

## **The Power of Giving**

*2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Matthew 22:15-22*

In Statistics Canada's latest survey on charitable giving [Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating] released in June 2009, the most frequently reported motivations for making donations were:

“ ... feeling compassion for those in need, wanting to help a cause in which the donor personally believes, and wanting to make a contribution to the community. Donors also give because they or someone they know has been personally affected by the cause of the organization or because of religious obligations or beliefs.”

At the beginning of the school year, the school secretary in one school routinely collected the money children beginning kindergarten brought for their lunch. This solved the problem of their losing the money. But for anxious five-year-olds, it took them a few days to catch on.

For the first two days, the secretary came into the room and asked, "Does anybody have any lunch money for me?" No child gave her any money

On the third day, before the secretary arrived, one little boy went hesitantly to the teacher and whispered, "Here is lunch money from my piggy bank for the poor lady nobody gives money to."

I believe this child gave out of compassion for someone he believed was in need. His giving even included some sacrifice on his part. We also give compassionately to some who have particular needs. We like to give to some causes we personally believe in. We often give because someone we know has been personally affected by a specific condition or issue. And we also give, don't we, because we believe God wants us to give generously out of our financial abundance.

There are at least three themes to understand as we think about the power of giving.

### **Theme One: We reap what we sow.**

A farmer knows that the kind of seed he sows in the ground is what he will reap sometime in the future. That means he won't get beans if he plants peas! If he wants high-grade peanuts, he must plant high-grade peanuts. And if we want lush green grass on our lawns, we need to seed the ground with plenty of high-grade grass seed and not dandelion seed! (We may get some dandelions even if we don't want them, but that's another story!)

In a similar way, if we want God's blessings, we need to plant the right seeds. In other words, our attitude before God and toward others matters. This was part of Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:37-38. Hear it from the *Good News Bible*:

“Do not judge others [that is, “Don't be judgmental” or “Quit being so critical”], and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you. \_Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands -- all that you can hold. *The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.*”

The picture here is of a farmer in Jesus' day with a large apron-like fold in the front of his garment for carrying seed. And the more widely he sows the seed, the greater his harvest. He will be rewarded with **a full measure, a generous harvest poured into the fold of his garment – all he can hold.** It is a principle in life and in Scripture that we reap according to how we sow -- that our actions will return upon us in time and **the same measure we use** for others will be **measured back** to us.

Think about that. We reap how and what we sow. If we judge others harshly, we will ourselves be judged harshly. If we forgive others graciously, we will also be forgiven. If we condemn others unmercifully, we will find ourselves condemned too. If we live to give, God will see to it that we receive; but if we live only to get, we may be rich in material things but we will be empty-handed of what truly matters in life and of the spiritual blessings God also wants to give us. This principle applies not only to our giving of money but also to the giving of ourselves in the ways we are able to care for and serve others. This echoes God's second great command: that we are to love others as we love ourselves.

Sharing with others is like sowing seed: the more generously we sow, the more we will reap. But this is *not* a promise that someone who sends in \$7 will get \$77 in return. Jesus does not mean that. I believe television preachers and others who manipulate both the Scripture and their audience will be in for a rude awakening one day.

Listen again to 2 Corinthians 9:8 in the *Good News Bible*: “And God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause.” This is an affirmation of God's way of outgiving his people. It is a statement of conviction. Because God is able to supply our needs, we have the spiritual freedom to give generously out of our means without fearing that we will deprive ourselves or our family by responding to the needs of others.

**Theme One: We reap what we sow. Theme Two: Cheerful and generous giving pleases God.**

Verse 7 says clearly: “Each of you must give as you have

made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion,  
for God loves a cheerful giver.”

A young boy had two apples. His mother told him to share one with his sister -- and to be generous and give her the larger one. He paused for a moment and said, “Why don’t you give her the apples and ask *her* to be generous.” Being generous does not necessarily come easily, does it?

Delight in giving comes from those with grateful hearts for what they have received from God and from

others. Delight in giving comes from those who want to share their joy and what they have with others.

Delight in giving comes from those who take time to think the situation through and then make a clear

decision about what they will give. I like how *The Message Bible* puts verse 7: “Take plenty of time to

think and make up your own mind what you will give -- that will protect you against sob stories and

arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.”

God loves to see us smiling as we give. God loves to see our eager willingness to give. In 2 Corinthians 8:12 (*GNB*), we are reminded that “If [we] are eager to give, God will accept [our] gift on the basis of what [we] have to give, not on what [we don’t have].” That is significant, of course, because we can’t give what we don’t have.

In the Stats Canada Survey I mentioned earlier, people were asked why they did not give more money to charities and non-profit organizations. Among other reasons, significant numbers of donors indicated they did not like the ways in which requests for donations were made.

No one wants to feel manipulated into giving. And no one wants to give under pressure. Giving is always more joyful and even more generous when the purposes and goals of our giving are carefully considered and thought through. Each person, the Scripture says, should give what he or she has decided in his or her heart to give.

**Theme One: We reap what we sow.**

**Theme Two: Cheerful and generous giving pleases God.**

**Theme Three: Generous giving creates a chain reaction of praise and love.**

We read and heard this morning the following from 2 Corinthians 9:12-14:

“For this service you perform not only meets the needs of God’s people, but also produces an outpouring of gratitude to God. <sup>13</sup> And because of the proof which this service of yours brings, many will give glory to God for your loyalty to the gospel of Christ, which you profess, and for your generosity in sharing with them and everyone else. <sup>14</sup> And so with deep affection they will pray for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown you.”

In this chain reaction, here are some of the results of generous giving.

Generous giving supplies the needs of God’s people.

Generous giving overflows in expressions of thanks to God from us for what God has given us and from those whose needs we have helped to meet.

Generous giving demonstrates our commitment to our faith in Jesus and to the love God has for all the world, which we are quick to profess.

Once our commitment is clear, we do what we can with a grateful and cheerful heart to meet the needs of God’s people and all the people God loves in the world.

In the context of today’s Scripture from 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is talking about a relief offering for the famine-stricken church in Jerusalem [Acts 20]. In Chapter 8, Paul reminds the Corinthians that he is not ordering them to give the offering against their will. Instead he outlines a stimulus package to encourage their love for those in need. We know a little about stimulus packages, don’t we? Our federal and provincial governments have set up their packages to stimulate the economy – programs that are meant to help those who are in financial need because of job loss. We hope these will do what they are intended to do. But Paul’s stimulus package is different. He tells the Corinthians how the Macedonians, though “very poor” themselves, gave out of their own poverty to help Christians in Jerusalem who were even worse off than they were. Paul tells the Corinthians about the enthusiasm and joy the Macedonians had for giving – “they begged us and pleaded for the privilege of having a part in helping God’s people [there].” That joy is part of the delight that encourages the Corinthians to give as well. But Paul also tells them that the most significant motivation to give comes from the gracious generosity of Jesus Christ [8:4]. Rich as Jesus was, Paul says, Jesus gave it all away so that everyone, including them, would become rich in the grace and mercy and love of God.

\_We usually think of the simple (even poor) family Jesus came from. But do you realize what Paul means when he writes about how rich Jesus was and all that he gave away for everyone, including us! Listen to this early church hymn from Philippians 2:4-8 about both Jesus' attitude and about all he gave up for everyone, including us:

“<sup>4</sup>And look out for one another's interests,  
not just for your own.

<sup>5</sup>\_The attitude you should have  
is the one that Christ Jesus had:

<sup>6</sup>He always had the nature of God,  
but he did not think that by force  
he should try to remain equal with God.

<sup>7</sup>Instead of this, of his own free will,  
he gave up all he  
had,

and took the nature of a servant.

He became like a human being  
and appeared in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup>He was humble and walked the path of obedience  
all the way to death—his death on the cross.

What remarkable humility! God the Son willingly surrendered his prerogatives of deity to die as a human being for the forgiveness of our sins. And that is why the Macedonians were so grateful and joyful. And that is what motivated them to be “extremely generous in their giving” to others in need. And that is what Paul was reminding the Corinthians about. And I wonder if Paul would also ask the Canadian Church – the church in Toronto and even our own congregation – what motivates us toward generosity? Is our love and

gratitude to God grounded in what Jesus Christ did for us? Does Jesus' gracious generosity to us and to the world also motivate us to give generously for others?

There is an old fable about an elderly man who spent all his spare time planting fig trees.

"You're a fool, old man," the villagers would tease. "Why are you planting fig trees? You're going to die before you'll ever bite into a single fig!"

"You are quite right," replied the old man. "Yet I have spent many happy hours sitting under fig trees and eating their fruit. Those trees were planted by others. Why shouldn't I make sure that others know the same enjoyment I have had?"

Friends – the power of giving involves being keenly aware that we will reap what we sow. If we give away little, we will receive little. But if we give away our lives in gratitude to God by helping to meet the needs of others and telling them the good news of God's love for them, we'll find life given back. But not merely given back -- given back with God's bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is God's way.

Generous giving is part of God's call for all who are members of Christ's Church – including those of us at Oriole-York Mills Church. And our generosity means our community of faith continues to be a place reflecting God's love for our members and also for others in this community, in this city and around the world. Our cheerful and thoughtful generosity from the heart means we will continue to support our church, local service organizations, and people and places in need in the wider church and around the world through our Mission and Community Service outreach as well as through other ministries of in Jesus' name that have touched our hearts.

Our gratitude to God and our "loyalty to the gospel of Christ which [we] profess" should also cause a powerful chain reaction of love -- in inviting neighbours and friends to join us as we journey together with God in Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. That's why we have Pastor Val with us to work with our young people. That's why we are developing a website to encourage people to connect with Christ and join us on that journey of hope and faith. We are here on Bayview Avenue to find our place in God's mission of healing love, of merciful forgiveness, of justice in this broken world and of caring stewardship for a fractured Earth.

So let us sow generously – with our hearts filled with a grace and love and joy that comes only from God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Let us be known as a generous and loving people. Let us be known as people who are continuously responding to the generous grace and love of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

May this be so for me and for you

Rev. Chris Miller

October 25, 2009