

# THE KINGDOM BUILDER



## STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

### When You Give, You *Will* Take Away

The statement, “When you give, you *will* take away” is an intriguing maxim, isn’t it? It at first blush almost sounds contradictory. Let me give you some simple examples to illustrate its truth. If you give food to a man, you will take away his hunger. If you give love to a child, you will take away his loneliness. If you give the gospel to a woman, you will take away her “lostness.” When you give work to a man, you take away a feeling of uselessness. When we are talking about giving someone “life essentials,” this does not seem like a particularly profound truth, does it? In the giving, there will always be something gained and something lost. In the above cases, what was gained was good and what was lost was bad.

What makes this statement anything but simple, however, is that once you go beyond “life essentials,” it is often a considerable challenge to be sure what you give is good and what you take away is bad. Without careful attention to this maxim, we could easily find ourselves giving a bad gift because it will take away more good from the recipient than it bestows. This is where God has a decided advantage on us. James 1:17 says, “Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...” God knows how to give the perfect gift. If we were all-knowing and all-loving too, we would be a lot better at this gift-giving than we are. But as mere mortals, this can prove to be a very tricky business.

Let me tell you a story. I live in a pretty blue-collar, interracial, tract home part of town. Last summer, I was standing in my driveway sweeping up some yard debris when up my road, driving very slowly comes a man and his young teenage son in a brand new, black, convertible, BMW sports car. I am not a car enthusiast at all, but even I could not help but notice this very *noticeable* car coming towards me especially since this is not the kind of car you ever see in our part of town. I had no idea

who they were, but I still smiled in their direction as they drove slowly towards our house.

Then, to my shock, they turn into my driveway and pull right up to me. I am now feeling real pressure because I am sure I should know them. Yet, seeing their faces clearly only confirms I have absolutely no clue who they are. The dad is sitting there smiling at me like we are old friends. (I just hate it, when this kind of thing happens to me!) I walked slowly around the car over to the driver side intentionally eyeing this shiny automotive masterpiece trying to buy myself a few extra seconds for my aging, mental hard drive to find the file on who this guy is that is sitting in my driveway smiling at me.

I walked over, smiled and said in a friendly tone, “Nice car.” He said, “Yep, just drove it off the lot. I bought it for my son who is turning sixteen next week. I am showing him what all it does.”

It was obvious. He didn’t know me from Adam. He simply pulled in my driveway to impress me, a total stranger, with the car he just bought for his son. His son, sitting in the only other seat in the car, didn’t look like he was more than thirteen. He

just sat there looking more overwhelmed than delighted by all this attention. I was so taken back with this spontaneous encounter that the most profound thing I could think to say in response was, “Well, this is a really nice first car.”

The dad beamed proudly. “Yep. Well, gotta run.” Putting the car in reverse, he backed out and drove off in the same direction he came – making it seem like he had driven over from wherever it was he lived for the express purpose of showing *me* the car. Now, with his mission accomplished, he was going back home.

As he drove off, I just stood there. What was that all about? And then as almost always is the case with me, I come up with the definitive response of what I should have said to this father, unfortunately, about three minutes too late. (If this ever happens again, however, I am ready!)

My response to this proud father should have been, “You realize that by giving your son this as his first car you are going to ruin him for the rest of his life.” I doubt my wise and insightful response would have made any difference to this dad, assuming he even understood what I meant by it. But I have thought often that I might have been the only person in this part of town that could have seen his gift for what it really was. Of all the driveways he could have pulled into to show off the car, he picks my driveway, and I was just too slow on the draw to think how to warn him. But maybe all this happened for your enlightenment, not his.

Back to my maxim. If you give your son a brand new BMW convertible for his first car, you will take away...what? This dad has likely taken away his son’s ability to ever be content with any less of a car. He probably has taken away his ability to set realistic controls on his spending, not buying what he cannot afford. He certainly has taken from his son the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of working hard and methodically saving up to buy his first car and appreciating what it really costs in time and money to own a car like this? He may have also taken away his son’s ability to appropriately connect a healthy work ethic to its corresponding material rewards. He might have taken away any sense of humility in him now that he owns the nicest car in both the student and

faculty high school parking lots. (I don’t know about you, but it would have been very hard for me as a sixteen year old to be driving a brand new, BMW convertible sports car and remain humble.)

You see, the first car this boy will ever own will be the finest car he will ever own. His “car life” going forward will always fall below the standard now set for him by his father.

Admittedly, this father was giving his son a very generous gift. In so doing, however, he was likely taking away several experiences that would be far more valuable to his son in the years ahead than the car. This gift, by my calculation, will produce for this young man a *net-loss life-effect* (i.e. more loss than gain). I have seen these kinds of gifts made many times by oblivious, well-intentioned, loving parents and doting grandparents who have given generous and loving gifts to their heirs that only ended up producing a *net-loss life-effect* for them.

Before we decide to give something to someone beyond “life essentials,” it would be in our and the recipient’s best interest to carefully consider this maxim and whether the gift we are considering might produce a *net-gain* or a *net-loss* in the *life-effect* on the recipient.

Remember the maxim, “When you give, you *will* take away.” Make every effort in your giving to ensure that your gifts do not unintentionally take away more than they provide.

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