, the two brothers brought their offerings and presented them to God. The Bible tells us that *the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering* (Genesis 4:4-5). The reason why God accepted one and not the other wasn't explained in Genesis, but the author of Hebrews offers us some clarity in Hebrews 11:4 (ESV) –

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. Abel's offering was acceptable in the sight of God simply because of his faith.

Because of his faith and his desire to do the right thing, he was commended as righteous. And even after his death, Abel's faith still spoke loudly. His actions were, and still are, an example for all to follow. The intention isn't for us to give out of obligation or because we will receive a reward if we do. We are to give out of our love for the Lord and out of our faithfulness to Him. We are to share what we have with the right heart's intention. Then, our offering will also be commended as righteous, and our faith will speak loudly to the world around us. The concern of God is not how much we have, but how faithful we are. Our willingness to give demonstrates our faith in God and our confidence that He will always care for those who have surrendered their hearts to Him. In Luke 12:48, as part of an answer to Peter, Jesus said,

For everyone whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

Jesus is emphasizing here that great privilege brings great responsibility. The greatest privilege given is to be children of God. When we believe that we received that title through faith, then whether we have a little or a lot, we will be led by the Holy Spirit to utilize what we have in the service of Him.

Giving is faith because it is out of our confidence in God and our devotion to Jesus that we obediently share what we have in full knowledge that our God will always care for us.

This doesn't mean that we should have the expectation that if we give \$10, God will reward us with \$100. Or that if we serve with our car, that He will one day reward us with one that is brand new. Our God will continue to be faithful to us and will provide us with those things we need in order to continue to serve Him by serving others. May this teaching on *giving is faith* strengthen your understanding of God's faithfulness to you and your desire to share with others because of your commitment and faithfulness to Him.

FROM THE 2018 SPRING VISION NEWSLETTER

1. What does it mean to be obedient to God's commands to give?

2. How is the act of giving a testimony of our faith?

3. What does it mean to hand over our fear and worry to Jesus?
What does this look like in our lives?

4. In what ways, other than giving, do you demonstrate your faithfulness to God?

5. If we give out of faith, then what can we expect from God?

6. If we are never satisfied with what we have, how is our faith and desire to give affected?

7. What is it like to give when you will not see the outcome?

8. *For everyone whom much is given, from him much will be required*
– What does this statement mean to you?

9. Read Luke 6:38 together. Jesus is using the imagery of grain being sold to describe God's generosity towards us when we give. The seller would take a measuring container and pour the grain into it. After getting it about three quarters full, he would shake it to level out the grain so more could be put in, with the goal of getting as much grain in the container as possible. In the same way God's gives grace abundantly to those who are gracious. Discuss these ideas. What does this verse mean to you with this added context?

10. How is giving faith?

VIDEO:

Watch the *Giving is faith* video. Discuss the analogy of planting a seed in describing giving is faith. How could these ideas inform how you invest in the people around you? In your relationships?

PSALM REFLECTION:

Read Psalm 34 together. How does the author describe God's faithfulness? How does he describe how God provides for the needy? When you read this Psalm, how could you see yourself being a tool in God's hands to provide for someone?

FAMILY WORSHIP

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosoms. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

Luke 6:38

Discuss:

1. What is Jesus teaching us in this bible verse? (See explanation of verse in question nine on page 24.) Give some thought to this for a moment. What would it mean to put this teaching into practice in your life?
2. In your own words, what do you think it means to give by faith? Who is someone in the Bible who gave by faith? Discuss the story of Abel and Cain. How did God respond to Abel's faithful giving?
3. Just as we love God because He first loved us, we should also be faithful to God because He's faithful to us. What are some ways that He's shown His faithfulness to you? How has He cared for you?
4. Consider the first part of Luke 12:48 – *For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required.* What is Jesus emphasizing here? What is the greatest thing we have been given? What responsibilities come with this great privilege?

Sing together!

Great Is Thy Faithfulness (Hymnal 40)

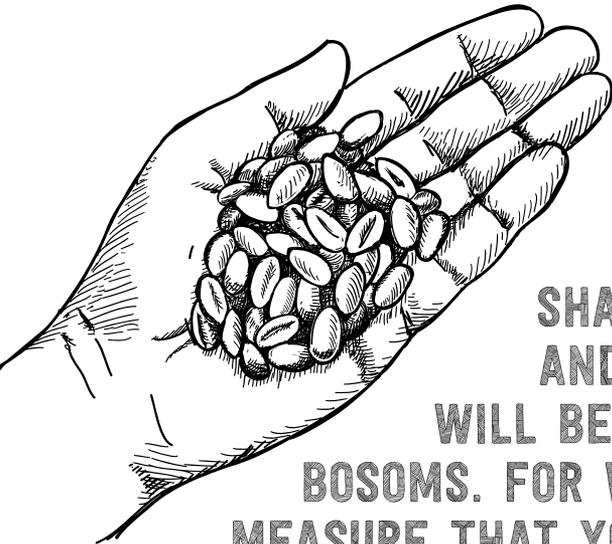
By Faith – Keith and Kristyn Getty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXB8ihepUpE> (with lyrics)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LNJgm55mj0> (children's version)

Put it into action!

Write a prayer for someone asking God to provide something that they need: health, comfort, joy, food, etc.. If you can, give the person your written out prayer to let them know that you are thinking of them and that you have faith God will provide.



**GIVE, AND IT WILL
BE GIVEN TO YOU:**



**GOOD MEASURE,
PRESSED DOWN,
SHAKEN TOGETHER,
AND RUNNING OVER
WILL BE PUT INTO YOUR
BOSOMS. FOR WITH THE SAME
MEASURE THAT YOU USE, IT WILL
BE MEASURED BACK TO YOU.**



3

Giving is joy

Overtaken by God's incredible love and faithfulness to us, we recognize the honor it is to reflect His love by sharing it with those around us. We love because we believe in Christ. We believe because He loves us. We have joy because Christ has invited us into a relationship with God. Because of the love, faith, and joy that we have received from Him, we give because we know we are loved, we know who we are, and we know where we are going.

THE SOURCE OF OUR JOY

The source of a Christian's joy is their childhood in God. Jesus revealed this truth directly to His disciples after they returned from their journey to Palestine. Jesus appointed 70 of His followers to go throughout this land, where He was about to go, to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God. Jesus warned them that they would not be received well in all the places they would go. They were going to be "lambs among wolves." However, when their journey was complete and they came back to Jesus, they returned with joy (Luke 10:17). They were filled with joy because they had been successful. God had used them, and they had witnessed the manifestation of the power of Christ in their work. They declared their happiness over the fact that the demons were subject to them in Jesus' name. So because of their success and the power they had experienced, they were happy. Jesus responded to them by redirecting their focus to the true source of joy – *"Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven"* (Luke 10:20).

Jesus taught these followers to be careful and not to misplace the basis for their joy. This lesson is important for all of us today. God's blessing

is for spiritual life. How often does our joy fluctuate and depend on what is happening in our lives – our family matters, our work life, our social circles, etc...? Do we only rejoice when everything is well? Does our joy disappear when we struggle? What does that tell those around us?

Our joy is founded and rooted in our childhood in God. When this truth remains at the forefront of our lives, then no matter the ebbs and flows of life, our joy is evident. We are secure in a loving relationship with our heavenly Father. We are children of a King and are under His provision and care. He has demonstrated His love for us when He sent His Son to rescue us from our sins. His love has been poured into us through the Holy Spirit. This is our joy! It is an unchangeable truth and is the motivation behind all that we do. Experiencing this joy prompts us to give.

SHARING WHAT WE HAVE

As a church, a united community of believers, the joy of our childhood in God should inspire us to share and help one another. This was also in the hearts of the believers in the first church. This is exhibited in Acts 2:42-47:

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continually daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

We learn from this example that the first believers chose generosity rather than earthly greediness. They recognized that they were all equal before the Lord, and they made a decision to devote themselves to growing in their knowledge of Him. Their joy led them to share, to

give to each other, and celebrate together. They praised God together for His goodness and their new life in Him. Luke tells us that as they did this, because of their joy and activity, they were a witness to those around them, and the congregation grew.

When our life in God is our joy and drives our actions, then others will be impacted by our joy because we will give and share with them voluntarily and without prejudice. Does your relationship with Jesus Christ fill your heart with joy and drive your actions? If you don't know, we encourage you to speak with a minister or a fellow believer who exudes joy to grow in your understanding.

JOYFUL GIVING: 2 CORINTHIANS

Apostle Paul was seeking financial help from the church in Corinth, for the church in Jerusalem. His intent in urging the Corinthians to take part in the offering was to give them the opportunity to use their abundance to help the believers in Jerusalem, who were in poverty. He explained to them how to give properly, and that their offering should be a generous offering rather than a grudging donation. God's generosity to them was to be an incentive for their own generous giving. Their giving would be a thanksgiving to God; it would meet the needs of God's people; and it would unify Jewish and Gentile believers.

As we practice giving out of the joy that we have from God, let us consider the words that Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7

When we mature in the mind of Christ, we will no longer give *grudgingly or of necessity*, but rather intentionally and with thought. Our giving is our decision, and because it is what we want to do, we give joyfully. Joyful giving is done freely, not grudgingly. This is where giving becomes faith, love, and joy intertwined.

Paul assures the congregation to trust in God's provision. *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work* (2 Corinthians 9:8). Our childhood in God secures our future. He will give us all we need to do the *good work* that He has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). This security frees us to give joyfully, generously, and confidently.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we give generously because we have received all from our generous God without conditions. Let us never forget that we were all lost and unworthy of grace. Yet, our Heavenly Father generously offered His Son to take our place to atone for our sins so that we could be children of God. That's more generosity than we can even fathom. When we joyfully give our resources to the church and those in need, it reminds us that everything we have is itself a gift from God. This is what Paul eludes to when he writes, *for the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God...* (2 Corinthians 9:12) When we give to help others, it not only meets their needs, but also is an offering of thanks to God for what He has provided for us. And so, we can joyfully share with others what the Lord has given generously, and give without worry because we know He will always care for His children.

Joyful giving is done thoughtfully and with intention. Through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we are able to see those who are in need and we are prompted to assist. We want to give when prompted, in hope that the one receiving will experience the joy we have, and glorify the Lord. As faithful followers of the Lord Jesus, we understand that those who are far from the Lord have needs also, and we believe in the saving power of Jesus Christ. We love them because we are all made in the image of God, who so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. We share freely the good news of salvation so that the name of Jesus can be made known to all, and so everyone may come to realize that true satisfaction can only be found in Him.

JOYFUL GIVING BRINGS A FORETASTE OF THE KINGDOM

When believers are united in their joyful giving, then the congregation becomes a foretaste of the kingdom of God. Pray together within your congregation, your family, your circle of friends, and ask the Lord to help you all to be joyful givers. Pray that God will enable you to see the world around you in such a way that you can clearly recognize the needs of others and act upon the prompting of the Holy Spirit to share what He has blessed you with.

FROM THE 2018 AUTUMN VISION NEWSLETTER

1. What brings you joy in life? What promises of God bring you joy?

2. How can we keep our joy when things aren't going well in life?

3. Why is joy contagious? How might this affect our giving?

4. Read 2 Corinthians 9. What does Paul teach the believers about giving?

5. How does giving bring a foretaste of God's kingdom?

6. How can you misplace the basis for your joy?

7. What is your response to the phrase "*joyful people are giving people*"? Consider Acts 2:42-47. What do you think it would've been like to live in a community like the first church?

8. What is the difference between a cheerful giver and a begrudging giver? How does this effect the gift?

9. How is giving joy?

VIDEO:

Watch the *Giving is joy* video. Many of the people featured in the video were children. Why are children sometimes used to describe or illustrate joy? What could this teach us about joy and giving?

PSALM REFLECTION:

Read Psalm 100 together. How do you feel when you read it? What joyful expressions do you find in the words? How could your perspective change if you approached each day with this attitude? Consider reading this Psalm when you get out of bed first thing in the morning every day for the next week.

FAMILY WORSHIP

*Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you,
but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

Luke 10:20

Discuss:

1. This Bible verse contains the words of Jesus. Who is Jesus talking to here? What did the disciples do wrong? What is Jesus trying to teach them?
2. What should our joy be rooted in? What's the ultimate source of our joy? What else brings you joy?
3. What response should this never-ending joy produce? Read Acts 2:42-47 and discuss, using the example of the first believers to help guide your answer.
4. 2 Corinthians 9:8 – *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.* In this short verse, Paul makes clear three things that God is able to do. What are they? How should we respond to these wonderful truths?

Sing together!

Let Your Hearts Be Ever Joyful (Hymnal 136)

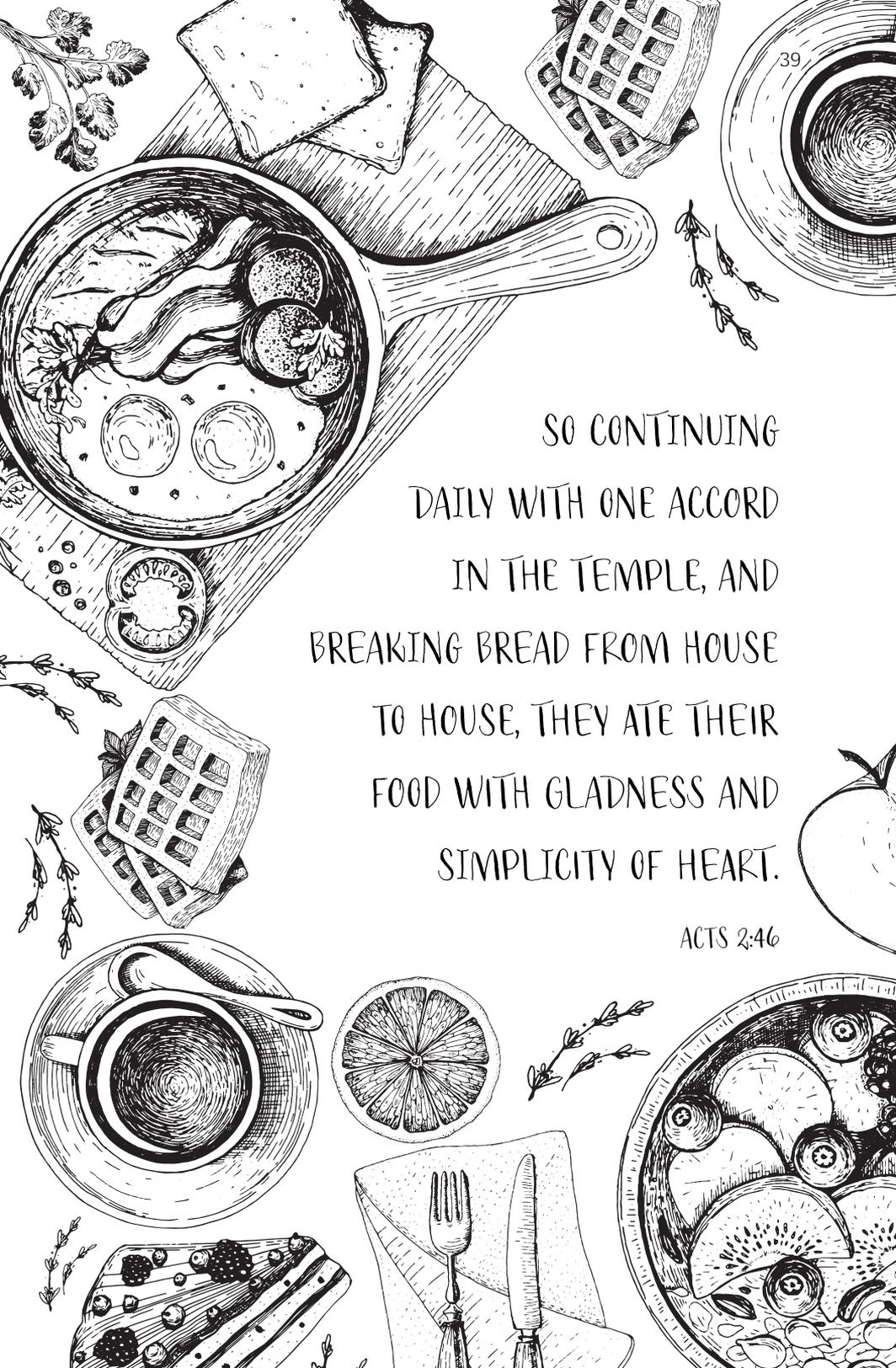
Christ Is All – Matt Papa and Matt Boswell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13dBODwf3V4>

Put it into action!

Make a card or a batch of cookies and surprise a friend or neighbor with them! With your family, talk about the feelings you experienced when you gave them your gift.

For older kids: find a Psalm with the word “joy” in it and include it on your card, or with the gift.



39

SO CONTINUING
DAILY WITH ONE ACCORD
IN THE TEMPLE, AND
BREAKING BREAD FROM HOUSE
TO HOUSE, THEY ATE THEIR
FOOD WITH GLADNESS AND
SIMPLICITY OF HEART.

ACTS 2:46

4

Giving is mission

As part of the family of God, we are on a mission. It was given to us by Jesus Christ through the apostles. And when we choose to follow obediently and give to the furtherance of the church, then we are choosing to give to the mission of the church. Jesus' mission when He came to the earth was to rescue humankind from their sin and re-establish their relationship with God, the Father. Nothing stood in His way or distracted Him from completing that mission. The devil endeavored to tempt Him away. The Pharisees accused Him of breaking the law so that He would be condemned. Even His disciples stood in His way from time to time before they fully understood the will of the Father.

Through it all, Jesus continued on His journey to give life and peace to all who would believe in Him. Through the giving of His life, Jesus gave us all the opportunity to enter into His kingdom. He gave us all the chance to be forgiven, to be re-born, and to live in eternal fellowship with the triune God. Before ascending back to His Father, Jesus placed His mission into the hands of His disciples:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

After being filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles shared the gospel of Jesus and the church of Christ began. Jesus intentionally created this institution, charged it with His mission, and then placed the

responsibility for managing it into human hands. We are the church, and we are called to take up this mission.

With the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, believers learn to trust in God and recognize how they can use what they have been given to give generously to others, so that all people may come to know Jesus.

This means we don't just give to the mission, but that Christian giving, in and of itself, is the mission to which we are called: to give a portion of that which we have for the sake of the gospel. Jesus Christ gave life to the dead, both spiritually and physically; Christians humbly follow His example by giving of themselves to the spiritual and physical welfare of others.

The mission statement of the New Apostolic Church is tied directly to the Great Commission:

Reaching out to all people in order to teach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit. Providing soul care and cultivating a warm fellowship in which everyone shall experience the love of God and the joy serving Him and others.

Giving is mission because givers move the mission forward. Because Jesus willingly gave His life on the cross, the mission advanced. Because the apostles left the room in Jerusalem and gave their lives to proclaim the gospel, the mission progressed. If the first Christians hadn't been willing to share what they had been blessed with, whether it was great or small, how far would the message have spread? Jesus led the way for us, and He is our example to follow. We want to make His mission our mission; and as He was willing and generous to give His all for us, let us adopt the same willingness and generosity to see the mission of His church fulfilled.

What will it take for the mission to be fulfilled? What will need to be given? God sent His Spirit to lead decision-making, but not an endowment to fund the mission. He left that to us. The institutional

and visible church is dependent upon the financial support of the believers to fulfill its divine purpose. When we look upon our world through the lens of the love of Christ, then we readily understand that financial assistance, along with our time and gifts, is needed for the message to be carried forward.

To reach out to others and teach the gospel requires our willingness to devote ourselves to the teachings of Jesus Christ and surrender to the impulses of the Holy Spirit. Why would we do this? Simply because we recognize the mission of God is to save us. And we've been called for a purpose.

When we are fully aware of how we came to be in relationship with God, then we devote ourselves to learning more about Jesus, and give our will over to the Holy Spirit.

When we take up the mission of the church, we find that we are called to share our stories of faith with others to show how we have been saved and transformed. We give of ourselves in this way to help others see the power of Christ. We may feel inadequate in our knowledge of the gospel, and we may be afraid to talk about Jesus because we've never done so before outside of the church, but give yourself fully to His mission and experience how He will provide for you. This can be seen again and again in the book of Acts. Some examples are when Peter and John spoke before the Sanhedrin in chapter 4; Stephen boldly proclaiming the gospel in chapters 6 & 7; Philip teaching the Ethiopian eunuch in chapter 8; Peter going to Cornelius and his family in chapter 10; when Paul and Silas were imprisoned in chapter 16, and when Paul is shipwrecked in chapter 27.

Where do we start? Look around at those who are closest to you. Spouses can share and remind each other of the good news. Parents can teach their children through reading Scripture, praying together, and by being an example in their willingness to give and share with others. In our neighborhoods, let's not confine ourselves to our homes, but see whom God has placed around us, and seek His guidance in how we can impact our neighbors for the sake of the gospel. And finally, as we go throughout each day, let's be mindful of the mission,

4. What is something you can do this week to remind your family members of the good news? What is something you can do in your neighborhood to share the good news?

5. Can you describe to others how you came to believe in Jesus Christ? Discuss the examples of Peter, John, Stephen, Philip, and Paul from the reading.

6. What do you have to give that will carry the mission forward?

7. Where has God placed you to share the mission? What is your mission field?

8. What does life look like when you are “open-hearted” to the prompting of the Holy Spirit?

9. How is giving mission?

VIDEO:

Watch the *Giving is mission* video. What did Jesus give for His mission? What did the first apostles and the early church give? What can you give?

PSALM REFLECTION:

Read Psalm 40 together. What phrases stood out to you in regards to speaking about God? How is the author a witness to those around him?

FAMILY WORSHIP

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

Discuss:

1. These verses from the Gospel of Matthew are known as the Great Commission. To whom does this Great Commission apply? How can YOU help fulfill this mission given by Christ?
2. The mission statement of our church is tied directly to the Great Commission (read it on the next page). What are some practical ways that YOU can help contribute to this mission? How can you help those within the congregation experience the love of God?
3. How is giving related to the mission? Name a couple examples from the Bible of people who gave in order to advance the mission of the Church.
4. When it comes to sharing the good news of Jesus with others, where can we start? What is it about Jesus that you would be eager to share with someone else?

Sing together!

Take the Name of Jesus with You (Hymnal 213)

Facing a Task Unfinished – Keith and Kristyn Getty (?)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOpt_buljxY

Put it into action!

Color in the following page with our Mission statement on it.



OUR MISSION:

REACHING OUT
TO ALL PEOPLE
IN ORDER TO
TEACH THEM
THE GOSPEL OF
JESUS CHRIST
AND TO BAPTIZE
THEM WITH
WATER AND THE
HOLY SPIRIT.



PROVIDING
SOUL CARE AND
CULTIVATING A
WARM FELLOWSHIP
IN WHICH EVERYONE
SHALL EXPERIENCE
THE LOVE OF GOD
AND THE JOY OF
SERVING HIM AND
OTHERS.

Giving is mission

A TESTIMONIAL BY KIMBERLY M. FROM STERLING HEIGHTS, MI

For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.” Then these righteous ones will reply, “Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?” And the King will say, “I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!” (Matthew 25:35-40)

The Sterling Heights congregation has tried to do our part to help and serve our community through various acts of service. We define community as all who are around us, whether in the congregation or not. After participating in a Helping without Hurting workshop conducted by reCM, we were inspired to consider how we could fulfill Jesus’ call to help those in need. This has helped us with specific members in need, our congregational food pantry, and working with the homeless.

It is our mission to help others. This does not always mean by giving a tangible or material thing that we think they are missing. The actual need often goes much deeper. We have found that building relationships is an essential piece to truly giving and serving. These relationships help develop “giving” into a genuine desire and calling rather than just a one-off gesture. Further, we serve Christ by serving those around us.

If you would like more information on the Helping without Hurting workshops that re Charitable Ministry offers, and other ways we can support your congregation as you work with your community, please email re.charitableministry@nac-usa.org



A Charitable Ministry of the
New Apostolic Church USA

5

Giving is sacrifice

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “sacrifice?” Do your thoughts go to the parents who give up their time, energy, and money to give their children a better upbringing than they had? Do you think about the men and women who serve in our armed forces? Are you reminded of the Old Testament and the story of Abraham and Isaac? Or, does the image of Jesus Christ on the cross appear before you? *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this wine, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.*

Whether we recognize it or not, we’ve been introduced to sacrifice in one way or the other. But the real question is, are **you** willing to sacrifice?

WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

Simply stated, to sacrifice is to offer something as a gift to God. But to be more specific, the intention of the Greek word, *thysia*, means a physical sacrifice of oneself, your person, or your entire being, for the glory of God. God’s mercy urges everyone to devote all aspects of life to Him.

For Christians, it’s important for us to note that sacrifice meant something different and served a distinct purpose in the days of the Old Testament and at the time of Jesus’ birth, than it did after His death on the cross. In the Old Testament, the people of God would sacrifice cattle, lambs, goats, doves, or pigeons for the specific purpose of atoning for their sins. But that all changed with the incarnation of Jesus Christ, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. Because Jesus sacrificed His life as an atonement for all sin, the need for God’s people to continually sacrifice animals was eradicated. The 10th chapter of Hebrews teaches us this. Consider the following verses:

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins... By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Hebrews 10:4, 10-14

Jesus' sacrifice far surpasses all other sacrifices and serves as the source for every acceptable sacrifice today. His sacrifice fulfilled the promises made by God centuries before, and effectively restored the fellowship between the Creator and His people. Sin has been dealt with once and for all. The debt is paid. The power of sin, guilt, and shame is vanquished. The glory of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be praised forever. That is why we should be continually thankful for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and realize that our sacrifices could never compare with His. Jesus' sacrifice put the love of God on display for all to see. This is repeatedly made known to us in the Gospels and the epistles.

It is in recognition of and response to this great love that we find our willingness to sacrifice. Jesus' sacrifice allows us the opportunity to surrender our lives to God in thanksgiving and recognition of His love. Our willingness to sacrifice is directly linked to the love we have for God and for people. Without that love, it's impossible for us to offer a sacrifice that will be acceptable to God. Consider the following from our Catechism: *...a sacrifice in the Christian sense should not be considered an enforced obligation. Neither should it be made in expectation of reward, but rather freely out of faith, out of gratitude, and out of love* (CNAC 13.2.3). If one sacrifices with such an attitude, it will never feel like a sacrifice, even if it requires great effort. Earnest believers do not think of it as a burden, but rather a joy, to engage their gifts and talents for the benefit of the congregation and their neighbor. If the *willingness to offer and sacrifice* is defined by love, the believer fulfils the will of God and acts in the mind of Jesus.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE?

First, it means that you are willing to actually give up your time, effort, and resources to serve God and your neighbor. For sure, giving is costly. But when the love of God energizes the willingness within us to sacrifice, then we will no longer hold firm to our own priorities and desires; they are what we sacrifice in order to serve others and glorify God. Are we willing to give up what we hold most valuable to help grow the kingdom of God?

Second, our willingness to sacrifice means that we are *truly committed* to serving and giving. The love of God impacts our entire lives. Should our commitment to Him be only part-time?

Third, in the Spirit of Christ, we should be willing to give and sacrifice without looking for any response or expecting to receive anything in return. We know that our heavenly Father witnesses all that we do and that He has blessed us and will continue to do so. We know this from Psalm 33:14-15:

The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.

And finally, being willing to sacrifice means that we do not compare ourselves with anyone else and what they are perhaps willing or not willing to give up. We realize that we are all unique and have our own individual relationship with the Lord. We have been created and equipped to be an active participant in the body of Christ. Let's be willing to give of ourselves.

Our desire and willingness to sacrifice is rooted in God's love and mercy. It is because of His love and mercy that our lives are transformed and we can be made spiritually new. We respond to this mercy by sacrificing for His glory. Paul describes the response of this new life that flows out of God's mercy in Romans 12:1:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Because God has been merciful towards us, we in turn offer to Him our bodies as a living sacrifice. Our behavior is our opportunity to make visible the beauty of Christ. Let's allow our living to be an act of worship. Be ever mindful of your actions and your purpose and strive each day for every part of your body - your hands (*what you do*), feet (*where you go*), eyes (*what you see*), lips (*what you say*) – to display holiness (Hebrews 13:15-16). Even if this means giving up material things that we want or think we need. Continually allow the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit to transform you. Our body becomes a holy sacrifice of worship when it is devoted to God's purposes of righteousness and mercy. Our sacrifice is holy and acceptable to God when it's offered with a willing heart, filled with His love.

FROM THE 2020 SPRING VISION NEWSLETTER

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “sacrifice”?

2. Why is love such an essential element of sacrifice?

3. How can we prove to God that we are truly committed to giving?

4. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. What does this parable teach about sacrifice?

5. How often do you think about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross? What feelings do you have when you think about His sacrifice?

6. Why can our sacrifices never compare to Jesus' sacrifice?

7. How can someone who is reluctant to sacrifice learn to be willing to do so?

8. Reflect on Romans 12:1 and explain what it means to you to *present your body as a living sacrifice*.

9. How is giving sacrifice?

VIDEO:

Watch the *Giving is sacrifice* video. Discuss the various examples portrayed or listed in the video – what would you have to sacrifice in order to help in each circumstance? How is loving a sacrifice?

PSALM REFLECTION:

Read Psalm 51:15-17, Proverbs 21:3, Ephesians 5:2, and Hebrews 13:15-16 together. What kind of sacrifices is God looking for?

FAMILY WORSHIP

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Romans 12:1

Discuss:

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “sacrifice?” What does the word “sacrifice” mean in a spiritual sense?
2. What’s the greatest sacrifice of all? Why was Jesus’ sacrifice so significant?
3. Our response to Jesus’ sacrifice should be sacrifices of our own. Although our sacrifices can never compare to Christ’s, there are certainly sacrifices that we can make. What are some examples?
4. Romans 12:1 provides another example of sacrifice: What is it? What does this mean, do you think?

Sing together!

I Offer My Life (Celebration Hymnal 663)

Holy Spirit – Keith and Kristyn Getty (Hymnal 466 – especially verse 3)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDYjn-YdnD4>

Put it into action!

Discuss the story of the Good Samaritan. What is something that you could give up and share with someone else? Look for a community organization or school program where you could donate your money, items, or time.

Giving is sacrifice

A TESTIMONIAL BY SHARON W. AND VALERIE D.
FROM DENVER METRO, CO

The food pantry was first started with the idea of only giving help within our congregation. As we moved into the new building, we saw that, while satisfying the needs of our congregation was helpful, the needs of the community became a greater necessity - that our congregation could give to the community, especially as we realized how the economy caused many to become homeless and forced them to survive on the streets near to our church building. That became the driving force and turned into a wonderful example of giving from our hearts! With the support of re Charitable Ministry and the Denver Metro Congregation, volunteers joyfully give gifts of time, effort, talent, and resources to support the food pantry to serve our community.

Over time, the pantry has become more than handing out food. For the pantry volunteers, *giving is sacrifice*. Each volunteer gives time to allow the pantry to operate (over 1,000 hours each year!). The physical efforts involved in running the food pantry are substantial. In addition to other activities, volunteers drive many miles and move tens of thousands of pounds of food annually. Every volunteer gives of themselves to help and engage with our clients, making them feel welcome, praying with them, and supporting them. We hope that the pantry has reached the hearts and souls of our clients. For our members, this unique opportunity to serve those in need so directly has given us purpose and joy and deepens our bonds with each other and the community.

Our volunteers and re Charitable Ministry staff freely share talents as greeters, organizers, cleaners, security, prayers, counselors, maintenance, tech support, and administration. Many volunteers even continued working in the pantry through the pandemic to keep it open and serve the community's needs. „Giving is sacrifice“ is at the core of these pantry volunteers; however, I think most would say their sacrifices are outweighed by the rewards they receive in return. Everything we do is by God's grace and for His glory.

The food pantry started with a grant from re Charitable Ministries, which also assists with applying for government and organizational grants. In addition, the congregation, community, and volunteers make cash and material donations in support of the food pantry. If your congregation is engaged with your community or a community organization, email re.charitableministry@nac-usa.org to learn more about our *Grassroots* grants and support.



A Charitable Ministry of the
New Apostolic Church USA

OUR VALUES

recognize · We need to recognize that everyone is made in the image of God, that we are all broken, and that we all have something to give. This is the first value, because without it, we'll start with the wrong perspective on helping and serving.

respond · This is your decision to make. Every day we have opportunities to help, to serve, to grow a relationship, to be a better neighbor. Regardless of whether you go to faraway countries to serve, or to your local soup kitchen, whether you roll-up your sleeves, or open your wallet - you have to figure out how you will respond to the responsibility that Jesus calls us to.

relieve · Sometimes relief is needed in times of disaster and crisis. As the Bible tells us, if someone is hungry or naked, and you send them away with a prayer, what good is that? We must take care of people in crisis in the best and most effective way that we can.

restore · Our focus must be on the restoration of the four broken relationships that effect every human: our relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the creation. This is the lens we must see through when it comes to serving.

renew · God promises to make all things new. Renewal brings with it a sense of hope, hope that we can all change, hope that we can repair our broken relationships, hope that we can be better neighbors. Every day gives us the choice and the opportunity to try and do these things.



HUMANITARIAN

Completely organized and run by rCM / see project description handout



DISASTER RELIEF

Focused support to local, on the ground organizations



GRASSROOTS

Locally initiated and run with grants and support from rCM

6

Giving is secret

We are on a journey of becoming whom God has called us to be.

It is a never-ending journey, but it is one that can be filled with much joy when we recognize that our almighty, loving God is with us each step of the way. While the journey can be a joyful one, it is also one filled with struggles and challenges as we battle to defeat our old nature and allow the new creation to blossom within us and flow out in all we do. As we grow into the likeness of Jesus, we begin to separate our thoughts from the worldview of today and, instead, see the world with a kingdom perspective. We are no longer driven by the desire to be known and the need to put everything we do on display for others to see. We no longer need to show what we are doing for others and try to tell as many people as possible. We stop shining a light on ourselves and focus instead on becoming whom God created us to be and doing all things to glorify Him.

What is the motivation behind our desire to give? Do we share the good things that God has blessed us with to draw attention to ourselves and gain the praise of our fellow man? Or are we willing to share and give without any desire or need for it to be known? When we are conscious of the omniscient and omnipresent nature of God, that He sees everything that we do and knows what motivates us, we should not be fearful or ashamed, but be humbled and rejoice that He knows us so well. Then, in a god-fearing manner, we give in secret, knowing that our audience of One is the only audience that matters. Knowing that we are loved by God should free us from the entanglements of arrogance and the desire for self-praise, and allow us to bask in the light of His glory so that we can reflect His love to the world around us.

...do not do your charitable deeds before men

In Matthew 6:1-4, Jesus teaches a lesson to the Pharisees, and to all of us, on keeping our giving a secret to encourage humility and avoid self-promotion. Jesus says,

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Matthew 6:1-2

Jesus warned that the recognition and admiration of others is the reward the hypocrites receive from their generosity, but their action is not rewarded by God. Plainly stated, Jesus teaches us not to seek an audience when we give. Have you ever delayed your involvement in helping someone in need because there was no one else around to see you do it? What message does that send to the one who is in need and what does it say about the condition of your heart? If we tend to only give openly in the presence of others, then we must think that our gift is quite noteworthy. But giving in secret implies a certain modesty as we realize that our giving is quite negligible compared to the giving of the eternal One. He is the great giver of all things and our giving will never outshine His. All that we have been given comes from God, and He places us where we can share what we have received. Since He is the only audience that matters and He always sees all, we should never delay helping because there isn't a crowd to witness our actions.

Next, Jesus says that there is no need to announce your work when you care for the needy so that others will know what you did and honor you with praise. As we read in the Gospels about all that Jesus did while on earth, we never once see Him seeking praise for His works of kindness. Instead, we often read of Him retreating to be alone and to pray. *God is the One who has equipped us* with what we need to be able to help those in need. When we truly recognize that and know

we are His humble servant, we realize the foolishness in making a loud fuss about what we are doing. Even if we may find reasons to justify why sharing our good deeds is okay or necessary, we don't have to take advantage of any of the platforms available (i.e. social media) in order to make it known to everyone how great and generous we are. As we grow in our faith, we know how meritless it is to seek the praise of our fellow man for what God has done through us. It is such a rewarding experience when we are able to jump in and give much needed help to someone, and then simply walk away with the joy and fulfillment of knowing that we used the tools given to us by God to share His love with someone. If you find that you need to celebrate what you've done, give praise and worship to God, and make a loud noise in His direction.

But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Matthew 6:3-4

Jesus is teaching about the motives behind giving when He talks about your left hand and right hand. Are you motivated to give because you know that you will get something back in return? Are you only willing to help someone else because you know they will reciprocate your "kindness"? Our motives to give must be pure. They must be born out of our love for God and our love for others. In the example of giving that Jesus shares in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, He teaches what it looks like to give without thought of reciprocation or fanfare. The Samaritan had compassion upon the man who had been wounded. He bandaged him, took him to a safe place, and cared for him completely.

Then the man departs only with a promise to repay whatever is spent to care for this stranger in need. Nowhere in the short story do we see the Samaritan seeking or receiving praise, nor does he say he'll come back to get what he was owed. What drove him to show such mercy and compassion? He was simply fulfilling the commandments to love God and love his neighbor (see Luke 10:26-28).

Our love for God drives us to be obedient to His will and moves us to be open-hearted towards others. As children of God, we must learn to give without any thought of what we will receive in return because we know that our heavenly Father will always care for us. This is contrary to human and societal ways; for some, this is a way of business and of life. But God rewards us each day in ways we recognize and truly in many more ways that we don't, and He will continue to do so for all eternity. Simply, our relationship with Him is the greatest reward. An old choir hymn expresses:

The greatest goal this side of heaven...that is a gift which God has given, it is to be His child in life.

The Greatest Goal

As we are becoming whom God has called us to be, let us rejoice in giving in secret because we know that our giving furthers the work of the kingdom and glorifies the One who is most deserving of praise.

FROM THE 2020 WINTER VISION NEWSLETTER

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1. Why is praise for doing a good deed such a big element of life in our society today?
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2. Describe an experience or time when you were able to give to someone in secret or when you received something from an anonymous giver. How did you feel after?

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3. Is it bad if other people know about something nice you have done for others? What is the difference between keeping it a secret, and not seeking acknowledgment? What do you think Jesus is trying to teach us?

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4. How does the condition of our relationship with God affect our ability to give in secret?

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5. How can you celebrate what you have done or given without telling others about it?

-
6. As you become more like Jesus, more like the person you are called to be, how does your approach and response to giving change?

7. How is giving secret?

VIDEO:

Watch the *Giving is secret* video. Why do we seek acknowledgement? How do you feel when someone acknowledges what you've done? What does it mean to live generously?

PSALM REFLECTION:

Read Psalm 139 together. Reflect on how you are known by God. Talk about all the phrases the author uses to get this point across. What is your favorite?

FAMILY WORSHIP

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Matthew 6:1-4

Discuss:

1. In the above verses, Jesus makes it clear that the motivation behind our giving and serving is of utmost importance. What specifically does He warn against? What does Jesus tell us to do instead?
2. Often we're told to say thank you after we receive something. How can you show gratitude when you don't know where a gift came from?
3. What does it feel like *to receive* a surprise or a gift that is secret? What does it feel like *to give* someone a gift in secret?
4. Why should humility be an aspect of our giving?

Sing together!

For the Beauty of the Earth (Hymnal 36)

Take Time to Be Holy (Hymnal 154)

Put it into action!

Secretly do something for a neighbor (leave them some groceries or cookies, mow their lawn, rake leaves, etc.).

7

Giving is worship

Worship is one's expression to another of their worth, value, or benefit to them. As Christians, we use this word in reference to God, our Father and Creator, our Savior and Redeemer, our Helper and Comforter. Naturally, we understand that God doesn't need our worship, however, worship is necessary for us and the development of our relationship with God.

From early biblical times, humans have expressed their worship and thankfulness in giving. We can read in Genesis that this was a very natural, almost instinctive response. Cain and Abel both turned to God, their Creator, and gave offerings to Him. Further, after the great flood abated, Noah, without any instruction from God, in a very natural way turned to Him, built an altar, and gave offerings in acknowledgement of God's benevolence and protection, which were pleasing to Him. Later on in history, we can see that God stipulated how He would receive the offerings of His people.

As we move through the Bible towards the New Testament, one can see that giving as worship also takes on a spiritual nature. The Psalms speak of sacrifices of joy, Jeremiah talks of sacrifices of praise, which is also further highlighted by the writer of Hebrews. Paul speaks most definitively of giving one's total being in Romans 12:1:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Thus, we can ascertain that giving as a form of worship means to give something back to our Benefactor; not as an even exchange of

services, or gift of equal value, but as a token to express our feelings. Because we know that the Lord looks at the disposition of our heart (Samuel 16:7), this expression includes our:

- *Humbleness* before His omnipotence and benevolence
- *Reliance* on the One who provides and protects
- *Need* for His daily grace
- *Adoration* for His love, compassion, and forgiveness
- *Thankfulness* to Him who is the Giver of all good gifts (Matthew 7:11, James 1:17)
- *Generosity* knowing all has come from Him

Simply put, it is a means for us to show our Father what He means to us. And this giving is not only regarding our offerings and sacrifices directly to Him, but as Jesus taught in Matthew 25:40, giving to others out of His love for us, is an expression directly to Him ...*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*

Many of our brothers and sisters understand this godly principle and have given sumptuously to others. They have discovered the wonderful mystery of giving; we do not give for notability nor ulterior motives, but rather giving in the mind of Christ humbly results in joy that fills the heart, unlike any other. Their giving also is a strong manifestation of their absolute trust in the Almighty, assured that His provision will always sustain them.

Thus, it becomes our privilege to give or lay down before our gracious Father as a firm declaration that He alone is the blessed source of all we are and all we have. What better way to worship God and tell Him what He means to you than by taking what He has given you in your life and using it to bless and serve others? Through our giving, we glorify our God.

1. Discuss the examples of Cain, Abel, and Noah. Why do you think they offered something to God?

2. How do we worship God when we share what we've been blessed with?

3. How does the condition of our heart affect the depth of our worship?

4. Why should we be engaged in worship on a regular basis?

5. Why is worship more for the worshiper than for God?

6. Consider the bulleted list in the article, examples of what our giving should express. Think about how you could incorporate these sentiments in your daily prayers. Write them down and put them where you can see them.

7. What is the mystery of giving?

8. How is giving worship

VIDEO:

Watch the *Giving is worship* video. How do we glorify God by our giving?

PSALM REFLECTION:

Read Psalm 96 together. How is this psalm an offering of praise? What does it tell us about worship? What is being expressed to God? What does it teach us about Him?

FAMILY WORSHIP

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Discuss:

1. How does Paul encourage those in the congregation in Corinth to give? Why should we follow Paul's advice and give cheerfully, or with joy?
2. How would you define worship? If God doesn't need our worship, why should we worship Him?
3. Giving as a form of worship means that we give something back to God as a way to express our feelings for Him. What are some things that we can "give back to God?"
4. Matthew 25:40 shows us that when we give to others, we give to Christ. Think about someone in your life who is in need. What could you give them that would help fulfill their need?

Sing together!

Worthy of Worship (Hymnal 29)

I Offer My Life (Celebration Hymnal 663)

Put it into action!

How can you focus your attention on God in this time of Thanksgiving? What can you give back to Him?

Find a branch outside to put in a pot with some dirt, rocks, or moss. Cut leaves out of paper that you can tie to the "tree branches". As a family, write what you are thankful for on each leaf. Discuss how you can praise and worship God for what He has given to you; plan a family worship night, save money for a special offering, say a prayer of gratitude, or sing a song of praise every time you add a leaf to your tree.

Facilitator Notes

Below you'll find a few suggestions for leading your small group discussion. More training materials can be found on ndi.nac-usa.org

1. Begin your discussion on time and stick to 60 minutes unless you have agreed on a longer time together.
2. Be sure everyone in your group has a book and encourage them to prepare beforehand.
3. Encourage everyone to participate, but do not pressure those who might not be comfortable yet. Remind the group of the confidentiality of the conversation, that this is a place of trust and if you're comfortable, please feel free to share your personal thoughts and feelings.
4. If everyone was not able to read the chapter ahead, it might be helpful to have someone read it (or take turns reading it) together.
5. You'll notice there are different types of questions; some questions are *knowledge and interpretation* (discussing what has been explained and how each person understands it), and others are *application* (applying the concepts to our personal lives).
6. Feel free to ask the questions in your own words, or skip one if you feel it has already been answered. Consider your group and come up with additional questions if you would like.

7. Avoid answering your own question right away. If necessary, rephrase the question until it is clearly understood.
8. Don't be afraid of silence – people may need time to think through their responses.
9. Don't be content with just one answer. Ask, “What do the rest of you think?” or “Anything else?”
10. Acknowledge all contributions, and try to be affirming. If an answer is off base ask, “What led you to that conclusion?” or “What do the rest of you think?”
11. The VIDEO section inspires discussion on the short videos that were created for each *Giving is* topic. Have the video ready on your computer or phone to share with the group. If it's not possible to watch the video together, ask your small group to use this section as a take-home to do individually during the week. You can find the videos on the NAC USA YouTube page in the *Giving is* playlist.
12. The PSALM REFLECTION section ends each session with the study of a psalm that relates to the chapter in some way. Be sure to leave sufficient time to read the psalm and discuss the questions.
13. The three TESTIMONIALS that you will find throughout the book give insight into how some of our congregations are engaging in their communities and what our NAC USA charity (re Charitable Ministry) can do to support these efforts.
14. Have fun! Allow your small group to be an environment where people can learn and grow in a place of trust, love, and generosity.

