

When God Taught Me To Give

By Oswald J. Smith, D.D.

I shall never forget how God taught me to give. I had been pastor of a large church in the city of Toronto, but one day I resigned and on the first Sunday of January became pastor of a church which knew how to give in a way I had never known. I commenced this pastorate at a time when the church was holding its annual missionary convention.

Now I knew nothing about a missionary convention. I had never seen one in all my life. I didn't know the first thing to do. So I just sat there on the platform and watched.

The ushers went up and down the aisles giving out the envelopes. To my amazement, one had the audacity to walk right up and hand me—the pastor!—an envelope. I sat there holding it in my hand. I can still remember that moment as though it were yesterday.

As I held the envelope I read, "In dependence upon God I will endeavor to give toward the missionary work of the church \$... during the coming year." I had never read such a statement before. I did not know that God was going to deal with me that morning, and teach me a lesson that I was to teach to hundreds of others all over the country in the years to come.

I started to pray. I said, "Lord God, I can't do anything. You know I have nothing. I haven't a cent in the bank. I haven't anything in my pocket. This church pays me only \$25 a week. I have a wife and child to keep. We are trying to buy our home, and everything is sky high in price." All that was true. The first World War was on.

"I know that," the Lord seemed to answer me. "I know you are only getting \$25 a week. I know you have nothing in your pocket and nothing in the bank."

"Well, then," I said, relieved, "that settles it. I have nothing to give and I cannot give anything."

It was then that the Lord spoke to my heart. I shall never forget it.

"I am not asking you for what you have," he said.

"You are not asking me for what I have, Lord?" I replied. "Then what are you asking for?"

"I am asking you for a faith offering. How much can you trust me for?"

"Oh, Lord," I exclaimed, "that's different. How much can I trust thee for?"

GIVING WHICH HONORS GOD

Now, of course, I knew nothing at all about a faith offering. I had never given such an offering. But I knew the Lord was speaking. I thought he might say \$5, or perhaps even \$10. Once, as minister of another church, I had given \$5 for missions. Once in my life I had given \$3. Also, I once had given \$2. But never at any time had I given more than \$5. I almost trembled as I awaited the answer.

Presently it came. Now I am not going to ask you to believe that God spoke to me in an audible voice, but he might just as well have. I was scarcely conscious of the congregation as I sat there with my eyes closed, listening to the voice of God.

"How much can I give?" I asked.

"Fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars," I exclaimed. "Why, Lord, that's two weeks' salary! How can I ever get \$50?"

But again the Lord spoke and it was still the same amount. It was just as clear to me as though he had spoken aloud.

My hand trembled as I signed my name and address and wrote in the amount—\$50.

How I ever paid that amount, I don't know to this day. All I know is that every month I had to pray for \$4. And every month God sent it to me in some miraculous way. At the end of the year I had paid \$50.

But this is what I want to make clear. There came to my heart such a fullness of the Spirit, that as I paid the final amount I realized I had received the greatest blessing that had ever come into my life!

I had trusted God for a certain amount and he had met it. So great was the spiritual blessing that the next year at the convention I doubled the amount and gave \$100. Then, at another convention I doubled the amount again and gave \$200. At still another convention I doubled it once more and gave \$400. Then later I doubled it again and made it \$800. From that day to this I have been increasing the amount and sending it to the bank of heaven, year by year. If I had waited until I had it, I never would have given it because I never would have received it. But I gave it when I didn't have it. I gave a faith offering and God honored it.

That was the first time, I say, that I had ever given what I call a scriptural offering, a Pauline offering. Paul, you will remember, often took up "faith promise offerings." He would get the church to promise a certain amount and then he would give the church a year to pay it. Then, you remember, as the year drew to a close, he would send someone to remind the church of the promise that had been made so he would not be ashamed when he arrived. (See II Corinthians 9.) He wanted to be sure it would be paid. A faith promise offering is a scriptural offering; it is a Pauline offering, and God blesses it.

Have you given only cash offerings? It doesn't require any faith to give a cash offering. If I have a dollar in my pocket, all I have to do is to tell my hand to go into my pocket, find the dollar, take it out and put it in the plate. I don't have to pray about it. I don't have to ask God for it. I don't have to trust him for any definite amount. I just have it and give it.

But it is entirely different with a faith promise offering. I have to pray and ask God how much he would have me give, then trust him for it. Month by month I must go to him in prayer and ask him for the amount promised. I must wait upon him until it comes in. That is the offering that brings blessing.

BETWEEN YOU AND GOD

For well over a quarter of a century now, that is the type of offering I have taken for missions. In our annual missionary convention we never get more than six or seven thousand dollars in cash, but we get a quarter of a million or more in faith promises! And it always comes in! More comes in than the amount promised!

It is customary in many churches to simply divide between various missionary societies whatever cash offering is given. If it comes in, they give it. But since there is no need to exercise faith, there is no burden, no responsibility. I have no use for that type of giving. I believe that every individual church should obligate itself in faith before God for a certain definite amount, and pray until that amount has been received.

Now I am not talking about pledges. I never have taken up a pledge offering. There is all the difference in the world between a pledge offering and a faith promise offering. A pledge offering is between you and a church, between you and a missionary society. Some day the deacons may come along and try to collect it, or you may

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