

**Part 2 of a two-part message given at the 10 conferences of the  
Eastern U.S. area and the United Kingdom, Spring 2001**

**PAY THE VISION: Part II**

~~ Say the vision, pray the vision, pay the vision ~~

1. God owns and operates everything, everywhere, forever
2. God shares his wealth freely.
3. God made us, his redeemed children, joint heirs of his wealth.

Believing these principles to be true and eternal, why is it that so many Christians and so many churches are living like paupers? Little love, little joy, little (few) workers, little money?

To address these and other questions, we look at the fourth principle in PAYING THE VISION.

**IV. God's approach to receiving is through giving.**

This makes absolutely no sense to human beings. Even some who have been saved by Jesus Christ, have never grasped the principle that we receive when we give.

This is a principle of nature. When a tree drops its leaves in the fall, those leaves put nutrients into the soil. The soil, then rich in nutrients, feeds the tree. The tree produces the bud, the leaf, the fruit, giving off oxygen and food for all living creatures. It all starts with giving and only thrives as it continues to give.

Why is it that the Christian church that started with a little band of fairly uneducated workers is growing more rapidly today than at any time in her 2000 year history? Why is it that colleges and universities; hospitals and clinics; social service agencies and ministries to the poor and downtrodden keep cropping up through the ministries of the church worldwide? It all goes back to one thing. God gave. And, He keeps on giving. Without the giving there would have been no receiving.

And God created us to give. That's why we are here. Why did God fill us with love? So we could feel good? No! He fills us with love so that we will give it away. How do we abound more and more in the love of God? Only when we give the love we have to those in need. Giving is the spark that ignites the fires of love. When we give, we abound.

The "gimme, gimme, gimme" of the pagan world is replaced by sharing and giving and living in the Christ-led world.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is spoken by Jesus and recorded in Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you." Do you hear the promise? "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.”

While this passage deals primarily with our relationship to our enemies, it is a passage that expounds an eternal truth. God uses in our lives the same measure we use toward one another.

It all starts with giving. What measure are you using? A thimble? A dixie cup? A wash tub? A dump truck?

God is using the same measure in pouring forth to you, his grace and love and joy and material resources.

One of the things I am most thankful for is that God put me in a home that understood how miracles and supply of every need emerges out of giving. My parents taught us to give. They taught us by example, which I'll share a bit of later, and they taught us from the Scriptures.

I would sooner steal a car or rob a bank than to be found robbing God of the tithe that He declared is Holy to the Lord. There are many good and powerful reasons to tithe on any income we ever receive, but this is not a message on tithing. It is a message on giving which doesn't start until the tithe is returned. As far as I know, I've never earned or been given a dime that has not been tithed – the 10% belongs to God. We do not give the tithe – we return the tithe to its owner. It is in giving where the fun begins.

When I was a freshman at Roberts Wesleyan College in 1958, there came the annual missions conference. My heart was stirred over the needs of the world and I made an offering commitment of \$50 with a promise that I would double that every year while in college. So, the next year I pledged \$100 – two weeks of wages back then. Then \$200, then I got married. When I told Janet of my pledge, she didn't flinch – she had also come from an extravagant, giving family. So, in the first year of our marriage we pledged and paid \$400 in offerings for missions. What I did not know when I was a freshman is that it would take me five years to finish school. So, there we were at the fifth missions conference. God has supplied all our needs, but \$800 was a lot. Janet's teacher's contract was \$4,200 for the year. We prayed and both believed God asked us to pledge \$900. Where would it come from? I sought a summer job and would you believe it! God gave me a job that included housing, meals and transportation. We had no expenses. And, I earned exactly \$900 which we used to pay the pledge. God provided the tithe and the offering.

I would not take a million dollars in exchange for the blessing, the increased faith and the deep satisfaction received through that little act of giving.

God's approach to receiving is through giving. Are you in trouble, discouraged, up against a wall? Ask God what you should give – who you should visit – how you can help.

22. The fifth principle of paying the vision is that God's wealth is our benchmark in giving.

There is calculated giving and there is FAITH giving. Every once in a while, I'll be in a Sunday School class where someone will raise the question, "Should we tithe on the gross or the net of our income?" The question itself betrays the problem. And the problem for most in the area of giving is that we calculate. We ask, what can we afford? We look at the balance in our own accounts. God is rarely if ever consulted. So, there is little or no joy in giving. Those who give this way do it out of duty or pressure or from a deadly legalism – "God told me I have to tithe, so here it is."

I've even heard pastors call upon their people to "give 'til it hurts." Who wants to do that? For some, \$5.00 in an offering plate hurts. There are thousands of Christians who have a bunch of money in the bank and lots of sorrow in the soul.

I've been in Africa where women have to walk several hours a day to get water for the family, where rice and beans are the daily fare and where two sets of clothing is a luxury. And I've seen these same servants of God spend ½ hour parading and singing and dancing for joy as they dropped large portions of their meager income into the offering plates.

Little calculation there. Here is the premise. Since God owns everything and loves to give, and since God has made us co-heirs of everything with Jesus Christ, all giving should be FAITH giving. In other words, we go to our Father in heaven and ask him – what would you like me to give?

You see, God knows the needs. And God has made us stewards to use his unlimited resources to meet the needs. The reason needs go unmet is because of poor stewardship. And poor stewardship is a result of poor faith.

Most Free Methodists do not even believe God enough to obey him with the tithe. Even fewer have found the rich joy of faith giving.

I love being around churches and Christians who live and give by faith.

When the WAVE was started, I had particular concern for one church – Fredonia, New York. They had grown fast and their obligations to the conference lagged behind their growth. They always paid their bills, but their apportionment was lower than it should be. They would be handed a \$4,000 increase when the WAVE started. In addition to that, they were just hiring another staff person. Result? They never missed a beat, paying every month. Then last year, they sent us an additional \$1,000, thanking us for being there in earlier days of difficulty. Now, this growing church is trying to raise a whole lot of money for another addition to their building. And right in the middle of their financial campaign, the United Methodist church down the road ran into a big problem. They were building a new building and halfway through, the contractor filed for bankruptcy – the project halted. What did the Fredonia Free Methodist Church do? They sent their pastor over to the United Methodist Church with a prayer and a check for \$3,000.

That's faith giving. Love giving. Will God honor that? Of course. Proverbs 19:17 says that when you give to the poor or needy, you are loaning to God. Do you think God will repay loans

made to him? No doubt and he will give a hearty interest rate as well.

How much love and faith and kindness and money is in your Father's account? How much does he say you can draw?

Faith giving is based on sound reasoning and it is never dull.

- God knows the need.
- God knows how much of the need he wants to make available through me.
- God will let me know if I ask him.
- When I give from His resources instead of mine, I am not limited by the amount of my resources.
- This way of giving requires the presence and power of God.
- This way of giving glorifies God and builds up the believer.

One of the best things a pastor can do for his/her people is to model and teach Faith Giving. Why? Because it brings about profound joys. We've often been sidelined by non-givers who accuse the church of speaking only of money. While giving goes beyond money, it is money that often separates people from God. Like the rich young ruler, they depart with sorrow because God touched them at the point of unholy dependence.

Teaching stewardship of all of life is one of the key responsibilities we have.

## **VI. The sixth principle is that "God's way of giving produces wonderful results."**

No where does the Bible give a command to give without a promise of return. This is why giving is so much fun. "Give," said Jesus, "and it will be given to you."

Paul told the Corinthians in 9:6 of his second letter – "Remember this. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."

Proverbs 3:9-10 says, "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."

We cannot outgive God. And God wants you and me to be in on his giving program. As we consult with him, asking what we should give, then step out in faith and give – out of His account – He will trust us to use us in even greater ways.

The reason we give is so that we will receive from God's bounty, so that we can give more. The cycle simply increases as our faith gets stronger and stronger. And, since our heart goes where our treasurer is, we will become more and more enthused about and committed to the mission of the church across the world.

I saw this amazing reality in my parents. My father was a Free Methodist pastor. He retired in

1968 at age 65. The most money he had ever been paid by the church was \$65.00 per week. His first Social Security check was the largest pay check he had ever received. There was no Free Methodist pension back then.

You see, even forty years ago, the church did not pay its pastors properly. Often the church has disregarded the Scriptures which declare that the one who teaches you is worthy of a double portion. Some unbelieving church members have thought it their responsibility to keep the pastor poor so that he/she could more thoroughly teach us how to live by faith.

Well, the church was wrong, but my parents taught faith giving anyway. And while they gave, God supplied. And what God supplied went way beyond what they gave. By the time they retired, Mom and Dad were putting 40% of their income into the work of the Lord. They understood that it was from His account, not theirs that giving abounds.

Were there wonderful results?

- Their five children finished college without debt.
- They provided down payment on the first home for four of their children, and would have for me had I needed it.
- Dad took my brother Vernon and me to the Holy Land and paid the whole venture.
- In 1975, Mom and Dad gathered the entire family, including grandchildren, and paid much of our way across to Wyoming (2,000 miles) for a big family reunion.
- They went to the Dominican Republic on an extended visa missionary assignment and paid their own way.
- They went several times to Africa on visa mission assignments for as long as six months and paid their own way.
- Since they did not believe in burdening anyone with their care in later years, they had put aside money in case of needed nursing home care. When Mom went into the nursing home, there was about \$168,000 available for her care from their savings. When she died, each of us five children received about \$8,000 from what was left over.

And that's not all. Because of my father's stewardship of life, he was sometimes asked by neighbors and friends to be the executor of their estates. When he did this, he always encouraged them – whether they were Christians or not – to contribute portions of their estates to world missions. Those estates gave over \$250,000 to missions – more than all the money my parents made in their entire lifetimes.

This stewardship has impacted our lives deeply and I am eternally grateful. The example we have been given continues to challenge Janet and me as we seek the Lord in our giving to His work and to the needy. God has and is taking us from faith to faith in this joy of giving. We have tested the Lord in this, and are continually astounded at the ways he pours out blessings. It is impossible to outgive God.

One day, I sat down with a pastor who was hurting financially. I found that the church was nowhere near what it should be doing for this giving and loving man of God. I met with their finance committee. They showed me their books. They had very little balance. The budget was barely being met as the church lived from week to week.

I asked them what they thought their pastor was worth. “If you could pay him what you’d really like to pay him, what would it be?” “Well,” they said, “we could never pay that much.” “How much?” I asked. When they gave the figure, it was several thousand dollars a year more than they were currently paying. So I asked, “What if you simply do what’s right and trust God to supply?” They swallowed hard and, bless their hearts, took the challenge.

Two years later that same church had over \$60,000 in the bank and has been through two major building programs since.

God’s way of giving produces wonderful results.

## **VII. Finally, the seventh principle: God loves a cheerful giver.**

The word for cheerful is **hilaros** from which we get **hilarious**.

Who gets the most out of life? Those who are always giving – finding ways to love. Finding ways to say thank you. Finding ways to serve. Finding ways to dig deeper and go further and trust more fully. The really joyous and happy people are the ones who ask God for His direction, then simply follow by faith. Their lives are filled with miracles and with little surprises.

Bishop Krober is a man who loves to give and help and serve. Every time I’m around him, I see this joyous sparkle in his service.

A few weeks ago, I was at Indianapolis. At noon time, instead of going to lunch, I went to the breakroom to buy a Snickers bar from the machine (chocolate heals everything). I got change for \$1.00, put 50¢ in the machine and looked at the number for Snickers bars. It was #22. So, without thinking or looking very thoroughly, I pushed #2 twice. Out came a granola bar – #2 selection.

I still had 50¢, so I inserted the two quarters. This time I hit #22. Out came a bag of animal crackers. The numbers were above the product – I thought they were below it. In disgust with myself, I went back to my desk to have animal crackers and a granola bar for my lunch.

Bishop Krober knew nothing of any of this. But there on my desk with a stick-it note from him was – of all things – a Snickers bar.

God is good. He has a phenomenal sense of humor. He loves to surprise his children. He gives with hilarity, and he loves it when we do the same.

Don’t you want to get in on all the fun?

- God owns and operates it all.
- God’s nature is to give it away.
- God’s children are joint-heirs with Jesus of everything, everywhere.

## **Pay the Vision cont.**

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- God's plan for us to receive is through us giving.
- God's wealth – not ours – is the benchmark for giving.
- God's way of giving produces great results.
- God loves a cheerful giver.

I'm praying that the Free Methodist Church will get back on the road we left and that we will take the lead in giving. Why? Not so we can brag about being first, but so that we will have more to give to see the advance of the Kingdom of God.

Without funds the vision perishes.

So, we will say the vision, pray the vision, and as God is our source, we will pay the vision.

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