

VIRTUE 12

CHARITY

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

—Philippians 2:4-7

Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

—1 Corinthians 10:24

The word used to translate the Greek word *agape* in most modern English Bibles is *love*, but in many older translations, *agape* was translated as “charity” when it was used in a context of one person to another. In this way, charity was defined as unlimited loving-kindness toward all others. In a biblical context, this term should not be mistaken for the more modern use of the word to mean only giving to those in need (i.e., “giving to charity”), although this can be a substantial part of what’s meant by the word. A more encompassing definition of the word *charity*, at least in the context of a modern-day knight, would be to be charitable (or giving) to others with his or her time, talent, and treasures. Let’s review each.

A knight's time and talents are not his or her own, as they belong to the body of Christ, but they are his to *manage*. See the difference? If you are involved in a ministry or giving effort that's not in line with your natural and God-given gifts and talents, maybe it is time to change ministries. If your time is, however, well suited for the endeavor, stay involved and give your time and talent with purpose, vigor, and intention. To those knights who are not directly involved in the ministry world, tithing your time (by giving ten percent or more) to a ministry that aligns with your gifts and talents. And about your time specifically, if too much of your time is being consumed by service so that your top game is not being offered, govern your time by retreating and resting until it is. Sometimes the most godly thing you can do is take a nap, which Christ did regularly even during the peak of his ministry seasons.

A knight's treasure is not his or her own, but it is his or hers to both *grow* and *give away* at the *right time* and in the *right way*—for a true knight *earns all they can, saves all they can, and gives away all they can*. To a true knight, money is only a resource. It is a tool to accomplish good and to fuel the working hand of God in his community, cause, and purpose in life. Even saving money until the end of your life is okay, provided that you have set up a way to give it all away with intention and purpose upon death: “A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children, but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous” (Proverbs 13:22).

A true knight is generous and realizes that all wealth will eventually and intentionally be used for God's kingdom: “Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them” (Psalm 62:10b; see also Luke 12:21, where Jesus' parable conveys that those who have wealth should be “rich towards God”). The knight who works diligently in life will be granted the gift to enjoy the fruit of his labor: “Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift

of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart” (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20).

There is nothing wrong with enjoying the fruit of your labor, within reason (see Deuteronomy 14). Just be assured that only in God does life have meaning and true pleasure. Without Him, nothing satisfies, but with Him, we find satisfaction and enjoyment. True pleasure comes only when we acknowledge and revere God (Deuteronomy 12:13). Riches do not satisfy, but Christ does (see John 7:37-38).

So how can a knight intentionally and effectively give to help the needs of the poor? First, it is important to understand that we are commanded to do so:

He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done (Proverbs 19:17).

If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered (Proverbs 21:13).

God cares deeply about the poor. There are hundreds of verses in the Bible about the poor and God’s heart for them. The two verses above show how God’s promises are specific to our lives and are intertwined with our choices, including how we respond to the poor He places in our life circle. Consider Christ’s expressions of love for the poor:

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of

these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:37-40).

By loving the poor, we love God. Mother Teresa once said, “Only in heaven will we see how much we owe to the poor for helping us to love God better because of them.” But we also need to be careful in deciding if we should give and how we should give. Sometimes giving money to those in need can hinder more than it can help because giving money to people who refuse to change their irresponsible spending habits can be a huge mistake (now they’ll just be spending *your* money unwisely!). Working with your church’s benevolence group or consulting other resources can help you answer the “if” question about giving. Some biblically sound benevolence guidelines are published by Crown Financial Ministries and can be found online at <http://www.crown.org>.

When it comes to giving (especially financial giving), many are quick to put up defenses: “The poor are poor because of their own bad choices. Why don’t they just pull themselves together, start working for a living, go from one good job to a better job and build a successful life like I did? If this is how I did it in life, why should it be any different for them?”

This line of thinking carelessly stereotypes needy individuals. While these assumptions may be true about some, they are not true about many of the people who are currently in need. You really have no idea how they arrived at their place in life. Whether or not we would like to admit this, there is even a chance we would have been worse off if we had lived their lives! Let’s imagine these assumptions are completely true about the particular poor that God has placed in your life. Does this mean we should not have mercy and grace on them? We must be mindful of the Proverb: “If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered” (21:13).

We can apply these truths to our lives by considering every encounter with others as divine appointments: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God

prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). Where will your feet take you? How will you respond the next time God brings you the poor, in whatever form they come? When the Lord scribed Proverbs 19:17 through Solomon (“He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done”), He was making a very straightforward proposal, “You help the poor, and I will repay you.”

REFLECT

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

—James 1:27

Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely, and the unwanted according to the graces we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work.³⁰

—Mother Teresa

For what purpose do you desire to enter the Order? If it be riches, to take your ease, and be held in honor without doing honor to Knighthood, you are unworthy of it.³¹

—Will Durant

RESPOND

1. How does God show us when and how much to give?
2. In what circumstances can giving actually hurt someone?

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3. What are some practical ways you can earn all you can, save all you can, and give away all you can?
4. What are some ways we can be charitable to others that don't require money?
5. When has someone's charitable actions positively impacted your life?