

HOW TO GIVE WITH NOTHING¹

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When you go to a doctor for your annual check-up, he or she will often begin to poke, prod, and press various places, all the while asking, “Does this hurt? How about this?” If you cry out in pain, one of two things has happened. Either the doctor has pushed too hard, without the right sensitivity. Or, more likely, there’s something wrong, and the doctor will say, “We’d better do some more tests. It’s not supposed to hurt there!” So it is when pastors preach on financial responsibility, and certain members cry out in discomfort, criticizing the message and the messenger. Either the pastor has pushed too hard. Or perhaps there’s something wrong. In that case, I say, “My friend, we’re in need of the Great Physician because it’s not supposed to hurt there.”

Jesus had gone across the Sea of Galilee, and as was usually the case whenever He went anywhere, “a great multitude followed Him” (John 6:1). Why was it that people flocked in such numbers around this poor man—a man so poor that He had no home, no place where He could lay His head? It was because He had something to give which they wanted. It was not food or money, although even in His poverty He did give those things; but such gifts were only secondary; the people could work and earn money, and buy bread, but He gave them freely that which money could not buy. They

followed Him “because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased” (John 6:2). He had a message of power, words of life,—and people were drawn to Him by an attraction which they could not understand or explain.

When Jesus saw the multitude around Him as He taught (for there were not fewer than five thousand man, besides women and children), He said to Philip, but in the hearing of all the disciples, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5). Philip made a hasty calculation, and said, “Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little” (John 6:7). Remember that the purchasing power of money was very different then from what it is now. A penny was the ordinary wage for a day’s labor (Matt. 20:1, 2). Two pence was a good deposit toward the lodging and care of an invalid at an inn (Luke 10:30-35). Two hundred pence would therefore buy a great quantity of bread, yet not enough so that each one of the company could have just a taste, and Philip could see no way of helping the hungry crowd.

It was very evident to the disciples that no matter how great the need of the company, and how disposed they themselves were to assist them, the thing could not be done. So they said to Jesus, “Send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.” Matt. 14:15. But even if this were done, many must have gone hungry, having no money to buy with. “Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.” Matt. 14:16. Again the business sense of the

¹ John 6:9-11. 370, 316.

disciples was brought into requisition, and they looked over their resources, and found so meager a supply that it was useless to speak about it. Peter, acting as spokesman for the twelve, said, "There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" John 6:9. Clearly nothing could be done. "Oh, no; it is useless to talk; we should like to feed these hungry people, but we have nothing worth mentioning to do it with, we have carefully considered the situation, and it is absolutely impossible to do anything. Oh, if we only had means!"

All this time Jesus "Himself knew what He would do." John 6:6. The business calculations of the disciples, and the demonstration that they were in too straitened circumstances to allow of their doing anything to help, did not affect Him in the least. He was not discouraged at the prospect. Five loaves and two fishes? Oh, that is an abundance! "Make the men sit down." John 6:10. Everything must be orderly. We don't want any pushing and crowding, any unseemly scramble for the overflow of food that is to be provided. There must be no chance for some weak, timid person to be overlooked. Moreover there must be quiet, so that all can have opportunity to think upon the wondrous gift of God, and upon the Giver. Let the men be still, that they may recognize God. So the men sat down, "and Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they

were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which remained over and above unto them that had eaten." John 6:11-13.

Here is the story complete; only a few of the lessons that it teaches can be noted at present. For the first we may see the tender compassion of Jesus on the poor and needy. His heart was and is always touched by the sight of human need and suffering. Everything moves Him. He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." But He doesn't rest content with mere pity and expressions of sympathy. He wastes no time in regrets that He is not able to help; but from His abundant fullness He supplies the want. His sympathy is practical, and always accomplishes something. He sympathizes; He longs to do something to help; He knows what He will do; and He does it. He knows the need; He cares for it; and He is able and willing to relieve.

The Lord allows us to realize our helplessness. His question, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (John. 6:5) was calculated to emphasize the great need and their lack of means. But remember that the question was not one of doubt. "He Himself knew what He would do." Let this case, then, stand as the type of all. How often we have felt our hearts stirred as we have seen poverty and suffering, and have longed to help, and have mourned our inability. Now that desperate situation, that was made so vivid to us, was only the repetition of the Lord's question to Philip, Whence

shall we supply these hungry souls with food? And just as the question was asked then to prove the disciples, so the desperate need is set before us so vividly in order to prove us. How often we have been tested in this manner, and yet we have not learned the lesson. May we begin now.

Jesus would not send people away hungry. He would not allow the disciples to do so. He always feeds the hungry. Therefore we may be assured that when we allow people to go away hungry for food either for the body or the soul, we ignore or deny the presence of the Master among us. “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). “Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father” (John 14:12).

“They need not depart; give ye them to eat.” Why did Jesus say that?—Because it was so. Jesus did not trifle with the disciples. He knew what He would do; the question was, Did they know what they would do? Yes; they knew that they would send the multitude away empty; but they did not need to. His question to Philip was for the purpose of proving him, and the rest of the disciples as well. The words of Jesus show that if they had but recognized their opportunity they might have fed the multitude the same as He did. And the lesson is recorded for our sakes.

“How can we give when we have nothing?”—Just the same as Jesus did when He had nothing; for He

did not do anything while here on this earth, except as man.

“Yes; but it pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell, and it was of the abundant fullness that was in Him, that He fed the multitudes.” Very true; “and of His fullness have all we received” (John 1:16). The same Christ is alive today, and dwells among us; and if we but allow Him to dwell in our hearts by faith, we shall also “be filled with all the *fullness* of God” (Eph. 3:19).

Our only hope is to discover a heart appreciation for God’s *agape*. The apostle John declared that “God is love [*agape*]” (John 3:16). That one word, *agape*, rightly appreciated, would put an end to wars, crime, selfishness, and corruption—what all the scientists and politicians in the world are powerless to do. But the Bible declares that the present world, as a whole, will never accept this solution.

But as individuals, we can. To believe that God loves us with this special kind of self-sacrificing *agape* gives us a true sense of our importance in the sight of Heaven—we are expatriate citizens of God’s unfallen universe. We see ourselves as allies with Heaven, members of His “whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph. 3:15), who “may be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). That experience is what the New Testament means by the word “faith.”

Finding the solution to *anomia* (selfishness) is not something that we do so much as something that we see. Paul explains: “[I pray that you] . . . may comprehend . . . the love [*agape*] of Christ, which

passes knowledge” (Eph. 3:17-19). The person who has grasped this doesn’t have to grit his teeth and force himself unwillingly to turn away from sinful allurements; *agape* motivates him to do so. The evil becomes distasteful.

We have wondered how the early Christians could endure the privations they suffered in following Christ in those days of Roman tyranny. We misread history if we assume that it was a mere hope of pie-in-the-sky, an “investment” that required foregoing present good for the return of a greater good to come. That would be next door to selfishness, a what’s-in-it-for-me religion.

The presence in the world of at least some people who have the faith of the apostles keeps the entire world from rotting away at the seams. There was a purer motive—a comprehension of *agape* that transcended all self-centered concern: “For the love [*agape*] of Christ constrains [compels] us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). For some in all lands the glitter of sensuality and materialism has lost its appeal. These people would never claim that they are an iota better than anybody else; they have simply *seen* something others haven’t seen!

They are the “salt of the earth,” exercising an influence for good all out of proportion to their scant numbers, preserving the world from complete deterioration. The presence in the world of at least *some* people who have the faith of the apostles keeps the entire world from rotting away at the

seams. Jesus begs us to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers into the harvest field of His Seventh-day Adventist church—and on into the world—who can proclaim *agape*.

How does one catch the vision? (1) By *looking* at the magnificent love God has revealed in His cross (“Babylon” can’t comprehend it!). (2) By telling Him, “Thank You!” (3) By *choosing* to let His love motivate one to take the first step of faith, letting faith bear its fruit of self-denial. (4) By *letting* its power begin to work in us “to will and to do for His good pleasure,” rather than our own selfish will (Phil. 2:13). (5) By *choosing* not to dam up the love which has flowed down to us from the cross of Christ. (6) By *letting* it flow out from you to someone else. (7) By *letting* tears of contrition flow from our eyes for all our hardhearted unbelief in the past. (8) And by choosing to *believe* the heart-melting assurance of God’s personal, persistent love for unworthy *us*.

Those who have such faith in Christ are not looking for a crown to wear; they want to crown Him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

What a marvelous manifestation of the power of God’s grace! that having nothing we should be able to give everything. “We then as workers together with Him beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain;” (2 Cor. 6:1) and we approve ourselves as the ministers of God, “as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6:10).

Peter and John found a man at the gate of the temple in sore need. He asked for money, but Peter

had none to give him. “Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). Having nothing did not make it necessary for Peter to pass by with a sympathetic greeting and the remark, “Poor fellow! how I wish I could do something for him.” No; Peter gave the man something better than money,—something that money could not buy, but that which would enable him to get money if he needed it. When all God’s professed people have Christ’s abiding presence through the Holy Spirit, as a reality of which they are conscious, they will never pass a needy soul by without supplying more than he asks or thinks to receive.

God gives us richly all things to enjoy. “He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). Everybody therefore has everything given him. Most people, however, do not recognize the gifts of God. Not only do they not know God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift, but they do not know how abundantly He gives, even when they know that He does give something. It is the business of God’s servants, therefore, “to open the blind eyes” (Isa. 42:7), that men may know the boundless grace of God, and the gift by grace. They are to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). But oh, how sad it is when those who profess to know God are themselves blind to the riches of the glory of their inheritance. Who is there of us who has not discounted the words of Jesus, and the lessons that He has left us, so much that they have

scarcely any more meaning to us than as mere stories? Shall we not learn?

Did Jesus ever find it difficult to give? Everyone will instantly say, No. But why? He was just as human as we are. He took flesh and blood the same as ours. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” And the kind of flesh that He was made in this world was precisely such as was in this world. “In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” “In all things”! It does not say, In all things *but one*. There is no exception. He was made in all things like as we are. He was of Himself as weak and powerless as we are, for He said, “I can of Mine own self do nothing.”

Why, then, being in all things like as we are, did He find it always easy to give? Because . . . all His dependence was on the grace of God. He always sought to serve God, only with the power of God. And therefore the Father dwelt in Him, and did the works of righteousness. Therefore it was always easy for Him to give. But as He is, so are we in this world. . . . “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure,” as well as in Him. . . .

True, Christ partook of the divine nature, and so do you if you are a child of promise, and not of the flesh. . . . There was nothing given to Him in this world, and He had nothing in this world, that is not freely given to you, or that you may not have.

All this in order . . . that you *may* be freed from sin; that sin may not have dominion over you; that you may glorify God on the earth; and that you may be like Jesus.

As we have freely received, so are we freely to give. That is, we are to give as much as we have received, and on the same terms. We have received everything; we are to give everything. The fact that we do not have a big stock to carry about with us to exhibit, does not prove that we have nothing. God is our treasure house. "The unsearchable riches of Christ" are all and always "in Him," for "in Him are all things created," and "in Him all things consist," and He is ours. He saves us the trouble of looking after and caring for our vast property, while we have all the use of it on demand. He says, "Concerning the work of My hands command ye Me" (Isa. 45:11). These are realities, and not empty words.

In all this God is trying to teach the world that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15) or seemeth to have. He would have us know, and teach others, that He cares for us, and keeps us. He would have all men know that all things come from Him, so that all may give Him glory, by receiving from Him the things that He gives.

True, He has said that the man who will not work shall not eat, but that does not teach us that man must support himself. No man on earth "earns his own living." No man can earn a living. Life is too precious a commodity to be bought with money, or earned by human labor. Life is a gift. God "giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). The occasions when He gives us help, when it is manifest that we are unable to do anything for ourselves, are to show us that even where we are

most active we simply gather up what He showers down.

Now when Christ's followers rise to their privileges as "workers together with Him," realizing that He was on earth as a representative Man, showing what every child of God ought to do when occasion calls for it, the world will see that there is something better than what this world can give. They will not all believe, but the work that God designs for the world will speedily be accomplished. They will see that poverty does not handicap a man of God; that the expression "rich in faith" is not an empty phrase; and that the poor Christian can do what the wealthy worldling cannot. How to give with nothing is the lesson that God teaches, for He takes the things that are not, when He has a great work to do.

Therefore let us know that a great need only magnifies God's gift. Instead of despairing when we cannot see the way to accomplish a necessary thing, remember that Christ Himself is the way. Yea, He is a "new and living way." With Him at hand, knowing His real presence, we do not need to be worried over "ways and means." When the Lord asked Philip how they could buy bread for the multitude, Philip might well have answered, "Lord, Thou knowest, for Thou art the Bread."

Christ "gave Himself for us," and the reality of the gift is demonstrated in the feeding of the multitude, for He literally gave Himself to them. But as He Himself said, He could do nothing of Himself. It was the Father dwelling in Him who did the works. He comes to dwell in believers, that they may be filled with the fullness of God, so that they may also do

the same as He did. We see that the disciples did give the people bread, after all. They took it from Jesus, and gave it to the multitude. That is to show us that we may feed the hungry when we are in touch with Him. Let each servant of Christ take the bread of life fresh from Him, and pass it on.

As Christ gave Himself, so are we to give ourselves. This we can really do when we can say, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but, Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). He who does not give himself gives nothing, even though only by the grace of Christ dwelling in him, gives everything, that any soul can need, even though he has not a penny.

What will then follow?—The same thing that took place with Jesus. Multitudes ran after Him, because He gave them Himself. So "thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He hath glorified thee" (Isa. 45:5). If He has glorified thee, then "the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isa. 60:3).

All will receive abundantly, but there will be no waste. Doubtless there were many "unworthy" persons in the crowd that day. He fed them all; for He was the Son of the Highest, "who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust" (Matt. 5:46). He even causes it to "rain on the earth where no man is; in the wilderness, wherein there is no man" (Job 38:26). The ocean also, where there is no need of water, receives showers equally with the dry land.

So lavish is God with His gifts. Yet there is no waste; for He draweth again all the drops of water to Himself. He gathers up the fragments, so that nothing is lost. All comes back to Him, to be again given forth. What if the recipient be unworthy? Know that God does not ask you to give because He needs your help to supply the needy, but that you may be blessed in giving.

If it were simply to see that somebody's wants were supplied, God could do that without your appearance on the scene. He allows you to share His work, that you may be partaker of His riches and joy; and this is accomplished for you, no matter what be the character of the one helped. So to him that gives shall there be given. That, which he imparts, namely the life of God, will come back to him again, to make him doubly rich. Thus may we be channels for the great stream of life that flows from God throughout all the universe, and returning to His bosom flows forth again ever fresh and new.

He was the world's ultimate mystery—so secretive, so reclusive, so enigmatic, that for more than fifteen years no one could say for certain that he was alive, much less how he looked or behaved.

Howard Hughes was one of the richest men in the world, with the destinies of thousands of people—perhaps even of governments—at his disposal, yet he lived a sunless, joyless, half-lunatic life. In his later years he fled from one resort to another—Las Vegas, Nicaragua, Acapulco—and his physical appearance became odder and odder. His straggly beard hung down to his waist and his hair reached to the middle of his back. His fingernails were two

inches long, and his toenails hadn't been trimmed for so long they resembled corkscrews.

Hughes was married for thirteen years to Jean Peters, one of the most beautiful women in the world. But never in that time were the two seen in public together, and there is no record of their ever having been photographed together. For a while they occupied separate bungalows at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and later she lived in an opulent and carefully guarded French Regency house atop a hill in Bel Air, making secretive and increasingly infrequent trips to be with Hughes in Las Vegas. They were divorced in 1970.

Hughes often said, "Every man has his price or a guy like me couldn't exist," yet no amount of money bought the affect of his associates. Most of his employees who have broken the silence report their disgust for him.

Don't allow the smoke screen of more money and hoarding it blind your eyes to the truth.

In the latter part of the 17th century, German preacher August H. Francke founded an orphanage to care for the homeless children of Halle. One day when Francke desperately needed funds to carry on his work, a destitute Christian widow came to his door begging for a ducat—a gold coin. Because of his financial situation, he politely but regretfully told her he couldn't help her.

Disheartened, the woman began to weep. Moved by her tears, Francke asked her to wait while he went to his room to pray. After seeking God's guidance, he felt that the Holy Spirit wanted him to change his mind. So, trusting the Lord to meet his

own needs, he gave her the money. Two mornings later, he received a letter of thanks from the widow. She explained that because of his generosity she had asked the Lord to shower the orphanage with gifts. That same day Francke received 12 ducats from a wealthy lady and 2 more from a friend in Sweden. He thought he had been amply rewarded for helping the widow, but he was soon informed that the orphanage was to receive 500 gold pieces from the estate of Prince Lodewyk Van Wurtenburg.

When he heard this, Francke wept in gratitude. In sacrificially providing for that needy widow, he had been enriched, not impoverished.

There's a lot more to being rich than making more money. Seneca, the Roman, was right, "Money has never yet made anyone rich." Do you want riches? Then listen to Jesus:

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

For the *real* riches, try switching kingdoms.