

March 23, 2025

“Giving as Good as You Get”

Genesis 28:10-22

**Intro:**

Are you giving as good as you get?

Often when people hear, or say, this phrase it is about revenge or payback. “I’ll beat him or her, no matter what.”

I had a friend way back in elementary school who had this kind of mentality. He was going to be tougher than anyone else and was all ready to get into a fight for it. He didn’t get into any significant fights until he was in high school, though. One day I received a call from him inviting me to witness his participation in an after-school fight that had been arranged for the next day. Getting into fights after school was not a thing that I went out of my way to engage in, but I did show up for this one. I really couldn’t tell you why I thought it was a good idea. It wasn’t much of a fight. After having heard all his bluster about how he was going to cream this other guy, it was a surprisingly short fight... and my friend did not win. He did not give as good as he got.

This mentality for revenge, or to prove oneself better than someone else, isn’t restricted to after-school fights. You can find this attitude in many different parts of life – it’s the constant one-upping in a prank war, or secretly sabotaging a co-worker so that you get the credit or promotion and they don’t, or showing up in a fancier outfit or car or having the bigger and more expensive TV. “Giving as good as you get” in a worldly context isn’t about what we receive from others, but how we can prove ourselves better than them.

In a church setting, our perspective and approach need to be radically different. The question is still valid: “Are you giving as good as you get?” But it is no longer about proving yourself. Instead, it is all about proper worship as a response to what you have received from God.

## **God and Jacob:**

Let's look back into the passage from Genesis 28:10-22. Jacob is on the first stage of his exile after tricking his father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing that should have gone to his older brother Esau. Esau has sworn an oath to kill Jacob just as soon as Isaac dies, which is the reason Jacob is on the run – he rightly fears his older brother.

On the journey to his Uncle Laban's house, he stops along the side of the road to sleep for the night, and while he is sleeping, he has a vision. Some translations say he sees a ladder, while others say a stairway, but the idea is that Jacob is given a glimpse of the heavenly courier route between heaven and earth. In that part of the world, it was believed that the gods went back and forth between the mortal realm and their dwelling place by way of a stairway or ladder. The difference in what Jacob saw was that it was not God who was traversing the stairs, but the angelic beings who acted as messengers on God's behalf. God is seen to be standing at the top of the stairs, where the messages originated from and where the responses would be returned to.

The purpose of the stairway is not the point here, just a framework to help you understand the significance of Jacob's dream. In the dream, God speaks directly to Jacob. The message is not carried by any intermediary, but comes straight from God's lips. It is a promise that He is making, a covenant that involves no one other than God and Jacob (who is the recipient). It is a promise from God that he is going to give the land that Jacob is on to him and his descendants – of which there will be many, and that the world will be blessed through those descendants. It is a reminder and reaffirmation of the promise that God had made to Abraham, and then to Isaac. Nothing has changed, and the fact that Jacob is on the run now, because he tricked his brother out of his inheritance, isn't changing God's promise.

If the story stopped there, it would still be a pretty good dream to have. I mean, Jacob is being told that he will not have to run forever, and in fact the blessing

that he received through trickery will be honored and is valid. I can imagine that Jacob might have had some doubts about that before this dream.

But that is not the best part of the dream. The best part is what God promises next. Land is good. Descendants that will bless the world are good. But what He promises next is great. Look at what He says in verse 15: “What’s more” – meaning on top of and in fact even better than what you have already heard, “I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go.”

This is the great promise God gives to Jacob. This is the great promise God gives to us. His presence. In this vision, God promises the blessing of Himself: wherever Jacob goes (and wherever we go), God is going to be right there with him. He is not going as a judge or as a bearer of punishment, but as blessing. In Jacob’s case, that blessing is in the form of protection (which, given his brother’s oath, is very relevant).

### **As Good as it Gets:**

This is as good as it can get. Yes, riches would be nice, and a nice house and nice job and the perfect family that never fights and where all the kids are super achievers in school and extra-curricular activities, but those things have a shelf life. Eventually the riches run out, or fade, or more likely fail to satisfy. The car wears out, the house gets old (and others build or buy bigger and better houses), the excitement and enjoyment of the job lessens, and the family falters because the members can’t keep up the unrealistic expectations and pressure.

But God’s full and continued presence is something that never fails. It is the best that God has to give. For us, this promise is fulfilled in Jesus and through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. God has given, as a blessing to his people, the very best He has to offer.

What we need to figure out is how to respond. Jacob gives us some guidance here, by giving back in two specific ways:

1. Worship

## 2. Offering a tenth of everything that God will give to him

Jacob does put conditions around his response, but he doesn't fear that God will fail in His promise. He sets the stone up as a memorial pillar, anoints it as marking a holy place, and dedicates it for worship – all before any of the promises of God are actually realized. Jacob gives back to God as good as he has received – or at least as good as he is able to give back (we cannot match the good that God gives to us).

When we think about giving back to God, the first thing we need to remember is that giving is an act of worship. It isn't about calculating precise amounts, or figuring out the bare minimum we owe, or fretting whether our gift is going to be used the way we think it should. It is about worship of God. About freely offering Him praise and acknowledgement of how good and wonderful and awesome He is. When we give, we are praising God because He is good.

The second thing to remember is that we give out of everything God has given to us. It is easy to get hung up on the tenth, or the tithe (which means “a tenth”) that Jacob mentions, meticulously doing the math on our pay-checks and then trying to decide if that tenth applies before or after taxes. When we do that, we lose sight of the worship. The thing to see is that Jacob responds by giving back out of **everything** that God gives to him – land, family, reputation, skills, and yes, money. And because this is first about worship and acknowledging how good and worthy of our worship God is, Jacob doesn't give the leftovers of what he has, but the best of what he has to offer in all areas of life.

This is why, time and time again, Scripture equates giving with offering the best of what we have – from Abel right through to Paul encouraging the church in Corinth to give a love offering for the Jerusalem church. Proverbs 3:9, which we read earlier, calls us to “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce.”

**Conclusion:**

For many of us, this is a radical and somewhat difficult shift in our mindset. God knows this. He knows that bills loom large. He knows that food costs are rising, that raising a family only gets more costly. He knows that our jobs are tiring and take a lot of time. He knows that we don't always think we have the ability or capacity to serve Him and others as we might want to (or more likely, as we perceive others doing). He knows that we are bombarded by fear and doubt. And this is why He offers us his presence and protection. He doesn't offer magic blessings and riches beyond anything we could imagine. He takes all our fears and concerns and says, "Trust me in this. Test me and see that I will be faithful. All you need to do is give as good as you get."

When we view giving not as a legal requirement, but as a spiritual exercise and act of worship, then our focus shifts from the stuff we have (and want to hold on to) to our relationship with God and growing that relationship. I like the way Wesley Willmer phrases this in his book *God and Your Stuff*:

"No one denies that God delights in blessing us when we follow Him. However, this material emphasis misses the deeper meaning of giving. We "spiritually give" because, as a lifelong spiritual discipline, it has the power to *form us* and with God's help *transform us*. To say it another way: In developing our skill at giving, we ... come into a more genuine relationship with God. By giving more of ourselves (time, money, talents), we are also giving more of ourselves over to God, shaping our own souls." (pg 33-34)

So again, "Are you Giving as Good as You Get?" This morning, I have challenged you to see giving in light of your relationship with God, but there is still the practical question of how to do this, and what that might look like for you. Next Sunday we are going to explore the question of where and how to give by hearing the experiences and giving journeys of some in our congregation. So please make a point of being here next Sunday.

Let's pray.