

Buzz King

[buzz@BuzzKing.com](mailto:buzz@BuzzKing.com)

BuzzKing.com

303 437 7419

**Luke 6:29–31, ESV**

*<sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. <sup>31</sup>And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*

**A torque wrench is like giving: *Gaining Leverage.***

There is a core Christian theological belief that says that God owns everything.

Nothing is ours. It's part of our definition of God - of what we see God as being.

The first line of Psalm 24 says the following in the New Revised Standard Version, updated edition:

*<sup>1</sup>The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it,*

Deuteronomy 10:14 says this in the English Standard Version:

*<sup>14</sup>Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens,  
the earth with all that is in it.*

There are a number of other passages in the Bible that say the same thing, and indeed, a core tenet of our theology, our concept of God, as Christians is that we do not own a thing. God owns all that exists, and we are merely the temporary users of whatever God lends us. It's a reason why we tend to believe in protecting the Earth and the life upon it: none of it is ours. A theological concept that goes hand in hand with this is that, since we don't own anything, we have no business keeping things for ourselves. As Christians, we should be

giving. And in fact, we should give happily, give without having to have our giving acknowledged, and we should give even when the party accepting our gift in truth took it without asking and without being invited. It's okay, by the way, to be reimbursed by an insurance company for what was taken or even to get it back if we need it to live. But we should never think it was stolen from us. Importantly, there is something more that we believe as people of faith, and it has to do with the benefit we get from giving. And no, it's not that God will decide he likes us and admit us to Heaven ASAP after we die.

But before we get to this, let's look at torque wrenches. When I was growing up, my father managed the sales side of a garage, tire shop, and gas station. The manager of the shop, where brakes were replaced, tires mounted, and mufflers replaced was a man named John. He was a big guy, an African American man, and a close friend of my father's. I called him Uncle John. I used to hang around my father's shop on occasion, and once, I was standing just inside the door that led from the sales area into the shop watching Uncle John work on a car. The hood was up, and I saw him lift what seemed to me to be an amazingly huge tool, maybe three feet long. He glanced over, saw my eyes widen, and he smiled. He asked me if I knew what the tool was. Perhaps I was about ten – I'm not sure - and I shook my head no. Then he said it was a torque wrench. He motioned me over. He said that the wrench was used to tighten bolts to a precise "torque" or strength, he said. That way, he told me, a bolt would be tightened just right and wouldn't be too loose or too tight. He said that he had been changing something called a head gasket and that he was about to put the head back on the car engine. In order

for the head, the top of the engine, he told me, to not be bent, and for the gasket to do its job and keep the oil inside the engine, the torque on all the bolts had to be the same, that is, all of the bolts had to be at exactly the same amount of tightness. That's what a torque wrench did, it measured the exact tightness of a bolt, Uncle John told me. Then I asked him why the wrench was so long: it was as long as his arm. He said that it had to do with something called "leverage". Uncle John said the longer the wrench, the easier it is to turn the bolt, and since he was getting to be an older guy, he liked using a wrench that wasn't too much work to use. He fingered me into the garage. It took him a while, but he got me to understand that he would have to work harder to tighten the bolts with a shorter handle than with a wrench with a longer handle. Now, Uncle John did three things that day, at least for me. 1, he taught me about torque wrenches. 2, he taught me about leverage. And 3, he brightened up my day by being a very good man and giving me a little of his time. The important one here for us today is number 2, leverage, because he also gave me the idea for this sermon, which I wrote more than a half century after this incident. I'll get back to this story.

Normally, I provide overviews of the books of the Bible that we use quotes from. But since we're going to look at several books of the Bible today, and since two of them are Gospels, I'll make my overview quite brief. There are two letters written by Paul to the church he founded in Corinth. We are confident that Paul wrote these letters personally. It's thought that the letter we're using, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, was written in late

55 A.D., and it might be the compendium of two separate letters, a second and a third letter to the Corinthians, if you will. Paul's purpose is to tell the believers in Corinth that their purpose in life is to serve Christ. The city of Corinth was about fifty miles west of Athens in Greece, and its remains exist today, but the ancient city was destroyed in 1858 by an earthquake. We are also looking at Matthew and Luke, two Gospels whose authors we believe drew upon the content of the shorter Gospel of Mark. We don't know who wrote Matthew, and we are confident that Paul's traveling companion, Luke, wrote Luke. Matthew was written for Jews who were followers of Christ, and it references Hebrew Scriptures, like Isaiah, heavily. The author's approach was to use the Old Testament as a way of showing that Jesus was the promised Messiah, in order to win over Jews to the new faith. However, the author of Luke was probably not a Jew, unlike the authors of the other three Gospels. Luke was writing to all people, perhaps with a focus on gentiles, that is, non-Jews.

There are many passages in the Bible that talk about giving. But let's consider the first of the three passages we will look at. It is 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:6-9, and this is from the ESV:

*<sup>6</sup> The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written,*

*"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."*

This can be best summarized by this one, short sentence: *God loves a cheerful giver*. We don't give out of duty only. We don't give grudgingly, out of some fear that if we don't give, we will spend eternity with a guy named Satan in a very uncomfortable locale. We are cheerful when we give. It feels good to do something for others. It lifts us up, energizes us, fills us with a warmth. It's a blessing. We're thankful that our faith demands that we give, because once we start doing it, we walk through life as if we were walking on air. We find ourselves living for the things of God's kingdom, not the Kingdom of People. That's why God loves a cheerful giver – because it's the most natural kind of giver, and God wants us to just be ourselves.

Now we consider Matthew 6:1–4, again from the ESV:

**6** *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

<sup>2</sup> *“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

This passage has something in it that sounds poetic - but is in truth literal. While the vast majority of ancient Israelite givers gave alms freely and quietly, trumpets would be blown in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem when sacrifices were offered to God, and this was considered a form of giving. This passage can be summarized by a single sentence. It's one that is very frequently quoted: *when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others*. In other words, Christians are not giving so that others will think

highly of them. We are, in a sense, being selfish, helping ourselves, because we give simply so that we can be ourselves, so that we can feel close to God. We don't stress ourselves out by hustling to get other people to think good things about us. You know, one of the biggest lessons we typically must learn in life is that you can't control what other people say and do, and when you try, you often feel frustrated and anxious. It's better to just model a good Christian way of living, hoping that it will rub off on others, and to live for God and for God's people – and that is, of course, all people.

Finally, consider Luke 6:29–31, and also from the ESV:

*<sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. <sup>31</sup>And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*

This says: *Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.* This quote is a bit subtle in translation, compared to the first two. It says two things. First, if someone you encounter asks for aid, give what you can. Second, if someone steals from you, let them keep what they have taken. Maybe they need it more than you do. Maybe you will touch their hearts, and they will be filled with God's grace when they realize that you care more for them than you do for your stuff or for vengeance. This quote is part of Jesus' so-called Sermon on the Plain, a shorter variation of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, and thus it is part of the core teachings of Christ. In fact, our second quote, from Matthew, the one about blowing trumpets, is part of the longer, very famous Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus

lays out the basics of being a Christian. We see the overwhelmingly critical need for a Christian to be a giving person.

To sum these three quotes, Christians should give happily, give privately and never publicly, and give to anyone who comes to you in need, even if they take without asking. It sounds like a gigantic order.

I'd like to get back to the man I knew as Uncle John. He did more than work on cars and treat little kids nicely. When he wasn't working, he was serving people through his church. He would borrow the shop's truck, then collect used appliances from people in his church and from other churches. He would then take these refrigerators, washers, driers, ovens, etc., to the car shop and repair them. Once he got them working - and he always paid for the parts himself - he would drive them to the homes of people who needed appliances but couldn't pay for them. He, like my dad, worked six days a week. Sunday morning was spent at church and Sunday afternoon was spent delivering these appliances.

Once, he took me on a Sunday afternoon appliance run. He loaded the truck up with the help of his sons, and then I climbed inside the cab next to him. One of his sons rode in the back of the truck to help unload appliances. I was too young to provide any muscle help, but my father was very much in favor of me accepting the invitation to join him, when Uncle John asked me if I would like to come along. My most vivid memory is the business-like way he did the job. He wasn't looking for thanks. But people were

indeed so thankful for the gift of an appliance. He didn't wallow in glory. He just smiled, shook a hand, and said that he was happy to do it, and that he got more out of it than they did. More. When he collected appliances to repair and give away, he never told people that he was doing this on his own and absorbing all the costs for repairs, deliveries, and installations himself. I believe that covers two of our quotes, he gave cheerfully, and he wasn't looking for glory. What about number three, giving to anyone who asks and letting people keep what they steal? Well, I never knew him to turn away someone who asked for an appliance.

What about folks who take without asking? That very day, after I watched him and his son install a washer, we went back to the truck to discover that a refrigerator had just been stolen off the back of the truck. I remember John's oldest son saying something like hell, somebody just carried away a full-sized refrigerator! His son started to jump in the truck, like he was going to chase the other truck down. Uncle John stopped him and said that's okay, it's one that we don't have to carry inside ourselves. Whoever took it will do that for us. And as far as the people who were supposed to get that refrigerator, well, he knew he could quickly find and fix up another one. Everything would be fine. I think that's number three: if they steal it, let them have it.

Uncle John is long dead, I'm sure. He would be over a hundred by now. I am quite confident I know where he is right now. He's with God and he never learned to play the trumpet.



Here's something interesting. Some number of years later, when I was in graduate school, the head gasket on my car failed while I was driving into USC from my apartment fourteen or so miles away near the coast. I ended up replacing the head gasket right there in the parking structure at the university. I of course knew that I needed a torque wrench, so that when I put the cheap aluminum head back on the engine of my beat-up Toyota, I wouldn't warp it by tightening the bolts at different torques. Luckily, another grad student, a buddy of mine, had one and he lived nearby. He drove to his apartment and came back with it. It was huge, just like the torque wrench Uncle John had used many years before. Interestingly, what should have been a nasty job that I really had no time for – replacing a head gasket between classes at USC – turned into a pleasant experience, because the entire time I thought about that man who so long before had taught me about leverage.

Leverage. That's a powerful thing about Christian giving. That's the magnificent gift we get when we give. It's a way to leverage what we are as believers, to take what we have inside of us and make much more out of it. When we give to others, it doesn't just help that person. It doesn't just lift us up. It is also a simple, easy way to teach others about the beauty of our faith. It can be very hard to teach someone about Christianity, especially today when we are thought of as being angry and selfish. Giving gives us a vehicle for living out our faith. It's like tightening bolts with a short wrench. If you don't give, if you try to just use words to sell your faith to others, you have to

work very hard at it. It's painstaking and you'll probably not do it right. You might even ruin the job, like warping the head of an engine. But if you use a longer wrench, if you demonstrate Christian values by giving to whomever needs it, by giving joyously, and even letting them have it if they take it without asking, you can leverage the act of giving and perhaps plant the seed of faith in someone else.

This church does give in many ways. People here provide a foodbank for the community. People in this congregation collect warm clothing, buy kids Christmas presents, and do many other things for the community at large. I want to underscore how critical this is to being an effective church, to planting the seeds of faith in a community. It's a critical way to grow a church, by making it clear that we follow that critical tenet of our faith: giving.

There is one final thing. At some point in our lives, we all find ourselves in a place of need. We may never need a free refrigerator or food or warm clothing or gifts for kids in our families. But we all end up needing something from someone. It is often emotional support. If we are humble and are willing to reach out and ask for help, we are letting that person who gives to us experience the leverage of giving.