

## ***Here--let me!***

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose! I trust that you've had a great time catching up within your small group...and have made this time an important part of your life. We need it, you know. We'll all go through times when we come to grips with the fact that we just can't face life alone! The Ponca Indian tribes realizes that, and they have an interesting tradition. When a loved one dies, the family and friends meet to share with one another. They share not in the form of words, but in the form of **giving**. Now, you may wonder, "Why that is so unusual??"...until you hear **who** does the sharing.

You see, **the family** is the one to give thousands of dollars of gifts to members of the tribe and friends. If people need food, the bereaved family gives them food. If someone needs household supplies, they'll receive an overflowing basket. Even personal items from the deceased, like blankets and shawls, are selflessly given to comfort others.

Think of it! Instead of friends bringing casseroles and words of comfort, the family who has experienced the loss is the one doing it! Even one year later, the family and friends get together again and the "giveaway" continues.

When asked about this custom, a granddaughter of a chief simply said, "We believe you can accept death better by giving rather than getting."

Instead of giving until it hurt, this custom emphasized that one should give until it heals.



## **Fellowship**

1. When have you felt blessed while doing something for someone else?
2. Who is the most giving person you know?



## **Discipleship**

The most giving person I know has to be an elderly mother of a pastor friend of mine. This lovely widow has spent her life "doing" for others. In fact, when recently asked how she's dealt with each disappointment that life has sent her way, she said that every

time she starts to feel down and depressed, she tells herself that she must stop this instant and go do something *for someone else!* Her key to happiness and joy was in getting her eyes *off* of herself and *her* problems and focusing on *others* and *their* needs.

Isn't it interesting, that loving others like Christ loved us, thereby fulfilling our God-given purpose of "fellowship", blesses *our* lives as much as those to whom we give?

Turn with me to our first text for today found in Leviticus 19:9-10 and let's read it together. "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."

Now let's go to the New Testament, Matthew 5, verses 38 through 48. "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks, you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

I don't know about you, but these passages are tough for me! First of all, I'm a perfectionist. I imagine that if I were reaping a field, I'd have a hard time leaving some fruit or vegetables behind even if it was for a good cause. But the second passage about selflessly giving to anyone who asks of me, I find *humanly* impossible. It's so much easier to give if I think the recipient *deserves* my gift! Yet who of us *deserves* the generosity of God? The Bible says that it's His kindness that leads us to repentance; no one deserves the grace He's so richly poured out. This glimpse of His generosity and care for us is our model in giving to others. In fact, He values each of His creations so much, that when *we* are generous and care for each other, He promises rewards!

Demographer and pollster George Barna did a survey a number of years ago and discovered that generosity is something that over 93% of all Christians believe in and ascribe to. Yet, when he went on to *refine* the question by asking if they set limits to their giving, keeping an eye on who might be benefiting unscrupulously or frivolously, the vast majority of Christians polled chose this latter statement as most indicative of how they view their generosity. If you are like most Christians, it simply makes sense to limit the scope of our generosity. To most of us, this just seems like good stewardship.

Yet God instructed His children not only to be generous but to demonstrate that

generosity in a way that was selfless and non-determining. At least in this instance, He forbid His people from selecting targets for their generosity or limiting its scope. Simply, generosity is something that should flow freely and without restrictions from a loving heart, filled with gratitude to a gracious God whose supply of mercy and grace are never-ending. So, when the Israelites planted a field, they planted not only with themselves in mind but also the weary traveler that might be journeying along that same field at harvest time. It may be their neighbor, but more likely it would be a stranger. They were mere caretakers of what was Gods.

Angus McGillivray was a Scottish prisoner in a World War II Japanese prison camp. This camp had become an ugly situation. An “every man for himself” mentality had set in. Allies would steal from each other and needed to sleep on their packs to keep them from being stolen. Survival was everything, and “the law of the jungle” prevailed.

But the Scottish soldiers were of a different sort; they took their buddy system very seriously. Their buddy was called their “mucker”, and they believed that is was literally up to each of them to make sure their “mucker” survived. Angus’s mucker, though, was dying, and everyone had given up on him; everyone, of course, but Angus. He had made up his mind that his friend would *not* die.

Someone had stolen his mucker’s blanket. So Angus gave him his own, telling him that he had “just come across an extra one.” Likewise, every mealtime, Angus would get his rations and take them to his friend, stand over him, forcing him to eat, again stating that he was able to get “extra food.” Angus was going to do anything and everything to see that his buddy got what he needed to recover.

But as Angus’s mucker began to recover, Angus himself collapsed and died. The doctors discovered that his death by starvation was complicated by exhaustion. He had been giving of his own food and shelter. He held nothing back, not even his very life.

The ramifications of his acts of love and unselfishness had a startling impact on the compound. John 15:12 says, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” No one in the camp had ever seen that kind love! As word circulated of the reason for Angus’ death, the feel of the camp began to change. Suddenly, men began to focus on their mates, their friends, and humanity-- of living *beyond* survival, of giving oneself away. They began to pool their talents—one was a violinmaker, another an orchestra leader, a cabinetmaker...even a professor. Soon the camp had an orchestra full of homemade instruments and a church called “The Church Without Walls”. This church was so powerful, so compelling, that even the Japanese guards attended. The men began a university, a hospital, and a library system. The place was transformed; love was revived, and all because one man named Angus took literally God’s principles of giving without limits.

Amy Carmichael said, “One can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving.”

Fred Craddock summed it up like this: We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking \$1,000 and laying it on the table. "Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all."

But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Maybe it's when we listen to the neighbor kid's troubles instead of saying, "I'm too busy." Or we give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home instead of spending time with our friends. Usually giving our life to Christ doesn't *appear* glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to faithfully and selflessly live the Christian life over the long haul.

An elderly man suddenly appeared at the back door of a house we were renting. Opening the door a few cautious inches, we saw that his eyes were glassy and his unshaven face glistened with sweat. He clutched a wicker basket which held a few unappealing vegetables. He bid us a good morning and offered to sell us produce. We were uneasy enough to make a quick purchase...both to alleviate our pity and our fear.

To our chagrin, he returned the next week, introducing himself as Ricardo, the man who lived in the shack down the road. As our fears subsided, we got close enough to realize that it wasn't alcohol, but cataracts, which marbled his eyes. On subsequent visits, he would shuffle in, wearing two mismatched right shoes, and pull out a harmonica. With glazed eyes set on a future glory, he'd puff out old hymns between conversations about vegetables and religion.

On one visit, he exclaimed, "The Lord is so good! I came out of my shack this morning and found a bag full of shoes and clothes...right on my doorstep!"

"That's wonderful, Ricardo," we said. "We're so happy for you!"

"You know what's even more wonderful?" he asked. "Just yesterday I met a family who could use them!"

Now, that's a God-sized generosity! Yet in order for us to have that kind of love and spirit of giving, we must first give ourselves to God. Only then, through His power, can our lives reflect our generous God, Who held nothing back.

3. Read Matthew 6:1-4. What principles for giving do you see here?

Which do you find more difficult: the act of generous giving or not taking pride in your giving?

4. Re-read Matthew 5:38-48. List some possible scenarios from everyday life regarding verses 38-42. How would God have you respond?

5. Read Luke 6:27-36. What lesson and encouragement regarding God's kindness can we glean from verses 35-36?

How does obedience to verse 30 challenge you? Free you?

6. Read Matthew 10:8 and John 15:1-17. Why must we first receive God's gift of love to us?

Talk about the word "remain" from John 15:4. If you are to "remain" with the Vine, how will your life need to change this week? What things might you have to give up for a closer connection to God?



**Ministry**



**Evangelism**

7. Discuss the Amy Carmichael quote: "One can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving." Who do you know who needs to see God's generosity through ***you*** this week?

8. What resources has God put at your disposal that you sense Him wanting you to share?



**Worship**

9. Read together John 14:15-27. End with a time of ***prayer*** for each other, those you will endeavor to love this week, and ***praise*** to God Who gives His Holy Spirit as our Guide!