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Proverbs 3:27, NRSVue.

²⁷ Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

Acts 20:35, NRSVue.

³⁵ In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Galatians 6:2, NRSVue.

² Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Phillipians 2:4, NRSVue.

⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Matthew 25:40, NRSVue.

⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Mark 10:45, NRSVue.

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Matthew 5:16, NRSVue.

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Let your light shine.

I'd like to look at a handful of brief quotes from the Bible. As always, I won't use them out of context. I want to weave them into a common theme that runs through the New Testament – something that forms the core of who we are as believers. While it is certainly true that the Old Testament does tell us to take care of others, to do it voluntarily, and to not seek reward for doing so – and in fact to not even seek recognition, the New Testament ramps up this principle many-fold. Consider what Proverb 3:27 tells us: ²⁷*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.* This proverb is intriguing in that it is qualified. It says to do good for others – when it is due. As Christians, we ask more of ourselves. We not only forgive those who have wronged us and offer them grace, we also reach out to strangers who are in need. We hold the needs of others above our own needs. In Philippians, Paul the great evangelist to the Gentiles, tells us: ³*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* This is the big thing about Christianity, about the New Covenant. Remember that covenants are two-way. The Old Covenant promised land, progeny and a blessing to the Israelites - if they lived by the laws of God, specifically those handed down to Moses on the mountain. The New Covenant says that God will always forgive, that we can walk in the Kingdom of God, that we will

have an eternal life, that we will have joy in our hearts every day of our lives – if we do our part, which is *to believe*. This sounds like an easy way to go, a breeze compared to what the Israelites had to do, and that was to follow a strict moral code. But as we all know, and as James, the kid brother of Jesus, told us, our actions are not only indicative of our faith: good works are also a mandatory counterpart to our faith: ²⁴*You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.* James' letter is full of cautions: not to confuse the profession of faith with the practice of faith, to not mistake abstract theology for faith that connects those in need with our faith, and to never mistake the initiation of faith with the living out of our faith. James sees a strong symbiosis between faith and the way we treat others, the way we offer ourselves to others. It is not just James: over and over in the New Testament, we see that we are commanded to offer ourselves to others.

Maybe the most famous quote along these lines is from Acts: ³⁵*In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'* This quote is more powerful than we might think. This is not Paul telling us that it is more blessed to give than to receive – it is Paul quoting Jesus as having said this. This quote doesn't appear anywhere in the Gospels. Paul first met Jesus years after Jesus left the Earth, when Jesus appeared to Paul on the road

to Damascus. Perhaps this is something that one of the Apostles told Paul that Jesus said. We see that there is a selfish aspect to being selfless: we do feel a reward when we help others, even if we get no public credit, even if we don't sit around and publicly pat ourselves on the back for being so holy in the way we act.

Here are a handful of other similar quotes from the New Testament:

Galatians 6:2: *² Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.* This is an interesting statement of Paul, as he consistently says that we are free from the law, that we focus on faith and a personal relationship with God through Jesus. Perhaps he is referring to the two commandments, as given by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: that we should love God with all our hearts, and we should love others without exception. When I was in grad school, I lived near the ocean and went to school at USC, which was far inland. I could drive to USC in about an hour and a quarter during a business day, but I could bike there in 45 minutes. One day, I was biking along, through the smog, when I had my first asthma attack since I was a teenager. I happened to be passing through a largely African American neighborhood, and I admit that when I tumbled off my bike onto the curb, and rolled over on my back, struggling to breathe, I felt extremely vulnerable and worried about my safety. Well, an African American couple, who were about my age, stopped. They sat with me until I could breathe properly

again. Then they had me climb into their backseat. The husband hefted my bike into his trunk, and they drove me all the way to my office at USC. Yes, they were Christians. As I got out of their car and thanked them repeatedly, the wife told me that the Bible says that we should bear the burdens of other people.

Here's another passage, Philippians 2:4: *4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* There's another chaplain at the hospital in Boulder. She is not a Christian. She draws her spirituality from multiple traditions, including Christianity, but also Buddhism and elsewhere. She was once going off to visit a woman who was sick with cancer and was extremely anxious. This chaplain pulled out a box that had a stack of blankets in it. She carefully chose one that she thought the woman would like. I asked her where the blankets came from, and she said that volunteers crocheted them. I told her that this sort of thing didn't appeal to me. Her answer was that it wasn't for me or for her – it was for a patient, and it was all about what that woman would treasure. So, yes, I have since then given a handful of blankets away. One woman, with end-stage kidney disease, who later died at our hospital, grew teary when I gave it to her. She kept that blanket on her bed for the rest of her life.

Consider Matthew 25:40: *40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'* This

one is famous, too. Jesus says this just before the plot to kill Jesus unfolds and Judas turns him in for a handful of coins. Jesus says this in the context of the final judgement. He begins by saying: ³¹ *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food’.* Jesus concludes this passage by saying *“as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me,”* making it clear that this is perhaps the most important thing for us to keep in mind when we contemplate the end of our lives and the end of the world. In Jesus’ day, children were often the least. They did not appear in public and were often considered a nuisance when adults were trying to talk about serious things. One day, when our kids were very little, we were on a bus driving through Puerto Rico. Martina told me that she had to pee very badly. I took her hand and led her to the front of the bus. I told the driver, a young woman, that I was sorry, but my daughter needed to stop and use the bathroom. The woman smiled at me, pulled the bus over, and personally took Martina into a roadside bush to pee. It says a lot

about the value of children in Latino cultures. It also says a lot about a culture that is – unlike ours here in the continental, English-speaking U.S. – still very Christian.

Here is one that is deeper than many of us might think, simply by reading it quickly: Mark 10:45: ⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” This quote appears in the context of James and John, who were among the first to commit as ardent apostles of Jesus. Here is the passage that appears just before this quote, and I have edited it: ³⁵ *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”* ³⁶ *And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”* ³⁷ *And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”* ³⁸ *Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* ³⁹ *And they said to him, “We are able.”* *And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized,* ⁴⁰ *but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”* *But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,* ⁴⁴ *and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.* These two apostles are fighting to be great, to be perhaps the most important of Jesus’ twelve apostles. They are

asking for honor, for glory. Jesus tells them that they don't understand what they are asking for: to drink the cup that he is going to have to drink means suffering and dying. He tells them that this will indeed happen. He tells them, however, that those who sit at his right and his left will have to earn it. He underscores this by saying that to be great you must be a servant. It is then that Jesus says that *the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*. That is the example of Christ. When our daughter, Martina again, did an undergraduate semester in Ghana, in Africa. One day, a man attacked her. She let out a cry and fought him. A couple of adults who happened to be within earshot came to her rescue. They grabbed the man and held him for the police. They did something that many Americans wouldn't do, they took a personal risk to help someone else. And yes, about 75% of the people in Ghana are Christians.

I'd like to end with a seemingly problematic quote. This is Matthew 5:16: ¹⁶*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven*. This seems to say that we should do good so that others will notice, so that we will shine brightly in a public way for doing so. This comes right after the Beatitudes, which Jesus declares during his longest sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. After the Beatitudes, Jesus says this: ¹³*"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness*

be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵ *Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.* ¹⁶ *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* The point, of course, is that Jesus isn't saying we should do good things to gain public glory. Rather, we should spread the word of what it means to have faith. We should be the salt and the light. We should inspire others. We should help other people see that to give glory to God, we must give to others of ourselves. A key reason to give is so that others won't just have their earthly needs met; rather, they will find faith and will be brought into the Kingdom of God. This is indeed a lesson that is repeated over and over and over in the New Testament. It is at the core of our faith to let our light shine so that others are given the greatest gift - and that is faith. Please pray with me.

God, inspire us to act, not out of a sense of responsibility, but rather let us be good to others because we, through our faith, have become servants. Let us drop what we are doing when we see someone who needs us. Let it be a deep part of ourselves. Let serving be who we are, not simply what we do. Let us serve your people by using every opportunity to bring them to you. Amen.