

Series: The Joy of Giving

Title: Real Giving

Text: I Kings 17:7-24

Key Word: Ways

Proposition: Everyone will grow in their faith by giving to God in ways that require a greater dependency upon Him.

It seemed as if everybody was getting an answering machine. Some didn't like the idea and refused to buy one. One time a family went on a vacation and the father called home to talk with their teenage daughter who stayed behind to work. To his surprise he got an answering machine. At first he thought he'd dialed the wrong number. So he hung up and dialed again. When he got an answering machine again, he worried that he was losing his mind, forgetting his phone number after two weeks of vacation. He dialed a third time. This time his daughter answered.

She said, "Did you just call?" He said, "Yeah, but I got the wrong number."

She said, "No you didn't." She told her dad that she had just bought her mother an answering machine for her birthday.

This family has enjoyed the answering machine. But they laugh each time they think of the daughter's idea of giving. She gave what she wanted; an answering machine to get messages from her friends. Many have ideas around giving.

What's your understanding about giving? In your opinion, what constitutes a real gift? **What do you think real giving to God is?** What kind of giving pleases him and advances his work?

Elijah announced the coming of a severe drought. Upon its arrival people were destitute, screaming for food. Elijah has the audacity to ask this single mother to give

him food for several years. His challenging request gives her the opportunity to really give to God and to see God provide.

Real giving to God puts God first and trusts him to supply. Real giving develops our trust in God not our money. As we look at this story, I want to challenge us to evaluate your giving. Is it real? Or is it pretend? When folks really give, they always see God abundantly provide.

Elijah's story describes real giving. God was trying to get Ahaz's attention by sending Elijah to announce this drought. God directed Elijah to go into the wilderness where He would provide water from a brook to keep him alive. God also promised to send unclean ravens to provide his daily food.

Elijah obeyed God's voice and God supplied. God always blesses obedience. Elijah goes immediately and places himself in a place requiring a deep trust in God. God abundantly comes through.

Then the brook dries up. Elijah must have water. This time, God comes through with some even wilder instructions. Elijah willingly obeys again, for he knows God always supplies.

He leaves this area and goes across Israel to a dangerous Gentile area controlled by Ahaz's wicked army! You see God is more interested in Elijah's character than his comfort and security rooted in a place. God instructs Elijah to find one of the poorest people in the land, a widowed, single mother who's already

overstressed trying to feed her family. God likes to show us His power and grace through the weakest of these.

Since God has proven his faithfulness, Elijah immediately obeys. Real givers remember that God has provided before and He will provide again and again.

Ray constantly gave things away. He even gave away his car. He constantly put money into people's hands. Many noticed that every time he turned around, money was falling into his lap from the strangest places. Ray kept giving and giving and giving, and God kept pouring and pouring and pouring back into Ray's life. Ray knew God was worthy of His trust, and God knew that Ray was worthy of His trust. He knew that Ray would always pass His blessing forward. Faith sets fear aside.

In this story, real giving comes in steps. The first step toward real giving is to get to belief. The woman believed in the God of Israel long before she thought of giving her last meal to Elijah. In her first conversation with Elijah, she utters a vow in the name of Israel's God. She says, *"As surely as the Lord your God."* She lives adjacent to Israel, but she's not a Jew. Yet, she believes that Israel's God is real, true, holy and present. She makes a declaration under his holy, watchful eye. In other words, she demonstrates a belief in God. She knows that Elijah is intimately connected with God.

Before God commanded this woman to give, God had won her heart. She possessed a shallow faith in her neighbor's God. Before real giving happens, God woos our heart.

When Elijah arrives, he immediately sees this woman alone gathering sticks. *Is this the woman God sent me to?* **The second step is to test her by asking for a smaller need first:** Elijah asks, *"How about a drink?"*

The drought made water scarce. Even though she had more water than her neighbors, this woman had little food. So, Elijah begins with a lesser need. Instead of ignoring him, this Gentile woman immediately goes off with a shallow faith in her neighbor's God to get him a drink of water.

The third step of her journey toward real giving creates an opportunity for deeper faith. When she's on her way to get the water Elijah says, *"Oh, by the way, could I have some bread, too?"* He asks for something greater, more demanding.

Her heels dig in and the dust flies. She objects to this challenging request. She didn't object about a drink of water, but now she resistant to a greater sacrifice requiring greater faith. She says to him, *"Your God knows, he's watching me. I don't have much. In fact, I'm down to just a handful of barley flour, and a little oil. In fact, I've got just enough for one more meal, and then we're going to cash it in. We're done; we'll die."* She's afraid that this courageous gift is more than what she can do. Elijah's response reveals the nature of real giving. Real giving moves beyond fear, beyond security in ones possessions and gives to God anyway trusting God to supply. He says to her, *"Don't be afraid. Go and do what you were planning to do. Go and bake some bread, but bring some to me first. And then go make some for your family."*

He encourages, even provokes her toward real giving by reminding her of God's promise. *"Your flour will not run out. Your oil will never run out the whole time of this drought. Others will struggle, but God will take care of you."*

She faced a crisis of faith. She can trust what she sees, hoard it, make a final meal for her family, then die. Or she can do the courageous thing of **trusting what she can't see yet**, believing the promise of God to provide in a miraculously abundant way.

Friends, if we're going to become real givers, it's going to take a series of steps. We must first give our hearts to God. We must give to him in smaller ways so that we'll learn that God provides for those who give to him first; who give with greater, deeper faith, trusting God where they cannot see!

Such giving unleashes God miraculous ways. When we exercise such faith-filled giving we too will experience God's amazing provision. Let's **look at the results of real giving: First, we see that God provides for the recipient. Elijah had daily food.** One day at a time, God provides. The wilderness and the gentile area was not a safe place for him to be. But if he's going to hang in there, calling people to change their ways, he's got to eat. So for twelve to eighteen months, God takes care of his daily needs through an impoverished, single mother. God is good, all the time.

Second, we see that God provides for the giver. God exceedingly provides the woman and her son's daily needs. In ancient times every widow was poor by

definition. A widow had no provider, no protector. This woman and her son were near death. Yet, she gave what she had. Every day for twelve to eighteen months her bread supply triples. She has enough for Elijah, enough for the family, enough for the next day to start over again. God is good, all the time.

Friends, God's power is unleashed not by her hoarding of what she had, but by investing it, by giving it away. She gave in response to Elijah's challenge, and God provided in abundant miraculous ways.

I often think of this when I walk around this building on the corner of Third and Main. Since the mid-1800's, hundreds of families gave millions of dollars to pay for most of this building. Since the birth of this fellowship, thousands of people have been touched by God's power in this place. Thousands have been touched by God because thousands courageously gave. That's amazing to me. It's beautiful. We can not forget college students in Athens, the Tanzanian orphans, Mexican children, and flood victims. We remember those in North Dayton and the poor in the Miami Valley, All have experienced God's goodness because this church has given courageously given. Nameless souls praise God because of your love, your sacrifice and your faith-filled giving. Our courageous faith-filled giving unleashes the miracle provision of God. God is good, all the time.

Now I'm confident that, because of the miracle of the flour and the oil multiplying, this woman had a faith in God that would last her whole life. This miracle testified to God's power throughout the whole region.

The chief end of real giving is trusting God on a deeper and deeper level. We become more confident in God's power when we exercise real giving. What is real giving? It's giving to God in a way that causes us to be more dependent on him. So when you're afraid, realize that the only way to have enough is to give courageously to God. Real giving comes in steps. Let's begin with giving in little ways. Then let's allow our growing faith to compel us to radically give. Take courage. Trust God to supply this week, then this month, and take a step toward becoming a real giver.