

## Circle of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:6-12  
November 12, 2023

First Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Dave Carlson

A little booklet showed up in my inbox last week. It's titled "A Love Worth Giving to You..." by Max Lucado. I actually got two books – one for me and Yuri and one for my mom. Thank you to the church member – and I know who it is – who gave us this book of Advent Devotionals, which is already producing fruit. The title, "A Love Worth Giving ...," fits so well with this year's Stewardship Campaign – "The Heart of Giving."

And not only the title, but also the devotionals inside. I happened to open the book last week while thinking about this sermon, and here's what I read:

"We delight in giving our loved ones extravagant gifts .... Whatever the gift might be, we want it to be a bountiful expression of our love. ... Why? Because that's what love does. It puts the beloved before itself.

... And that's what extravagant giving is all about," says Lucado, "– love, God's love, a love that knows no bounds, no limits, no end. ... A love worth giving to others. ... There's a problem, though" he says. "How can you give something that you never truly received?"

How can you give something that you never truly received? Wow; now that's a question worth pondering. And it just happens to be a question the Apostle Paul addresses in today's New Testament lesson.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, "The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

Well, that gets to the heart of Lucado's question: "How can you give something that you never truly received?" The world says, "The more I receive, the more I can give," right? But God says, "The more you give, the more you will receive."

That's a hard spiritual lesson to understand, let alone put into practice.

But if it's true – and God says it is – then we better try to understand it – understand how it can be that the more we give the more we receive, particularly when there are those in this world who take and take and take, and never really give, not as they could.

Understanding how it works that the more you give the more you will receive starts by what Paul says about how you give. "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind," says Paul, "not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Think about what you give to the church – your time, talents and treasure, as they say. You can't cheerfully give a little of what you have. That's being stingy. There's nothing cheerful about holding back what you could give. There's nothing cheerful about sitting at home when you could be serving the Lord and fellowshiping with church members and friends.

And yet, in a world of limited resources, limited time, limited abilities, how do you cheerfully give what you have when there's no guarantee you won't need it for yourself?

That's the next question Paul addresses. Paul says, "... God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

To understand and come to believe that God does, indeed, provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you always have enough of everything, let's flip that first statement around, where it says, "God loves a cheerful giver." Let's flip it around so it says, "A cheerful giver knows and feels the love of God."

In other words, giving is its own reward, when it comes to knowing and feeling God's love and all the blessings that flow from it.

A certain banker<sup>1</sup> discovered this one day when writing a check to buy an air-conditioner for a homeless shelter. As he was making out the check, he started praying and thinking about the joy God was feeling as he gave to this worthy cause. He started thinking about the joy of the homeless men who would sleep in the air-conditioned room. He started thinking about the joy that would wash over them as they felt God's love, maybe for the first time ever.

And what welled up in him, as he prayed, was laughter. He was so overwhelmed with joy that he laughed. It was spontaneous laughter, born of the joy that was being experienced by God, by the homeless men, and by the Banker himself, all because of one small gift.

Giving is its own reward, as we come to know and feel God's love. And what more do we truly need in life than the love of God? Isn't God the source and provider of all we need?

That's what Paul says. "As it is written," says Paul, God "scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." In other words, all giving – all the grace and generosity and abundance in the world – begins with God, comes from God, who, Paul says, "... will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity...."

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Johnson, VP, Talent Acquisition at The Bancorp, West Chester, Pennsylvania, United States.

The point is, if we give what we are able to give – of our time, talents and treasure – then God will make sure we have it to give, that we will not suffer from the lack of it when giving of our financial resources, not be depleted when giving of our time and energy, not be embarrassed or feel less-than when giving of our gifts and talents.

In fact, when we give our time, talents and treasure, God multiplies them through a circle of giving, a circle of giving that God initiates, a circle of giving that we participate in, a circle of giving that we help to perpetuate. Your generosity, says Paul, “will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for ... this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.”

Paul is saying that when you give, it causes people to draw closer to God, it energizes and invigorates a spirit of blessing, and it shines light on God’s grace, which is embodied and reflected in your giving. People drawing closer to God, blessings in abundance for you and others, and God glorified through you – that is what giving is all about.

So, let your faith be alive, and cheerful, and abundant this Stewardship season, as you write down on your 2024 pledge card the time-talent-and-treasure gifts you are committing to the Lord.

And in keeping with our campaign theme “The Heart of Giving,” whatever you give, let it come from your heart.

When you give in this way, you become the heart of giving, you sow or plant the blessings of God for the benefit of others, and you harvest bountiful blessings and prayers of thanksgiving, because who you are, as a faithful and cheerful giver in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, in every age you call certain persons to defend against oppression, tyranny and evil. Since our founding as a nation, countless American men and women have stepped forward to defend our country, and to liberate those held captive.

Today we thank all our veterans – those who rest in honored glory, those who still suffer from the wounds of war, and those who, with us, enjoy the blessing of living in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

We are thankful for the selfless sacrifice of these veterans and of their families. Help us to remember them, to pray for them, and to care for them.

We pray, too, for those in our family of faith in need of your healing touch and your strength, and for the family members who provide them support and care.

We thank you, O God, for all your angels among us, those who give and serve in the spirit of Christ. And we thank you for the gifts of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. May we continue to keep these rights available to all.

In God's most holy name we pray, using the words of our Lord Jesus, who taught us to pray together saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**