



How to Use This Life Group Guide

1. Review your notes from Mark's message.
2. Read Mark's blog (copied below).
3. Write out your answers to the questions that follow.
4. Discuss your answers with your Life Group.

GIVING

They're nine words that change everything.

Nothing about them is hard to understand. They're commonly used. Only two of them have more than four letters. Most people know them by heart. But when it comes to helping us understand the heart of God, they're among the most powerful in all of Scripture.

For God so loved the world that He gave...

Most of us, when we read those words, have an immediate reaction of gratitude. We're thankful for all the ways God has provided for us — everything from the gift of life itself, to our "daily bread," to the assurance of an eternity in His presence. And, certainly, that's entirely appropriate. We *should* be grateful, when we think about everything God has done on our behalf!

But there's another response to consider. Throughout Scripture, we're encouraged to not only *accept God's gifts*, but also *imitate His character*. To love, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19) To forgive, in the same way we've been forgiven. (Ephesians 4:32) And to give, just as it is God's very nature to do so — generously, and without expectation of anything in return.

Too often, we think about giving in strictly financial terms. We see it as something we *do* — writing a check for our tithe, for example. But God calls us to move beyond that. He wants giving to be part of who we *are*, something that's built into the very fabric of our being.

Growing to maturity in Christ means reflecting His nature to those around us. It means that we give not only our money, but also our encouragement, our compassion, our forgiveness, our love, our acceptance, our time, our talents ... the list is endless. We see a need, and we plant a seed — because doing so reflects the giving heart of God.

It's tempting to think "Wait a minute. If I give like that, I'll run completely out of

resources in no time!” But remember this: Everything you have to give has been given to *you* in the first place. Like the widow who cared for Elijah, God is fully able to “keep the bowl of flour full, and the jar of oil from becoming empty” (see I Kings 17: 8-16). As the Apostle Paul reminded the Philippians, God is quite capable of keeping us “amply supplied,” as we reflect His nature and do His work. (Philippians 4:18). He gives strength to the weary, power to those who lack might, and grace to those who linger in His presence. In fact, as the Psalmist reminds us, “no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” (Psalm 84:11)

When we start to see giving as less *something I do* (I give my time, I write a check, I donate an item) and more *someone I am* (I am a giver, by *nature!*), we set ourselves on a path toward incredible growth and maturity. We move beyond the realm of “grudgingly or under compulsion,” into the land of “cheerful.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

And it’s not just God who loves a cheerful giver. The world does, too.

For Personal Reflection and Discussion with Others:

1. Who comes to mind — someone you know personally — when you think of a cheerful giver? Why?

2. What do you think makes that person the way they are? What shaped them?

3. Read I Kings 17:8-16. What can we learn about giving from that passage?

4. In what areas — beyond financial — could you become more engaged in giving? What would that look like?

5. Read Philippians 4:18. Why do you think the Apostle Paul was so content? How do giving and contentment work together?

6. In what ways has giving been “something you do” instead of “someone you are”?

7. What would need to happen in order for that to change?
