

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

◆ **Intro:** In our denomination of churches, called the Christian Reformed Church in North America, we have a system of giving that enables lots of other ministries to exist that a single church, or even a handful of churches couldn't do. It's called the Ministry Shares. The idea is that if churches, like their people, would tithe on the money that comes in to them, there would be a constant flow of resource that would enable more love in action than we could do alone. Essentially some Christians helping other Christians serve the world in need. So, like the conscientious member of Sunrise who sets aside ten percent of their paycheck each time to help us make our budget, or to support some other Kingdom cause, the church itself does the same thing. (About \$32,000 of our budget for 2020 is for these ministry shares.) Material provision is a significant need in the world. But I want to share some secrets today that truly add joy to the essential task of sharing your material wealth with others.

◆ **1. When it comes to joy-filled giving, it's never just the stuff.** The stuff, you know, the games, the presents, the pile of loot as some call it – have you ever noticed that while getting it does bring a moment of excitement or thrill, that feeling never lasts very long? Especially if the gift came without someone's heart in it. Think of it like this: you find a box of homemade cookies on your desk at work with a little card. Right away you know that someone thought of you, on purpose, and cared enough to make them and bring them over. Now it just wouldn't

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

be the same if you found a package of Oreo's on your desk, would it? That is, unless they happen to be, say double stuffed, and that just happens to be your favorite kind of cookie of all times. Then you know there is more meaning involved, or what we sometimes call "love." Somebody gave you something of themselves, and that, even when it's simple, is a lot!

◆**A.** The most meaningful giving involves the heart of a real person. That's what people mean when they say "it's the thought that counts." There was a man listening to Christian radio one day and felt convicted to change his ways as a husband and a father. He saw that he'd been pretty wrapped up in his own achievement and success and had taken his wife for granted for way too long, so on the way home he bought a bouquet of the prettiest flowers he could find. Upon arrival, just to be special, he rang the bell to surprise her on the front porch. When she opened the door and saw him standing there, home from work on time, holding the flowers out to her, she burst into sobs. "What's wrong, dear?" he asked bewildered. Between sobs she spurted out, "First Jonny flushed his slippers down the toilet, again! Then the cat barfed up hairballs and yuck on our bed. While I was cleaning it up, the chicken in the oven got burnt. And now you come home drunk!" In this particular case, I guess what the other person thinks the thought was also counts a lot!

◆**B.** Did you know that the expression of love we're talking about right now (in genuine joyful giving) is one of the reasons why God

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

doesn't fix all your problems instantly? Love is one of the reasons God doesn't solve all our problems instantly. I suppose like me, some of you have sometimes wondered why God doesn't fix more troubles than he does. I mean, why doesn't he make us more like holy robots? Sometimes I think I might prefer that. No more battles with sin, no more giving in to my false self and choosing, or speaking, or behaving poorly. Why not just program a believer in Jesus to now do everything right?

◆ The problem with a robot is that it has no feelings, volition, no choices or willingness. These are what persons have. These also make possible the miracle we call love. *Love is voluntary, chosen self-giving relationship.* This is what only a person can really do. At the end of one of the early Terminator films, I think it's Sara Connor's voice that reflects on the fact the robot that came back from the future to protect her, and that gave it's life for her in a vat of molten steel, could learn to love and sacrifice self. Her closing indictment is a voice-over that asks "If machines can learn this, why can't we?" It's a good point, but a false premise of course because machines can't learn it. It takes humans for there to be love.

◆ **C.** Christian theologians describe this when they say that we are "embodied souls". Yes we are physical creatures. But we are also "soul" creatures in the image of God, with a spirit knowing right and wrong, sensing meaning, reason, and emotion. It

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

follows then that for giving to be joyful, or meaningful we need to attach it to our hearts, our love.

◆What is so “joy -full” about giving from the heart, or from the soul? Suppose we all had perfectly equal wealth. One might make the argument that we should all just keep what we have. That there would no longer be any reason to give. And by that same deficient reasoning, we would conclude that if we had less than another, it was certainly not our place to be the giver, right? The the “haves” in the world owe “have-nots”, or so we imagine. Now let me show you the opposite example in our text again.

◆“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.” 2

Corinthians 8:2-4, NIV.

◆Did you catch that? Here the “have-nots” are the ones giving! What does that tell you about their souls? The Christians in Macedonia were poor themselves but when they heard of others in need they were all over it! It doesn’t follow the rules of logic, now does it? They might easily have said “Hey we’re in no position to give. If we do we’ll just have to have someone turn around and rescue us!” But these folks actually cause themselves hardship because of their generosity. Have any of us *ever* done that?

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

◆ Have you ever played that Christmas gift exchange game where everyone is supposed to buy a \$5 gift, and wrap it up. Then you pass a basket around the circle and roll dice. Anyone who rolls a seven can take a gift from the pile. By the time the gifts are gone, someone usually has 3-4 of them. Others have none. Then the dice rollers start taking from anyone with more than one. Eventually everyone gets a gift but there's a lot of *taking* going on usually based on the external appearance. Then everyone opens their gift. The person next to you opens a one pound chocolate bar! Woot! You open your gift and it's a color coordinated hanky pack. That's when the thought occurs to you: "I'd have been better off buying myself something I wanted for \$5 and keeping it." But you're missing the point, aren't you? You're thinking about economy when the point is community.

◆ **D.** When it comes to joy-filled giving we must not get caught up in economy at the expense of community. Real giving is really about community. Case in point: this is why we don't just buy and provide Angel Tree gifts. We also went down to Trinity Mission and wrapped them with the family members. Therein lies the secret I was talking about earlier. When you thoughtfully give to a person rather than merely provide a service or a need in general, you create community and love. That's where the real joy comes in. Thoughtless giving leaves the soul untouched.

◆ **E.** Let's return to God's concern to be interacting with us as an example. God isn't merely interested in the transfer of blessing

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

from him to us. He wants our personal involvement, -relationship!

And so he voluntarily makes some of his goodness dependent on us, our actions as well as our reasons for our actions!

◆ Forgiveness and power over specific sins require not only that we name them but also that we ask.

◆ *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9, NIV.*

◆ Sometimes God's release of blessing requires involvement of other believers!

◆ *"And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:15, 16, NIV.*

◆ Sometimes deliverance involves serious pursuit of God, and by now you know why.

◆ *"Sacrifice thank-offerings to God, fulfil your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me." Psalms 50:14, 15, NIV.*

◆ Scripture tells us our rewards in heaven are affected by our choices and actions here on earth!

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

◆ *"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." Luke 6:35, NIV.*

◆ And the reward God gives when you give is also affected by your *reasons*. Again, we've returned to the state of our heart, haven't we?

◆ *"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." Matthew 6:1, 2, NIV.*

◆ **2. Some implications and applications:**

◆ **A. When you fill a need get to know the people if possible.** It's great to give funding to a cause, but consider how you might add relationship. Write a letter, correspond with the people you help.

◆ **B. When you help someone, give them opportunity to do the same thing.** This not only gives them dignity but it furthers relationship. Most folks don't want to feel like a parasite; someone who feeds off of others and contributes nothing. So let's say you're going to fix something for a person. Fix it with them

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

helping you, perhaps. I've often thought this while we as a church have been on mission work trips. (Incidentally, it's time we started sending teams again. All we need is an organizer who feels moved by God to help get it on our calendar, so start wondering if it's you!)

◆ To illustrate, here's a picture of a small fish in a shark's mouth! The remora is a small suckerfish known to hitchhike on larger animals. In exchange for temporary room and board, remoras keep their hosts devoid of parasites, dead skin, and food scraps. We don't call these parasites because each is an actual benefit to the other.

◆ **C. Involve your God in your giving.** Involve God, invoke God. Tie him in somehow. Find an opportunity to help someone you're helping know that Jesus is the reason behind your action. When you pay the way for someone ask them if you can pray for them. Or simply tell them your gift is from God, you're just the messenger. Write a note to this extent when you leave a overly generous tip. Name your savior somehow. It is him that we are doing this for, is it not?

◆ **Conclusion:** Verse 9 sums it up.

◆ "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9, NIV.

◆ God, Jesus, put aside his riches, becoming poor (he's talking about the incarnation, Christmas!) so that we could become rich

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

(he's talking about eternal life, life in the Kingdom of God!)

Knowing that, "excel in the grace of giving." (Read v7 out loud).

◆ On September 3, 1939, German troops invaded Bielsko, Poland. A fifteen year-old girl, Gerda Weissman, and her family survived in a Jewish ghetto until June of 1942. That's when Gerda was torn from her mother, kicking and screaming. Her mother, Helene, was sent to a death camp. Gerda would spend three years in a Nazi concentration camp, followed by a 350-mile death march that she somehow survived. By the time she was liberated by American troops, Gerda was a sixty-eight-pound skeleton. And in what must rank as one of the most improbable love stories ever, Gerda actually married the soldier who found her, Lieutenant Kurt Klein.

◆ There are six glass towers at the Holocaust Memorial in Boston, Massachusetts, representing the six extermination camps where six million Jews lost their lives. Five towers tell the story of unconscionable cruelty and unimaginable suffering, but the sixth tower stands as a testimony to hope. Inscribed on it is a short story titled "One Raspberry," written by Gerda Weissman Klein.

◆ Ilse, a childhood friend of mine, once found a raspberry in the camp and carried it in her pocket all day to present to me that night on a leaf. Imagine a world in which your entire possession is one raspberry and you gave it to your friend.

◆ The true measure of a gift is what you gave up to give it. One raspberry isn't much unless it's all you have! Then it's not next to nothing; it's everything. The same is true of two billion dollars or

MY MONEY OR MY LIFE, 2COR.8:14

Joy of Giving #4

two mites. Big dreams often start with small acts of kindness. It's powerful when we're on the receiving end, but it's even more wonderful when we're on the giving end.