



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network

SPIRITUAL GUIDELINES (11)

Contributing to the Needs of Others

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One version of the natural gifts listed in Romans 12.6 is

'Whoever shares with others should do it generously'

and in Romans 12.13 the emphasis is on

'Giving to the needs of the saints'.

Sharing with others all that the Lord had given to them, was one of the memorable features practised by the Early Believers which created the community, fellowship and belongingness many strive after in today's fragmented society. The ability to do this with a generous spirit is often referred to as 'giving with a good eye' - *'if your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light'* (Matthew 6.22). There is a wholeness of spirit that comes when you give in this way - not because you must but because you want to - and it then becomes a blessing to God - with the result that everyone else (including yourself) receives the blessings. I still remember a catchy tune and phrase from my childhood 'Love is not love 'til you give it away'.

Limited Understanding

The biblical phrases highlighted in the above box are often interpreted and used by fund raisers to give justification to asking for financial support for Christian workers and in doing so in many eyes it has become the main interpretation and outcome of the gift in Romans 12.13. Some believe that the main way this gift can be exercised is by giving financially to others - and the greater the monetary value is, the more spiritual it will be. This can of course become a questionable way of fulfilling your responsibilities vicariously - almost paying someone else to do it for you! But it can also be a way in which those who are 'rich' can help those who do not have the same level of material possessions as they have and they can show their commitment to the person or the cause. Anything which is given with the right motive of generosity can be both of value and a blessing in the eyes of the Lord - size does not matter (see the story of the widow's mite in Luke 21:1-4).

Greater Value

But there are many other aspects of using this gift that are overlooked. Many things have a greater value than money - love, prayer, care and listening being some of them. But then again James 2.16 warns us *'you shouldn't just say, "I hope all goes well for you. I hope you will be warm and have plenty to eat." What good is it to say this, unless you do something to help?'*

The picture of relationships in Acts 4:32 in the early church shows a way of life which has become an ideal in many eyes and almost a template of how things should be between believers. *'The group of followers all felt the same way about everything. None of them claimed that their possessions were their own, and they shared everything they had with each other.'*

Reaching Out

A natural progression of this beyond just the care and support of the believers in the immediate fellowship comes in Paul's teaching. As noted, one of the natural gifts in Romans 12.13 is that of contributing to the needs of others. *'Take care of God's needy people **and welcome strangers into your home**'*. This has various translations in different versions but it is a call to all Christians to look beyond their own needs and to be aware of the needs of others whether close friends or even complete strangers.

So we are called not only to support those who are already believers - but also to include all those who are needy. The help may be going the extra mile as the Good Samaritan did when he came across the man attacked by robbers as recorded in Luke 10:25-37 *'when he saw him he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him'*. He gave time and even some of his own possessions to a complete stranger. In Luke 3:11 John told them, *"If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any. If you have food, share it with someone else."*

But there is a warning in Matthew 6:2 *"So when you give something to a needy person, do not make a big show of it, as the hypocrites do in the houses of worship and on the streets. They do it so that people will praise them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full."*

Relationship Building

In order to be effective there is then a responsibility on the potential giver to build a relationship so that there is a right understanding of what is really needed by the potential recipient. There needs to be an empathy with others which results in action when real needs can be shared and met. Most people have received a present which says more of the giver than responding to the felt needs of the receiver!

Galatians 6:6 takes on a whole new meaning when it says *'Those who are being taught the Christian message should share all the good things they have with their teachers.'* This does not just mean financial reimbursement for their teaching - but also to share an understanding of that which they have received and to join in the conversation! It becomes an active partnership as recommended in Philemon v 6 *'I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ'*.

Importance for Today

We ourselves believe and know that God will take care of our own needs. Matthew 6.28 tells us *'not to worry'* which is elaborated in the prayer in Philippians 4.19 *'I pray that God will take care of all your needs with the wonderful blessings that come from Christ Jesus!'*. And we are all exhorted in Hebrews 13:16 *'Do not forget to do good and to help one another, because these are the sacrifices that please God'*.

In our day and age when individualism is prized in our society at large and many are suffering through the lack of good relationships, the significance of this gift becomes very special. Christians need to follow the example given by Christ of elevating the well-being of others above the needs of self which may be difficult for some as it stands against the current trend in society - but it needs to be a goal for each of us.

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