

**2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 8-15
Creekside COB
November 7, 2004**

“Delightful Givers”

It is Saturday morning. I put on jeans and sweatshirt and head to the office to put finishing touches on the sermon. In Dunlap, the traffic is backed up at the light. Ahead, I see commotion. Probably an accident. As the line moves, I realize it's worse than I thought—men holding plastic buckets, soliciting money from cars waiting on the red light. Blaze-orange traffic cones line the center of the road, presumably to protect the collectors. I know better. The cones are to prevent lane changes by drivers who don't want to give.

I have nothing against the organizations that get the proceeds. I do have a problem with traffic light fundraising. The Lion's Club members shouldn't be doing impersonations of tollbooths. I'll admit it—I look for escape routes through business parking lots, alleys, or, fishing for my wallet, I point to the light. "Sorry. The light is green."

When trapped by a red light, I dig in my pocket, pull out some lint and seven cents, and toss it in. Mr. Buckets hands me a mini-rol of Lifesavers, a token of appreciation. But I'm not stupid. The ten-cent Lifesavers are given to produce guilt for my seven-cent donation. If I say, "I'm sorry-- I have no money on me," I get a, "Sure you don't," look. I can only live with myself by reasoning, "If I worked for an organization that got its funds from cars stuck at red lights, I wouldn't take it."

Everyone must do as they have made up their minds, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). This is Paul, writing to Christians at Corinth. The mother church in Jerusalem had fallen upon hard times, and Paul made an appeal to the churches he had founded, encouraging them to give generously to help the church where it

all began. Earlier, the Corinthians contributed generously. Since they were financially stronger than the other churches, he appealed to their generosity again. Listen to Paul's counsel in Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*:

I want you to take plenty of time to think it over, 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.

It's time to discuss funding ministry for another year. Churches will be asked to do their best for God's kingdom. Some make the appeal with hot-off-the-press programs from denominational headquarters. Consultants manage detailed stewardship drives. Pastors design clever sermons to motivate increased giving. Some churches do as they've always done. "Here's the budget. It's a little less than last year. Do what you can. Amen."

Einstein said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over, expecting a different result." It's giving season in church, and when the numbers are tallied the results will be nothing to cheer about. Years of sermons, stewardship programs, drives, campaigns, plastic buckets, and dog and pony shows, have immunized us. We know what's coming and we tune it out! So where is the delightful giving that God loves so much?

No one can tell you what to give. For the disciple of Jesus, the tithe, ten percent is the starting point. The board believes it is important to model this practice, but it's not a legalism. Not everyone is at this point, and it isn't a discipline one can be "pushed" into, but must "grow" into. The reference point for giving is between you and God-no sliding scale, formula, or percentage. Money given to the church isn't dues or an obligation or capital added to your files in heaven. Giving is the result of relationship-a decision between you and your Maker. The Psalmist expressed it in a question: "What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me?"

Dog owners know how fast some dogs gobble down their food. It is a leftover instinct from a million years ago. Food was

scarce. If Rover didn't eat his kill in a hurry, another animal would. Tell your dog there is no need to hurry. "Slow down and enjoy your food."

Someone observed that humans are born with a sense of scarcity. We hoard and accumulate and protect things. Among the first words a child says is, "MINE!" We cling to our stuff because we think it is a limited commodity. Before I give I must know what will be left for me." In the church, the scarcity instinct is a vision killer. New ideas are blocked with, "Money is tight. It costs too much. We can't afford it."

"Each one must make up their mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion," Paul said. "God delights in a cheerful giver." Christian conversion involves a move from instinct to habit-from an attitude of scarcity to abundance. There is a marvelous economy in the Christian life. As we give ourselves to God and others, we find that we are filled, not diminished. The more love we give, the more love comes back.

A student home for the holidays was walking down a city street with his father, discussing issues that confronted the church. They headed for a pay phone to call home and see if they should get a pizza for dinner. Before they got to the phone, a homeless man approached and asked, "Can you spare any change?" The father reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of change. "Here, take what you need." The man smiled, took all the change, thanked him and went his way. Father and son headed for the booth and realized they had given away all their change and didn't have a quarter for a call. They called to the homeless man and said, "We forgot that we need to make a call. Can you give us back one of our quarters?" The man smiled again, got the change from his pocket and said, "Here, take what you need." Change was all he had, but he had an attitude of abundance, not scarcity. Grace provided it, and grace moved him to share it.

When you get down to it, all of us are beggars before God. We can't count the times God has said, "Here, take what you need." The number can't be numbered, but we remember. We remember

being shown the way when there was no way. We remember answered prayers that came at the right time, and in unexpected ways.

What is it worth-all the blessings that made your life meaningful? What is it worth-all the helping hands, every loving gesture, every precious day of your precious God-given life? What is it worth? What about the church, this body of Christ you are grafted into-go figure-- what is it worth?

Rent and utilities	\$ 1,300 a month
Church school materials	\$ 2,500 a year
Sunday bulletins	12 cents each
The Visitor	\$ 1 per copy
Piano tuning	\$ 300 a year
Office equipment upkeep	\$ 900 a year
Twenty acres of prime land	\$ 150,000

Musicians who practice hours each week to enrich our worship--

Moving moments of worship when we experience God's presence--

All the hours invested by disciples of this church, who dare to dream, who dedicate themselves to bring dreams to reality by building a new facility and building a new body of believers in the faith that God will provide--

The warmth that swells the souls of those who are anointed and prayed for in worship--

The people in whose eyes you see the face of Jesus--

Dedicated Sunday school teachers who teach your children well-

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Saints who kept vigil with you by the bedside a loved one taking their last breath--

Brothers and sisters who stayed by your side as you struggled through the dark night of the soul--

Being in the portal between life and death, knowing that the prayers of others pulled you through--

Friends of faith who doubled your joy in good times, and halved your pain in times of loss by carrying your hurt in their hearts--

Belonging to an eternal family that gathers on Sunday to model the quality of life that will be ours in the Kingdom--

Priceless!

The ushers are not at the exits with buckets and Lifesavers. No sob stories. No arm-twisting. God doesn't want your gift given reluctantly or by obligation. Spend it somewhere else. What shall you give to the Lord for all his goodness to you? It's your call-- its between you and God. For your sake, for our church's sake, for God's sake, give. God loves it when the givers delight in the giving.