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# TRUST TO LIVE

## Giving Connects Us with God

*Trust in the LORD and do good;  
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*

—Ps. 37:3

**I**n 1971 Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City took a chance with a small book titled *The Cycle of Victorious Living*. More than 100,000 copies later, it is a classic by any definition.

I (Stan) was privileged to hear its author, Earl Lee, speak on the subject of his book the year it was published. After listening to him, I modified his “cycle of victorious living” to the “cycle of victorious *giving*,” with a faith promise pledge during our annual missions conference. I felt impressed by God to give \$100 as a pledge of faith. And at that time it certainly was a *faith* pledge. College expenses had put a colossal crimp on my finances. I paid the pledge promptly, but it took the last of my cash. After the offering, I was broke. Good old-fashioned worry weighed heavily on my mind.

Soon after, while I was working part-time as a barber at the North Court Barber Shop in Circleville, Ohio, my boss said he wanted to talk to me.

More worry.

“Stan,” he began, “all the other barbers in this shop have a chance to get more tips and profits from the sale of hair prod-

ucts than you. But you're doing a great job! Here's a bonus of \$100—just don't tell the others."

If it weren't for two things, I would have danced around the shop and hugged my boss's neck. First, back then students at the college I attended weren't allowed to dance. Second, pedestrians passing by the big plate glass storefront of the shop on their way to Risch's soda fountain probably wouldn't understand why I was hugging my boss.

God taught me something that day. I discovered that I could never beat Him in a giving competition. God honors obedience. And He loves it when we learn to trust.

Earl and Hazel Lee wrote,

If faith is nothing apart from its object, the same is true of trust, for they are closely akin in meaning. The recommendation from Scripture is to lean hard on the Lord. He made heaven and earth. He calms the storms and stills the waves. His is the earth "and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Ps. 24:1). He is the One on whom you lean—all your weight on all of Him! You feel lighter after casting your cares on the Lord. Once you find release through commitment and trust, leaning hard becomes another forward move in the cycle.<sup>1</sup>

## Living in the Cycle

When you first learn to trust God—to lean hard on His power, His presence, and His provisions—you've entered the *cycle*. You have begun the journey of faith; you've made the wonderful discovery that God will not fail to keep His word. I (Stan) will never forget kneeling in a college chapel service and raising my hands in full release of all the fears that had haunted me since the death of my dad. As I entered the "cycle of victorious living," peace swept over my soul.

The first words of the Bible are "In the beginning God." It's the same in the "cycle of victorious giving." It begins with God—with who God is, with what He has promised, with what

He has already provided. In essence, you've begun your journey on the sunny side of life. The positively positive! You've leaned against the resources of the God of the universe, whose supply is endless.

## The God of Abundance

Our friend Chuck Crow loves to tell the story of a company that sometimes puts on what they call "Lunch and Learn" seminars during the employees' lunchtime, dealing with a variety of physical and mental health issues. If the seminar lasts beyond the normal lunch hour, employees are supposed to get managerial approval to attend. He laughingly tells about a flyer that circulated not long ago that read, "Lunch and Learn Seminar: Who's Controlling Your Life? (Get your manager's permission before attending)."

No matter what the issue is in our lives, we must come to the same conclusion: God is our manager. He owns it all (Ps. 24:1), and that includes all our problems. He has immeasurable riches and lavishly gives to us from that abundance. Our material possessions are not ours after all. They belong to God. He simply lends them to us to meet our daily needs.

Granted, trusting God in that manner is contrary to human nature. Jesus warned us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1). Ever since the events in the Garden of Eden, we've had the tendency to do things our way. We appoint ourselves CEO of our own lives and live by the faulty premise that our *decisions* result in our *provisions*.

## We Can't Do Anything

So much of what God has promised can't be controlled by our efforts, including our salvation. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Often we act as if God's guarantees had a line in small print that nullifies His promises unless we do all the work. Salvation's work has already been done. The price

of redemption has already been paid. We live by *grace* through faith, not *grit*. Out of His abundance and love, God poured out His supply, giving us what we could not earn or buy.

Trusting God means believing what we cannot see. Heb. 11:1 states, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” He moves across the landscape of our lives, working miracles that we cannot envision or understand. The sun rises. The seasons evolve. Rain falls. Snow caps the mountaintop. Planets turn in their orbits. We don’t understand how it all works; we just enjoy the benefits. And we believe that the Creator is in control of it all.

If God takes care of that, He can be trusted to take care of the details of our lives as well. Thomas G. Long commented,

Ultimately, whether one serves God or wealth depends upon trust. The appeal to trust God is the goal of Jesus’ picture of the birds of the air, which are fed by God even though they neither fret nor plan, and the lilies of the field, gloriously and colorfully clothed even though they have never touched a needle and thread. If God takes care of the birds and the wild flowers, Jesus promises, then surely God will take care of us. So, not only are we freed from compulsive anxiety about vain luxuries, we do not even need to worry about the basics, about food or clothing, because our God knows we need all these things (Matt. 6:31-32) and will provide.”<sup>2</sup>

Trusting God is a reminder that He is CEO—and CFO (chief financial officer)—of our lives. Prov. 3:5-6 tells us, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” By committing the details of our lives to Him—including our finances—we acknowledge spiritually that He is a loving and trustworthy Heavenly Father.

## Knowing Our Source

Trusting God also verifies that He is the source of our supply. Deut. 10:14 states, “To the LORD your God belongs the heavens,

even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.” When you acknowledge that everything comes from Him, it puts the ball in His court. The pressure is still on—but the pressure is on God, not you. You simply do the daily tasks of life, diligently, faithfully, and skillfully. He’s in charge of the bottom line.

Moses didn’t worry about water levels. He simply trusted God to part the waters and get the Israelites through the Red Sea.

David didn’t worry about proportionate height or strength for his contest with the giant Goliath. He simply picked up a stone and left the driving to God.

Joseph didn’t worry about online courses on protocol or purity. He just depended on God’s wisdom to run Potiphar’s household—and to run *away* from Potiphar’s wife.

The woman who touched the hem of Christ’s garment wasn’t concerned with keeping the rules of etiquette. She pushed through the crowd and went directly to the source of her healing, the Ruler of life and death.

The apostle Peter didn’t worry about the laws of gravity. He simply got out of the boat and started walking on the water toward the Master. Peter knew he could trust Jesus in the midst of a storm.

Recently we saw a sign posted in a warehouse that should be permanently engraved in all of our hearts. It read,

Good morning. This is God.

I will be handling all of your problems today.

I don’t need your help.

So have a nice day.

Staying out of God’s way is the key to having a great day!

## **The Giver of Perfect Gifts**

God isn’t a “finders keepers” Father. He’s the giver of “every good and perfect gift” (James 1:17). God so loved the world that He gave! Every fiber of His holy being is filled with generous giving. From the fragrance of the rose to the soft sands of the beach, His only concern is to enhance the lives of His creation.

His greatest gift was His only Son. He gave His “only begotten Son” (John 3:16, κτν). Out of His love for us, God was willing to give the dearest and best of His possessions. “Only” is such a key word in this scriptural scenario. It reveals the height, depth, and width of God’s love. No sacrifice was too great to provide a source of forgiveness and hope for us. The link is absolute: He loved; He gave. And we reap the eternal benefits.

That same cycle of giving can be realized in our lives as well. God promises to *supply* in response to our *service*. “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33). There are several important principles to remember about His supply.

First: *We reap what we invest*. That is seen in all of life. In nature the harvest comes after the sowing. In football the touchdown comes after the run or the pass. In science the discovery comes after the experiment. The effort produces the effect.

It’s the same in the spiritual realm. The Bible says, “The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward” (Prov. 11:18).

A seasoned citizen from our church was answering phones on a television show I (Stan) was hosting when a young lady called to ask prayer for her desperate financial situation.

Everet got the call and began to counsel the young lady. “Do you tithe?” he asked.

“What’s that?” the lady responded.

The 86-year-old man of faith was able to explain to the financially troubled caller the principle of giving a tenth of one’s income back to the Lord in obedience to the Bible (Mal. 3:10).

“I started at a young age, and God has blessed me,” he told her. “You need to invest to expect.”

In God’s kingdom, our investments result in expectations. It’s a matter of faith. We invest, and then we believe God for the return. And you can be assured that no financial statement on earth will ever reflect a greater return on investment than what we invest in His kingdom. For sure, the returns

aren't always given in dollars. There are even more important returns than monetary returns. Peace. Love. Joy. Purpose. Family. Talents. The list of benefits is almost endless. But it all starts with our personal investment.

Second: *We reap in God's time*. The wisdom writer said, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven" (Eccles. 3:1). In the human realm, we're often on a predictable financial time clock. We live by quarterly or year-end reports. We circle April 15 on our calendars. We receive our paychecks on the 1st and the 15th or every Friday.

But God isn't necessarily on the same clock. He lives by "due time." 1 Pet. 5:6 says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in *due time*" (emphasis added). He isn't limited by earth's time or space. He looks over the walls of calendars and planners. He sees beyond the immediate to the long range. Throughout history, His prophecies and promises have been given in "due time"—right on schedule, *His* schedule. Gal. 4:4 shows us, "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law." The Messiah was born right on schedule—heaven's schedule—not a moment too soon, not a moment too late.

God knows exactly what we need when we need it. We may not see an immediate return on some investment that we make in God's kingdom, but it will come right on schedule—in "due time." Our task is simply to obey His Word now and to expect the return later.

Some years ago while on a mission trip in India, we had the joy of seeing Mother Teresa in Calcutta. While there, a missionary told us the story of an assistant to Mother Teresa who was troubled because he didn't have an opportunity to speak to the saintly humanitarian. He finally arranged to talk with her during the planning of a mission trip. He told her that he would be glad to pay his own airfare for the flight if he was given an opportunity to have a few moments of her time.

Mother Teresa responded surprisingly. She advised the man that if he had enough money to purchase a ticket on the air-

plane, he should simply forego the trip and give the money to the poor. She told him that he would learn more from his giving than he would in spending time with her. Giving is a powerful teacher.

Jesus was the first to establish such a principle. A wealthy young man approached Him to ask the secret of a successful spiritual life. To his surprise, Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matt. 19:21). Trust doesn't carry a lot of baggage. It leans heavily on the resources of God.

Third: *We always reap more than we invest.* Jesus illustrated that principle in one of His parables, which was an example from nature that He used to teach a heavenly truth. He told of "seed [that] fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (Matt. 13:8).

Another of our parishioners was a living example of the truth that Jesus taught. At the end of a sermon on giving, I promised to give people their money back in 90 days if they found that God didn't bless their tithing. Good ol' Huston stood and said, "Pastor, I discovered the joy of giving when I was 25 years old. And you can't out-give God!"

Huston then proceeded to offer a refund to any persons who tried tithing for six months. He promised to personally give their money back if God did not out-bless them. During our seven years of ministry at the church, "Huston's Guarantee" was offered during the stewardship emphasis. Each year the inquiry was made, "Huston, is your guarantee good this year?" And each year he made the same pledge without flinching. Not surprisingly, no one ever asked him for a refund!

## **God Pours His Love on Us**

Heaven hasn't downsized. God's resources aren't subject to budget cuts. So when you're on the expecting side of an investment, you can look for a lavish return. Jesus said, "If you then,

though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). In other words, if earthly parents do their very best to meet the temporal needs of their children, how much more will your heavenly Father do in meeting your spiritual needs?

But His blessings don't end with meeting spiritual needs. He is concerned with meeting temporal needs as well. In fact, God has already lent us the raw material of life: time, health, family and friends, intelligence, skills, possessions, and so forth. We're to act responsibly in managing that "loan." This is called being a steward of His resources—stewardship.

Jesus explained the concept of stewardship in the parable of the talents. He told the story of a landowner who went on a journey, entrusting his possessions to three servants who were left behind. To the first servant he gave five talents (a talent was a large sum of money, representing a day's wage many times over), to the second he gave two talents, and to the third he gave only one.

It's intriguing to see how the servants used what had been entrusted to them. They reported to him after his return. The man with five talents invested his master's resources and returned with ten talents. The second returned with four. But the last hoarded his "loan," digging a hole and burying it (see Matt. 25:14-30). All the servants shared an opportunity. But not all of them acted with responsibility.

God is a wise Heavenly Father. He doesn't give us material possessions for our detriment. He gives for our good. In return, He expects us to handle His material blessings with a sense of responsibility.

There's an interesting story about a man who was hiking a mountain range. Coming across an old-fashioned pump, he stopped for a drink. A tin cup was tied to the pump handle. The traveler noticed a note in the cup as he untied it. He quickly took the note from the cup and read, "It is safe to drink from this well. I fixed the pump and put a new sucker washer in it.

The washer dries out, and the pump needs to be primed. Under the large white rock west of the well is a bottle of water. There's enough water in it to prime the pump, but not enough if you take a drink first. Pour a little of the water into the pump to soak the leather washer. Then pour in the rest of the water and pump fast. You will soon get water."

The note continued, "Have faith. This well won't run dry. After you've pumped all the water you want, fill the bottle back up and put it where you found it. Put this note back in the cup, and tie the cup to the handle. Another thirsty traveler will soon be along."

What a beautiful portrait of God's supply: "This well won't run dry." The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah voiced it when he penned God's words, "My people will be filled with my bounty" (Jer. 31:14).

## Giving to Grow Your Faith

As Huston said with his "Huston's Guarantee," you can't out-give God. What a wonderful opportunity we have to make a spiritual and financial link of faith and trust to that supply! Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38).

The question is—how big is your measuring cup? What size is the spiritual container you'll use to dip into God's supply? It needs to be faith-sized. If you're going to trust God for a return on your investment, you'll need to notch up your faith. (See 2 Cor. 9:7-8.) Louisa M. R. Stead expressed it so beautifully in a hymn:

*'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,  
Just to take Him at His Word,  
Just to rest upon His promise,  
Just to know: "Thus saith the Lord."*

*Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!  
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er!*

*Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!  
O for grace to trust Him more!*

*Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus,  
Just from sin and self to cease,  
Just from Jesus simply taking  
Life and rest, and joy and peace.*

*I'm so glad I learned to trust Thee,  
Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend;  
And I know that Thou art with me,  
Wilt be with me to the end.*

—Louisa M. R. Stead

You'll also need to accept the “giving challenge” that the apostle Paul gave to the New Testament Church: “As you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2 Cor. 8:7). That's a step beyond gratitude for the “raw material of life” that God has given to us. It's a commitment to give something back—to give to get to give, in a glorious cycle of giving.

The Early Church not only accepted the “giving challenge”—they committed their resources in a giving routine suggested by the apostle Paul.

“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collection will have to be made” (1 Cor. 16:2). Theirs wasn't a spur-of-the-moment gift. It was planned. It was systematical. It was practical.

Systematic giving is a spiritual discipline: a predetermined amount (the tithe—one-tenth) on a predetermined schedule to a predetermined place (the storehouse—church). Just as you would go through repetitive motions in strength training, you go through repetitive motions in *spiritual* strength training.

Also, you don't have to have a lot of money to link your faith to God's supply. In fact, you can be broke and still commit a portion of your resources to God. Give your time. Give your

talents. Give your encouragement to another. Give a helping hand.

Trust to live. Give proportionately. Give generously. Give faithfully. And then expect a reward. It's an economic principle of God's kingdom. He instructed in Mal. 3:10, "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.'"

Will you dare to trust Him? Will you first commit yourself to Him? Will you give Him all of your life in return for all of His? Then will you commit your finances to Him? Will you acknowledge that He's the source of your every material blessing? Will you take Him at His word, believing that He'll reward your obedience?

If so, you've begun the cycle of victorious giving. You've taken the first of many steps in a spiritually rewarding journey.

It was another missionary convention. We had moved to Tampa, Florida, to plant a church. We were distinctly impressed of God to send \$50 to the Carters, missionaries to Native Americans in Arizona, even though we didn't understand why. Linda and I examined our checkbook and found just \$54. We sent the \$50 anyway. The next day, I went back to the post office. To our surprise, my college roommate, J. Michael Walters, who was now a seminary student, had sent us a letter and had enclosed a love gift of \$50! We've often wondered how God could move financially poor church planters to send money to financially poor missionaries—and a financially poor seminary student to send money to us. But that's how God works!

Were we surprised? Of course! We're human. In the human realm, we had encountered the blessings of a divine God. It was new territory for us. But it was a lesson that we have not forgotten. We had committed our way to the Lord. We had trusted Him. And He gave us a return on our investment that still blesses our hearts after all these years.