

**“Blessed are those who give”  
Acts 20:35**

### **Introduction**

1. **Most Bibles are black and white.** Black ink on white paper. But, there are Red Letter Bibles—maybe you have seen one or own one. Red Letter Bibles are mostly black on white except for direct quotes from Jesus which are printed in red. If you flip through a Red Letter Bible almost all the red ink is in the four New Testament Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. When you turn the page into Acts it’s back to black—except for one line on one page. Acts 20:35 is in red. **Acts 20:35 is a quote from Jesus that appears nowhere else in the Bible.** There were ten thousand other quotes from Jesus that were left out of the New Testament but this one somehow squeezed in. It must be really important. It’s a quote about those who are blessed; it’s about those who are happy.
  
2. **Let’s all take a quick anonymous quiz:**
  - ① On a scale of 1-10, how happy are you?
  - ② On a scale of 1-10, how blessed are you?
  - ③ On a scale of 1-10, how generous are you? (Like, what percentage of your money and time do you give away?)

**Hold those numbers while we find out what Jesus said.**
  
3. **St. Paul had been a missionary and pastor to the people of Ephesus and now it was time for him to say goodbye.** He predicted that he would never see them again. The Ephesian church leaders met him at the Mediterranean seaport of Miletus and Paul tearfully gave his farewell speech.
 

**Acts 20:30-38**

*“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

*When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.*
  
4. **Paul taught some revolutionary ideas.** He said that he was a really hard worker (he was a tentmaker by profession). While that was his profession and the way he made money he insisted that as a Christian *“by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said....”* With Jesus in mind Paul worked so he could give to the weak. **Apparently he didn’t buy into Darwin’s belief in the survival of the fittest.** There were people then as there are now who believe that the strong and rich are those who work hardest and are the fittest. The rest suffer because they are just plain weak. Paul had a Christian view that called him to work hard to help the weak.

## Jesus’ famous quote

**1. Jesus’ famous quote taught that “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”**

If that’s true, God must be very happy because “*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16).

**2. Jesus certainly knew what he was talking about because he was himself a great giver.** Listen to the way St. Paul described Jesus and told us to be like him.

**Philippians 2:1-11**

*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

*Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.*

*And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

**3. Out of personal experience, Jesus tells us that it is happier to give than to receive.** And, he wants us to experience the joy and blessing of giving.

## Giving in America

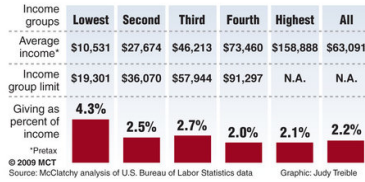
**1. There are so many evidences of biblical teaching woven into the history and culture of the United States of America.** One of those is generosity.

**2. Americans volunteer more hours each year and give more money each year than the people of any major industrialized nation.** While foreign aid from our government is comparatively small, our individual generosity is at the top of the list. And, the leaders of this generosity are church-going Christians. Surveys indicate that Bible-believing Christians who regularly attend church are the most generous of all—and that’s not just church generosity but generosity to secular charities, education, the arts and others. You also volunteer at the top of the list.<sup>1</sup>

- But, there is a surprising twist to our American generosity—the poor are the most charitable.** The highest percentage financial generosity comes from those with the lowest income. As Christians you would think it would be the other way around, that more money means more generosity. Perhaps those who are poor better understand Jesus’ teaching that *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

**Poor are the most charitable**

*Those in the lowest U.S. income group give the largest percentage of their incomes to charity. Figures for 2007:*



## Bible teaching

The Bible has a lot to say about Christian giving. Let’s take a quick overview.

### 1. Purposeful

St. Paul invited the Christians in Corinth to give money for the poor people in Jerusalem. He wrote them a letter giving them some guidelines on how to be generous.

**2 Corinthians 9:6-8**

*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

**Give what you have decided in your heart.** In other words, our generosity should be purposeful and planned more than impulsive and random. Think and pray it through.

### 2. Cheerful

Christian generosity should always be fun. Jesus said it is *happier* to give than to receive. When Paul tells them that *“God loves a cheerful giver”* he uses the Greek word *hilaron* from which we get our English word “hilarious.”

**I picture a giggle with all generosity.**

The restaurant server asks what you are laughing about and you answer, “The tip I just left for you.” The server thinks it’s a cruel joke and then discovers it’s the biggest tip of the day. The server loves it. God loves a cheerful giver. You are blessed and happy.

Why is that girl smiling while mowing the lawn on a hot summer day? Because it’s her neighbor’s lawn and she’s a cheerful mower.

Who is that driver giggling while letting you cut into the line of cars? Oh, yeah, that’s a generous hilarious Christian.

### 3. Proportionate

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he told them about the generosity of the much poorer Macedonian Christians.

**2 Corinthians 8:1-4**

*And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.*

**“They gave as much as they were able”**—it was proportionate not fixed. The less people had the less they gave. The more they had the more they gave. That’s what happy Christians do—their percentage goes up when their money goes up.

#### 4. Compassionate

These New Testament Christians were compassionate and generous to the poor. That’s where the money was going. This was following the Old Testament law and traditions.

It was the law in the Old Testament that richer people had to leave part of their harvest for poor people to glean. *“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God”* (Leviticus 19:9-10).

John Chrysostom (c. 349–407) was an early Church Father, archbishop and one of the greatest Christian preachers in history. He praised the compassion of generous Christians: “The almsgiver is a harbour for those in necessity: a harbour receives all who have encountered shipwreck, and frees them from danger; whether they are bad or good...it escorts them into his own shelter. So you likewise, when you see on earth the man who has encountered the shipwreck of poverty, do not judge him, do not seek an account for his life, but free him from his misfortune.”<sup>2</sup>

## Stories

1. **Curtis Jackson** has been a homeless Chicago panhandler since 2004. Most passersby give him nothing but one woman, a single mom who worked at a bank, always gave him a few dollars and stopped to talk to him.

According to Fox News she lost her job, couldn’t pay her mortgage and lost her home. A social worker gave her enough cash to stay a couple of nights in a hotel. When Curtis Jackson found out he came to the hotel and paid her bill with his panhandling money. He comes every night. Since last December he has given \$9000 to her and her son.<sup>3</sup>

**Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”**

2. **Matt Jones** from Michigan decided to offer one of his kidneys, just because he figured someone would need it. “I thought that if I could help one person live a decent life that would be great. It’s turned out to be a lot more than that,” Jones said. Matt Jones’ kidney went to Barbara Bunnell. Her husband decided to donate one of his kidney’s to Angela Heckman whom he hardly knew. To keep this going, Angela’s mother decided to donate one of her kidneys to someone else.<sup>4</sup>

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3. **Christine Bouwkamp and Kyle Kramer** were married in Spring, 2007. Instead of the usual wedding reception they used the money to buy food for hungry people. They said they "wanted to begin their marriage with an act of service to Christ." After their wedding at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Muskegon, Michigan they put on aprons marked "Bride" and "Groom" and led their guests to the parking lot where they served 100 neighborhood families with 5000 pounds of food.  
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4. **The Bible says that we should "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. And, love your neighbor as yourself."** A legal expert once asked Jesus "Who is my neighbor? Jesus answered with a story.

**Luke 10:30-35**

*"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and 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, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'"*

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## **Conclusion**

**When you leave today's service you will be given a coin to keep in your pocket or purse or on your desk or dresser.** It was specially minted for us today with the words of Jesus, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

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<sup>1</sup> Buster G. Smith & Rodney Stark, "Religious Attendance Relates to Generosity Worldwide," Gallup.com, September 4, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Miller, "Early Church Leaders on Giving to the Poor," *PreachingToday.com*, posted October 25, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Hawkins, "Homeless Man Curtis Jackson Gives Thousands To Single Mom Who Helped Him," *gimundo.com*, posted May 11, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> John Faherty, "Paying it forward proves lifesaver," *USA TODAY*, July 24, 2007.