The Question

In *Matthew 5:42*, Jesus says:

> “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.” *(ESV)*

This teaching often raises a serious and practical question:
Are we really obligated to give to everyone who asks — even if the person is irresponsible, wasteful, or has questionable intentions? Are we disobeying Christ if we say “no”?

The Context of Matthew 5:42

This verse appears in Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5–7), a section where He teaches about the heart of the law and the ethics of the Kingdom of God. In this passage (Matthew 5:38–48), Jesus is correcting the misuse of the “eye for an eye” principle. Rather than insisting on personal retaliation or rigid justice, He calls His followers to practice radical generosity, love, and mercy

— even toward enemies.

So when Jesus says, *“Give to the one who begs from you,”* He is teaching us to cultivate a generous heart that is not controlled by materialism, fear, or pride. But this does not mean indiscriminate giving without wisdom or discernment.

Is It Always Right to Give?

Short Answer: No. While we are called to be generous, Scripture also teaches us to be discerning stewards.

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1. You Cannot Give What You Do Not Have

It’s a simple truth: you can’t give what you don’t possess. If someone asks for something beyond your means, you are not under obligation to fulfill that request.

For example, if someone asks to borrow one million shillings and you don’t have that amount, you’re not breaking Jesus’ command by declining. The principle here is readiness to give, not unrealistic obligation.

> “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”
> — *2 Corinthians 9:7*

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2. Motives and Purpose Matter to God

Even God Himself does not respond to every request, especially when the motives are selfish or harmful.

> “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”
> — *James 4:3*

> “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”
> — *1 John 5:14*

If God doesn’t honor requests that are contrary to His will, we too should exercise wisdom when someone’s request clearly leads to sin, irresponsibility, or harm — such as funding addiction, illegal activity, or idolatry.

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3. Giving Should Be Guided by Wisdom and Stewardship

Jesus calls us to be wise stewards, not just generous givers. While Scripture emphasizes mercy, it also teaches us to assess needs responsibly.

> “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.”
> — *Matthew 7:6*

> “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.”
> — *Proverbs 19:17*

We’re encouraged to give to those in genuine need — especially the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (cf. Deuteronomy 10:18; James 1:27) — but not to enable sin, laziness, or destructive behavior.

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4. Habitual Irresponsibility Should Not Be Rewarded

The Bible also warns against supporting idleness or laziness.

> “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”
> *— 2 Thessalonians 3:10*

If someone repeatedly misuses what you give them or refuses to change irresponsible habits, it is not unloving to withhold further support. In fact, enabling poor behavior can be a disservice to them and dishonoring to God.

So What Did Jesus Mean by “Give to the One Who Asks”?

Jesus is not calling us to reckless giving or blind obligation.

Rather, He’s calling us to:

- Cultivate a generous, selfless heart
- Be free from greed and fear of lack
- Be open-handed with those in genuine need
- Avoid the instinct to withhold out of selfishness or judgmentalism

When someone asks with pure motives and legitimate need, and you are able to help, you should not turn them away. To do so when you can help is a sin of selfishness.

> “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”
> — *1 John 3:17*

> “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”
> — *Luke 12:15*

Conclusion: Discernment + Generosity = Biblical Giving

Jesus calls us to be generous, but also wise. Giving without love is meaningless (1 Corinthians 13:3), but giving without wisdom can be harmful. The goal is to reflect God’s heart — one of compassion, righteousness, and discernment.

When someone asks for help:

- Pray
- Discern the need
- Evaluate your ability
- Give generously — if it honors God and blesses the person

Final Encouragement

If someone truly needs help, and you’re in a position to provide it, don’t turn them away. It may be that God brought them to you for such a time as this — both for their benefit and your own spiritual growth.

> “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done.”
> — *Proverbs 19:17 (NIV)*

May the Lord give us hearts that are both generous and discerning.

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