

# **Gifts And Cement Blocks (Giving) (Generosity)**

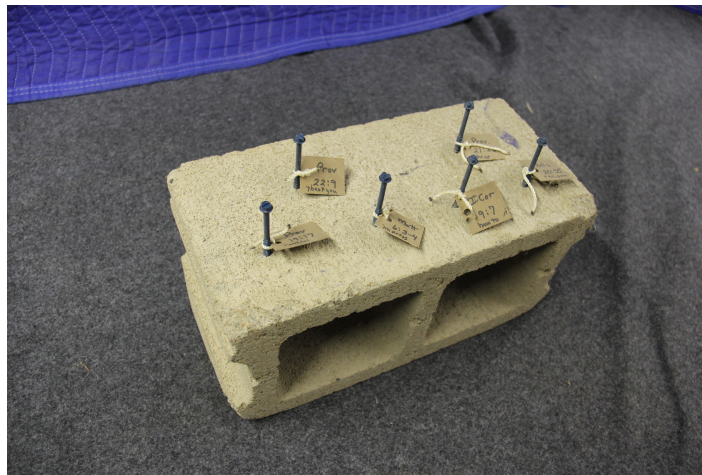
*Several Scriptures*

## **The Basic Bible Truth**

When we take on the name of Christ, we also inherit the responsibility to act like Christ. One of the character traits that we must learn to imitate is His tremendous generosity. An honest look through the history of our lives, reveals a God who is loving and kind, to be sure. But when we examine the things in our lives closely, we discover that He has given us much more than we deserve. Scripture says that we deserve death because of our sin, and yet, He has granted us a pardon and lavished His love upon us. What a gift that is!

## **The Object**

A Cement Block With 6 Concrete Anchors Drilled Into It  
String Line  
6 Candy Bars  
Scissors



When possible, I arrange the chairs in the room in a semi circle around the cement block. It becomes the center of attention, and has string line attached to each of the concrete anchors sticking out of it. Attached to each string is a candy bar, tied tightly so that it cannot be removed. I “give” the candy bars out to random individuals and invite them to take them home with them afterwards. Of course they cannot because of the strings attached. I follow up with the lesson, and as each point is discussed, I cut the string to one of the candy bars, finally, truly giving it to the recipient.

## **The Lesson**

We like to think that we are generous people. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. We give with ulterior motives, or begrudgingly, or maybe not quite as generously as we can and should. First of all, let’s establish this one thought. The requirement to give, commanded to the Christian, extends far beyond just money. God has actually little need of your finances. He owns everything, why would he

need a paltry few dollars from us? God wants us to be generous with our time and our talents as well. It is us that He desires to have access to.

Jesus talked about the heart and its view towards money often as He walked this earth. But He never pointed at money as being the problem. He assured those listening that what He was more concerned about was the heart felt attitude towards the physical things that we have been given by God. Anything in our lives that we hold closer to our chest than Him, is a sin that needs to be dealt with. We are called to be generous, and sometimes in our deviousness and self-deception, we give gifts with strings attached. Let's look at some of the more popular strings that keep our gifts from being true gifts.

1. I'll give to you, and you give to me—Acts 20:35. At Christmas we exchange gifts. Note the word "exchange". We give, knowing that we will also get. That must disappear from our catalog of acceptable behaviors and thoughts if we are to follow Jesus' example of giving. The Bible says that *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*. Jesus went to the cross and gave Himself for each of us. I was a math major in college. So I looked at this through the eyes of a math student for many years. This was my thought. Jesus suffered beating and punishment and the cross for the sins of everyone in the world, from roughly 6:00 in the morning, until He died around 3:00 that afternoon. That is approximately 9 hours. Let's assume, for the simplicity of mathematical equations, that 1 billion people will come to know Him during all of history. In my numbers inclined mind, I calculated that Jesus suffered .0000324 seconds for me! That just doesn't seem very impressive at all. But as I have grown to understand Scripture, I discovered that I cannot look at it that way. His gift of salvation is a personal gift to me. Had I been the only one in history who would repent and come to know Him, He would have gone to the cross for me and me alone. He hung on that cross and offered Himself for me personally. That changes everything! I must learn to give with that kind of heart.
2. I'll give something cheap—Proverbs 21:26. I have noticed in my life that I am much more willing to spend time, money, and effort on things that I enjoy and love. I am an analog audiophile. In the mid 70's, I was in college and on a self imposed strict budget. But I loved popular music. I found several guys in the dorms who belonged to record clubs. For those of you who are not old enough to have experienced them, let me explain how they worked. For a fairly reasonable monthly fee, you could have a record album or two of your choosing shipped to you on a monthly basis. They were yours to keep, of course, and the record company made their money by having you as a regular monthly customer. I convinced several of them that I would pay for a small part of their subscription if they would allow me to be the first to play through their new albums on arrival. I would only play it once and then they could have it back for eternity. I had a very, very nice transcription turn table, running through a Marantz amplifier system, feeding the signal through to a professional, separate, Dolby noise reduction unit, and finally recorded to an extremely high quality reel to reel tape recorder. I was able to "clean up" an album, removing slight background tape hiss from the master recording and also small clicks from microscopic particles in the record grooves. The end result was some absolutely fantastic audio recordings. The equipment to accomplish this feat was not cheap, but I was willing to pay the price. The quality, when played back and listened to through very nice, but quite heavy, headphones was almost like sitting in the recording studio. Reluctantly, I have come into the digital age, but occasionally, I will play the old reel to reels through the same old system that I have kept all of these years. They still sound as good today as they did back then. If God ranks at the top of our list, His work should come first in our life. That means our time and money and talent. We should be willing to spend whatever is necessary to accomplish what He has set before us. We do not have the option to "go cheap" with God. He didn't "go cheap" for us, rather He went with His everything—His Son.
3. I'll give because I have to—II Corinthians 9:7. I dislike Valentine's Day. Not because I do not love my wife, but because there is a tremendous amount of social pressure to do something on that specific day. Maybe it is my inner self-will wanting to make my own choices in life, but I dislike

being told that I have to do something on that particular day. And for me, that cheapens the gift somewhat. It doesn't come completely from the heart. Part of it comes from a sense of requirement. Our gifts are not acceptable coming from a heart of reluctance. We give because we want to give. It fulfills a desire in our heart to help others along the way. And remember, we are talking about much more than a simple financial commitment. Our time and talents are also at stake here. They are things that God has graciously given us to use. We are simply stewards of what we have been given.

4. I'll give to impress others—Matthew 6:3-4. One of the most amazing stories in the Bible is the moment that Jesus was watching people put their gifts into the treasury at the local synagogue. He watched a poor, old woman put in a very small amount, everything she had, without saying a word to anyone. First note that Jesus was watching. That is important to understand. But secondly, her gift did not impress anyone but God. He took notice. When we give, our gift is to Him, no matter how large or small, and Him alone. No one else needs to know about what we have done.
5. I'll give expecting a big "thank you"—Proverb 22:9. I watched my father work in the farm machinery industry for 45 years. His job involved designing and building prototypes of new and exotic ideas for farm machines. He was working on a top secret round bailer project one year. The machine alone was insured for over one million dollars. At the end of his career, his retirement party was a big bash, with a presentation of documents and plaques reflecting the hundreds of patents with his name on them. He simply set those gifts aside. His joy and satisfaction in life came from actually doing a job that he thoroughly enjoyed. Our giving should not be with an attitude that someday someone will see what I am doing and say, "thank you". Chances are very good, if you are doing things God's way, He is the only one who will notice. And His "thank you" is better than anything that this earth can supply.
6. I'll give, but I want to control it all—Proverb 19:17. When we give, we need to "let loose and let God." Our inclination is to want to oversee our gift. It is wise to be careful in our giving and expect an organization to use the money or time wisely, but we need to be able to give and turn around and walk away, confident that God will handle things better than we ever could expect to. Many years ago, I had the privilege of building a pulpit and communion table for a church. It was a gift from the heart. Several years later I found that their new pastor did not like to stand behind a pulpit of any kind and so it was pushed off to the side, and as far as I know, it is still in storage there. I will admit, there was a bit of disappointment in my heart when I discovered the turn of events. All my hard work and generosity gone to waste, or so it seemed. I had to remind myself over and over that what happened to the gift afterwards was not my concern. I have found in my own life that I personally struggle with this one often.

We are to cheerfully give of ourselves and our time and our money. Let's make sure we don't have any strings attached to those gifts.