



## Ten Habits That Make Your Life Better

### *Habit Five*

One time during my first teaching trip to Russia, I was going through an underground walkway to take a metro train. I was with a student and two other pastors. We suddenly came upon a beggar who was sitting on the floor and had one leg missing. She implored me to give her something and I reached into my pocket for money. Immediately the student, who was serving as our tour guide, stopped me and firmly let me know that the beggars in the metro station all worked for the Russian mafia and paid for their places where they begged. As we proceeded towards the train, I was shaken and felt guilty about not helping the woman. Have you felt torn about helping someone or not, about whether you should give to support a particular cause? Perhaps you have become jaded by the many requests for money you come across. Even the kindest heart can suffer from "giving fatigue" when faced by a nearly infinite number of appeals for help.

Many just shut out the cries of the needy and ignore them but one of the most widely quoted declarations Jesus made is jarring and provocative. **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."** (Acts 20: 35d CSB) Therein is the fifth habit for those wanting to make their lives better. Give! The word translated "blessed" means "happy" or "deserving of congratulations". In other words, Jesus insists that you are better off when you give. Scientific studies back up that assertion. It seems that giving lowers blood pressure as well as stress levels, reduces anxiety and depression and in the end leads to a more fulfilling life. It has been found that when you give, the brain secretes Serotonin which regulates moods as well as Dopamine which increases the feeling of pleasure and Oxytocin which creates a sense of connection with others. You can see how you might find yourself happier when you give.

Most of the time we think of giving as a financial transaction. Plenty of places in the Bible speak of it that way. When Jesus shocked the rich young ruler who inquired about eternal life, the demand Jesus made was for the fellow to give his money to the poor. **Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** (Mark 10: 21 NIV) This was clearly an extreme case, there was something in the rich young ruler that needed to be shattered if he were ever to have eternal life rather than be trapped in the devil's hell. Giving money is ironically one of the easier ways to give. Reach in your pocket and pull out some spare change for the guy at the intersection with a sign asking for help. Throw a little bit into a kettle for a Salvation Army Santa or a dollar into the offering plate at church. Now think about this. **Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.** (John 15: 13 NIV)

Giving looks quite a bit different when you view it from that perspective. You may argue that Jesus wasn't talking about giving but rather loving. Yet if you look at the statement closely, giving and loving were almost interchangeable. "Laying down your life" is the ultimate stretch of giving. You cannot give more than that! We use the expression, "It cost him his life." Now it could be that the cost was forced on him. Someone against his will took his life from him. But in this case, Jesus is talking about freely giving up one's life and doing so out of love. There are two points to make about giving, at least the sort of giving that makes your life better. 1. Giving costs you something. It is not free of charge on your end. Giving is not casting aside something because you no longer want it. For example, in our church parking lot is a large metal bin where anyone in the neighborhood can drop in used clothes and the organization collecting them will re-purpose them. But did you really give them if you were going to discard them anyway? Is that the sort of giving that changes your life, that upgrades who you are? Jesus gave His life for your salvation. Giving comes with a cost.

2. Giving that transforms you is a manifestation of love. There is a form of giving that is due to feelings of guilt, out of coercion, giving that is done grumpily without any joy to it but although good may come out of that type of giving, it won't make you better or improve the quality of your life. Notice what the Apostle Paul said of giving. **And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.** (1 Corinthians 13: 3 CSB) Nothing! Others may benefit from your loveless giving but not you. Jesus makes this clear. **Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.**" (Luke 6: 38 NIV) The sort of giving you do determines what you get back for it. Grumpy, stingy giving will bring you minimal joy and do little to improve your health, happiness or peace of mind. It certainly will not improve your relationship with God. But giving that is the result of the love you have for God and others will work wonders for you. When you give out of love, you can't help but be cheerful in your giving. And that has always been God's plan! **Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.** (2 Corinthians 9: 7 NIV)

If it makes you a happier and healthier person, why wouldn't you make giving a significant part of your lifestyle? It makes sense! Here are some ways you can build giving into your day. 1. Give to finance the work of the Kingdom and the needs of those the Lord shows you. One of the accounts in the Bible that always makes me smile is described in Exodus. During the time the Israelites were making their way towards the promised land, the Lord commissioned some skilled craftsman to create a Tabernacle and all the various things needed for the worship of Him. The people were given the privilege of providing the materials out of their private possessions for building everything. They took such joy in this that they brought far more than was necessary. **So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done."** (Exodus 36: 4-5 NIV) It is thrilling when God's people have that sort of attitude when it comes to giving.

2. Give your time. 3. Give your skills. When the Tabernacle and all the beautiful items used for worship were built, it was volunteers who were skilled that gave up their time and expertise for its construction. **Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the Lord had given ability and who was willing to come and do the work.** (Exodus 36: 2 NIV) 4. Give your prayers. When a beggar approached Peter and John asking for money, Peter's response magnified the value of prayer and the power it brings!. **Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.** (Acts 3: 6-7 NIV) 5. Give the Gospel. Led by the Lord who directed him to go down to a desert road leading to Gaza from Jerusalem, Philip met an Ethiopian riding in a chariot. The Ethiopian was reading a passage written by the prophet Isaiah and Philip explained to him the point of Isaiah's prophecy. **Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.** (Acts 8: 35 NIV) Opportunities to bring Jesus up in your conversations occur every week. "Seize the moment" and give the Gospel to those God brings into your life. 6. Give hope. The world is filled with people struggling with depression and despair. They have lost and failed and feel like nothing will ever go their way. More than anything they need hope, and you have it to share. David was feeling the terrible despair of hopelessness. King Saul night and day tried to hunt down David to kill him. Saul's son was a great friend and Jonathan came to David's hideout to do what he could to help him. **While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.** (1 Samuel 23:15-17 NIV) Giving is a gift of hope wherever it is offered. Your giving may seem insignificant but what you give can be multiplied a thousand times over by Christ and bring light to dark places, hope to those desperate for a reason to believe.