

BLESSINGS: THE RESOURCES OF A STEWARD 1 CHRONICLES 29:10-16

You may have heard this true story. One day a father takes his little boy out to lunch at McDonalds. The little guy wants the large order of French fries and that's what Dad orders. During the course of the meal, Dad reaches over and helps himself to a few of Junior's fries. But Junior will have none of that! He moves to protect those precious fries saying, "No, Daddy, these are my French fries." At first, Dad is just kind of amused by his son's response, but then he begins to think about what just happened. "You know, my son doesn't have any idea that I'm the source of those French fries. Even though we went up to the counter together and he saw me take out my money from my wallet, he either doesn't understand or he doesn't care that I'm the source of those French fries." Dad thought even more about what had just happened. "My son doesn't realize that I have the power to take away every last one of those sorry French fries from him right this very minute if I wanted to do so. Or, I could go back to the counter and order \$50 worth of French fries - \$100 worth of fries - so many fries that I could just bury the kid in French fries! My son doesn't know that I don't really need his fries. I could go back up to the counter and order 50 bags of French fries for myself. But, no, I don't really want all those French fries. I guess what I wanted was to see if he was willing to share those fries with me."

If you're a parent, you can probably remember an incident pretty similar to that one from your own experience. I suggest that there might be some parallels between Dad, son and French fries, on the one hand, and God, us and all the blessings of life, on the other hand. What is a "blessing"? Let me offer a pretty broad definition: a blessing is anything that has value and worth. It could be intelligence, abilities, skills, health, time, energy, a job, money or possessions. Anything that has any kind of value or worth is a blessing – God's French fries, so to speak.

The Bible teaches in a variety of ways that God is the ultimate source of all blessings. Sure, those blessings come in different sizes and different shapes. Some people get more than others, but all of us get some. God will sometimes want you to share your blessings and all too often our response can be, "No, Lord, those are my blessings. Those blessings belong to me." I wonder if when that happens, God shakes His head and thinks to Himself, "He just doesn't have any idea that I'm the source of all those blessings. She just doesn't have any idea that I could just take away all those blessings this instant or I could bury her under a load of blessing. He doesn't know that I don't need or want those blessings. No, I would just like to see her share those blessings with Me and with other human beings I bring into her life."

Come with me today back some 1000 years before Jesus was born to the land of Israel. This is the world of 1 Chronicles 29. King David is an old man now and he knows that his life is coming to an end. His life and reign have been very successful in many ways, but one great dream is still unfulfilled. More than

anything else, David wanted to build a great temple in the city of Jerusalem to honor the Lord. But God had said very clearly and very finally, “No.” The Lord wanted David’s son and heir, Solomon, to build the temple instead. Back in chapter 28, we discover that David did everything necessary for the building of the temple without beginning any actual construction. He designed the temple. He developed the methods of worship to be used in the temple by the priests. He raised all the money for the construction of the temple. After he witnesses the phenomenal financial response of the people of Israel, David lets loose in this song of praise and thanksgiving to God. Let’s read part of it just now. This wonderful song of David can be very instructive for you and me because it reveals and reminds us of several key truths about our giving God. First of all, David’s song reminds us that...

GOD’S POWER: HIS ABILITY TO GIVE BLESSINGS.

God has the ability to give us what we need because He is the source of all good things. Just walk with me through some of the thoughts and phrases in these verses that underline that truth. “Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O LORD.... Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us!... O LORD our God, even this material we have gathered to build a Temple to honor your holy name comes from you! It all belongs to you!” (1 Chronicles 29:11, 14, 16 NIV)

It’s helpful and important to remind yourself often of God’s power. How does that happen for you? God can remind us that He possess ultimate power in a variety of ways. One way is through worship. That hymnal in front of you is full of songs that celebrate God’s power. Many recently written praise songs do a fine job of reminding us that God is all powerful and that God’s power makes all the difference. When you sing those songs – either here with others, or by yourself in your home or driving around town – the Holy Spirit can remind you of God’s ability to give blessing because of His power. Often God will use prayer, reading God’s Word or listening to an inspiring message to remind you of His power.

By way of example, God reminds me of His power in two other additional and personal ways. Being out and in nature, for instance, communicates the reality of God’s power to me because only He can make the beauty and the complexity of the woods in which I take a hike, or the sunset I enjoy at the end of the day, or the mountains and the ocean that I observe with my eyes. I also get regularly reminded of God’s power in moments of personal disappointment and disillusionment. It’s at those moments that I realize afresh and anew that God has all power and that, at the end of the day, I have very little power. I need those uncomfortable reminders because, otherwise, I’m tempted to live in a state of unreality. God alone is all-powerful. God alone is all-sufficient. God alone can accomplish everything that He sets out to do. God alone cannot be thwarted, ignored, set aside or defeated. All of that is true of God. None of it is

true of you or me. And because He is all-powerful, He's the source of every and all blessing – past, present and future. Everything of value comes from God. Now, David's song highlights another great truth about God and blessing...

GOD'S PROVISION: HIS WILLINGNESS TO GIVE BLESSINGS

God not only has the ability to give blessings, but He wants to bless you. He is more willing to give you blessings than you are to receive them. In fact, God has already given far more blessings than you might realize or want to admit. David reminds us of an important fact here. All that you ever give back to God is what He has first given to you. Isn't that the explicit message of v. 14? "But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us!" (1 Chr 29:14 NLT) David repeats the same thought in v. 16, "O LORD our God, even this material we have gathered to build a Temple to honor your holy name comes from you! It all belongs to you!" (1 Chr 29:16 NLT) Do you remember your parents giving you money to buy them a birthday or Christmas present? Or maybe you just did that for one of your kids. Many times you get back a kind of goofy present you'd never get for yourself, but you still "oohh" and "aahh" over it. Why? Because you want your child to understand that an important part of life is giving to those we love. You hope to teach that value by giving them the money to buy you a gift. Doesn't God interact with us in much the same way?

David became one of the most successful men who ever lived. Born as the youngest to an obscure family, he rose to become the leader of his nation of Israel. He was a brilliant soldier who enlarged the borders of his country. He became immensely wealthy. He was blessed with wives and children. He earned the undying respect and love of his people. And yet David recognized something of great importance here. Everything he had accomplished, every success he enjoyed, every possession he acquired, every honor and blessing he received could be traced back to the hand of a gracious and loving God who had provided it all.

Now, the Bible never suggests that your hard work and personal effort are unnecessary. No, instead, the Bible reminds us in numerous places that in the end hard work and honest effort do pay off because God has so ordered and made this world to work like that. But here's what we need to keep in perspective. Where did your intelligence come from? From where did you get your innate abilities? From where do you get your energy to work, to produce, to be creative? Where does your ability to hold a job and earn money come from? Where does the blessing of good health ultimately come from? Without God's prior provision, you would have nothing and no success in life would be possible. Think of it this way. God requires nothing of you that He has not already given to you: your time, your energy, your abilities, your money – nothing! How wrong it is for you or me to ever say, "No, God, those are my French fries. Those are my blessings. It's my money, my time and my talents."

Here's yet another aspect of this truth to keep in mind. The same principle holds true for what we might consider the hard or negative experiences in life. Every one of us here today has gone through trials, difficulties and dark periods. You may be going through such an experience even now today! We didn't necessarily bring them upon ourselves; they're just there – big, dark, scary experiences. It's helpful to remember that God doesn't ask you to go through those hard, negative experiences without already giving you whatever measure of grace, discernment, power and strength you need to get through it. Isn't that the message of God's Word when it says, "The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure." (1 Cor 10:13 NLT) God requires nothing of us that He has not already given.

But there are two places where you can run into problems in this business of God's provision. First, we tend to want resources that we don't need. God promises to give me today what I need for today. He makes no promise to give you what you don't need today. Someone might ask, "Rick, would you have the courage to give up your life – to die – for Christ today?" Quite honestly, I would answer, "Probably not." But, here's my point. I don't need that resource of courage today. But, let's say, a year from now I was faced with a situation where I was called upon to give up my life for Christ, I believe God would empower me with dying grace. I'll need it if that day ever comes, but I don't need it today. That's a spiritual principle that applies to other issues. If you're dissatisfied with how God has blessed you, perhaps it's because God has determined you don't really need what you think you need!

Second, we tend to want to hoard what we've been given by God. There's the French fry problem! It can be money in general or the tithe specifically, your time, your energy or the giving or sharing of any abilities God has given to you. You can keep those blessings to yourself. "No, it's my French fries!" Do you remember the Old Testament story of how God miraculously fed the people of Israel out in the wilderness with a bread-like substance called manna? He told them not to gather any more manna than they could use in one day. Of course, some of them concluded that God didn't really know what He was talking about. They tried to save and hoard it up. The Bible says that even as they lifted that hoarded blessing of manna up to their lips, it began to rot right in their mouths. There's a spiritual principle there: if you hoard God's blessings and become selfish, God can allow those blessings to become a curse to you. Then, let me suggest, that David's song implies a third truth having to do with God and blessings...

GOD'S PARTICIPATION: HIS REASON TO GIVE BLESSINGS.

Why does God give any of us blessings? You say, "Because He loves us, Rick!" Amen! But it might be better to say that God uses love as a way to accomplish

His ultimate goal: He wants us to become like Him. God is always giving and He wants us to become givers just like Him. What does the first verse most of us ever memorized say? “For God so loved the world that He gave...” (John 3:16) God is very interested, then, as to how many French fries – or blessings – you’re willing to share with Him and with others.

In your message notes, you have something called a “partnership pyramid.” Here’s what the initials stand for. GG stands for “God Gives.” TM stands for “To Me” and TO stands for “To Others.” Now God gives blessings to me and to others. You can draw in the appropriate arrows. Most of us share many of the same blessings, but there are blessings that are unique, too. God doesn’t give me all the same blessings you might enjoy and He blesses me in ways He may not bless you. But He blesses all of us abundantly.

Now the first step in this partnership pyramid is when you understand that this giving can and should be a two way street. You surrender to Jesus as your Lord and Savior and you begin giving back to God. So make an arrow from “To Me” back up to “God Gives.” You begin to love God, obey God, pray to God, study God’s Word, worship God and tithe your money to God. And there are many other people doing the same thing so you can draw an arrow from “To Others” back up to “God Gives.” But here’s the second step in this partnership pyramid that’s just as important as the first one. At some point in your Christian experience you begin to understand that you need to share all these God-given blessings – these French fries – with others. And so you begin to give “To Others” illustrated by the arrows pointing in that direction. You help others, you listen to others, you encourage others, you use your spiritual gifts to bless others, you tithe so others can be blessed through the ministry of the church. Then, you discover that God has infected other people with this wonderful “disease” of giving and they start to pour into your life. So you can draw that arrow from “To Others” back to “To Me.” So I get helped, I get listened to and encouraged, I get ministered to by your spiritual gifts. When all three sets of these arrows are going in all directions, you have partnership, you have participation, you have giving in a way that God desires and in a way that honors God.

Let me close today by reading through one of Jesus’ parables because it touches on this whole matter of God giving blessings to us and to others, and our giving back to God by giving to others. (Read Matthew 25:31-46) Let me briefly point out four brief observations from that passage having to do with giving and blessings. One, you are accountable to God for what you do with His blessings. Two, giving to others is one way you give to God. Three, not giving to others in need is not giving to God Himself. God so identifies and participates in the brokenness and pain of human beings that He says to help hurting people is one significant way to give back to Him. Four, we are incomplete without each other. You have French fries I don’t have. I have French fries you don’t have. When we share them with each other and with others, we participate with God in His giving of blessings.

Vernal Simms grew up in a rough Boston housing project called Columbia Point in a family of nine children. Although he'd been a hardworking student, paying for college seemed impossible. But Vernal's mother's favorite expression was "Pray, and the Lord will make a way somehow." He viewed that as good advice for other people, not necessarily for him. But when Vernal decided to go to college and then seminary because he believed the Lord had a call to ministry on his life, he had no other choice! Vernal packed for college and even went to orientation, but still didn't have any money. He'd have to pack up his belongings and make the 100-mile trip back home. But an heir to a corporate fortune heard about Vernal Simm's plight and paid for his college and seminary education. Talk about a blessing! After he graduated, he went to his benefactor's office to thank him for all he had done for him and asked him what he could do to pay him back. Imagine saying to a multimillionaire, "What can I do to repay you?" The man responded, "Help somebody." Vernal Simms has gone on to spend many years in the ministry with that goal in mind. He's pastored in the drug-ridden, crime-infested inner city as well as well-manicured suburbs. I love what Vernal Simms says he's learned about blessing: He says, "I've learned that the blessing of God is like a boomerang. As I've tried to help somebody, the Lord has blessed me." That's how it works in the Kingdom of God!

The blessing of God is like a boomerang. I like that! Have you discovered the truth of that in your own life? Have you met anyone who needs some of the French fries – some of the blessings – God has given to you? How about the good news of what Jesus has done for them and how they can receive the gift of eternal life? How about the blessing of God's love channeled through you? How about kindness and encouragement? God has given us so many French fries as a church – so much blessing! A wonderful facility to release into all kinds of ministry... wonderful people who have skills and abilities that this community desperately needs... Church, what are we going to do with the blessings God has given us? May we find new ways to partner and participate with God as He seeks to bless the Northland community through us!