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IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE

Almost everyone has heard this statement, but few people actually know who originally said it and where it can be found. It might come as a surprise to you to learn that this statement was made by Jesus. But it is found in a very unusual place. Whenever you think of the statements of Jesus, you probably immediately think of the Gospels and possibly His few comments in the book of Revelation. But this statement is actually found in the book of Acts. Paul includes this statement of Jesus in his farewell to the elders at the church of Ephesus after his three year ministry with them.

What is particularly interesting about this is that Paul tells the elders to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said (Acts 20:35, NASB), suggesting that these words must have been widely known among believers even though they are not recorded in any of the Gospels. The Apostle John does tell us in the last verse of his Gospel, Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (John 21:25, NIV). Needless to say, there is much more that Jesus said and did than is recorded in the Bible.

With that as a background, let's consider the verse itself. This verse is an example of the idea of human contradictions. Jesus was a master of these. He would tell people that if they wanted to be first, they would have to be last. If they wanted to live, they would have to die. If they wanted to be rich, they would have to become poor. This is just another in the list. This contradiction is never more obvious than at the Christmas season when giving and receiving reaches its annual apex.

Ask a small child whether it is more fun (blessed) to get presents at Christmas or to give presents at Christmas and the answer will always be the same. In fact, they may even look at you with some degree of disbelief that you would even be asking such a ridiculous question. What keeps young children up at night with excitement is what they are going to get the next morning, not what they are going to give. There is nothing wrong with a child who is almost delirious with excitement about what he will receive – it is very natural. And that is exactly my point. It is very natural. Jesus is the master of calling us to the unnatural, like loving your enemies and forgiving those who hurt you.

Everything about being a follower of Jesus is unnatural or counter-intuitive. In fact, it is a safe rule to follow that in whatever way you are naturally inclined to respond to a situation, respond just the opposite and you will likely be responding the right way. You see, the spiritual dichotomy is between what is natural versus what

is supernatural, which is how we have been re-born to live. The natural man will say, "It is more blessed to receive than to give." The supernatural man will say, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

If we were completely honest with ourselves, we would admit that it is a blessing to both receive and give. Notice, Jesus did say "it is MORE blessed to give than to receive." But when the blessing of receiving suppresses our giving, life becomes warped, myopic and egocentric.

The story of Ebenezer Scrooge is a classic example of the natural man turned into the supernatural man. Ebenezer's life was consumed with getting and accumulating, and giving was an entirely foreign notion to him. In fact, he found the idea abhorrent to such an extent that when he was asked to support the poor so they would not starve to death, he heartlessly declared, "Let them die and decrease the surplus population."

Scrooge would squeeze every penny out of every business deal he could, continuing to pile up greater and greater wealth. Yet, his receiving of more and more wealth failed to give him what he was looking for. In fact, the more he acquired, the more miserable he became. Something was terribly wrong with this miserable, lonely old man. The deceitfulness of believing that receiving was the greatest joy had failed him completely. He was not happy. He had no friends. He had no joy.

But then that one fateful Christmas Eve, Scrooge, forced to face himself for the first time, found himself broken and changed through three spirits who visited him. That one night brought an immediate transformation of his understanding of the purpose for all his accumulated wealth. He now saw it as a resource to be used for good, and for the first time in his life he gladly opened his hands to help others as quickly and generously as he could. And in all his giving he discovered the one truth that had completely eluded him all the years of his life – that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

This stingy, odious, crabby, hard-hearted old man was transformed into a generous, pleasant, kind, and caring gentleman who finally found everything that he was looking for in life – not in receiving and accumulating wealth for himself, but in giving that wealth in ways that would change people's lives and circumstances.

Sadly, King Solomon's life outcome was not as positive as Scrooge's. As one of the richest men who has ever lived on this planet, Solomon reflects back on his life and all his material accomplishments in Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 (NASB). Read it carefully.

> I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. I enlarged my works: I built houses <u>for myself</u>, I planted vineyards <u>for myself</u>; I made gardens and parks <u>for myself</u> and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water <u>for myself</u> from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.

> Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men – many concubines. Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. **Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.** (emphasis added)

I have always wondered if Solomon, rather than doing all this stuff as the Scriptures say, "for myself," had done these things for others, would he have come to the same pessimistic conclusion about his life and his work (*all was vanity and striving after the wind and there was no profit under the sun*)? I somehow think not. With all of Solomon's wisdom, there is one truth that he sadly missed entirely: *It is more blessed to give than to receive*. If you want to experience a new level of blessing and joy during the Christmas season, let me encourage you to follow Scrooge's example and not Solomon's in regard to your accumulated wealth.

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E. G. "Jay" Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University's Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.