

FINDING THE SOURCE, 2COR.8-9

The Joy of Giving #5

◆ **Intro:** I know it's January but there are traditionally 12 days of Christmas, the last one is tomorrow which is known as Epiphany. This holiday recalls the appearance or epiphany of the star the Wisemen saw that lead them to the Christ. So one last thought on the season of giving, or the Joy of Giving as we've been calling our Christmas study. Most of you are familiar with Charles Dicken's well-known tale, A Christmas Carol, which is not a song but a story of a crabby old miser named Scrooge, who gets visited by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future. It terrifies the man, and upon waking on Christmas morning, he is so grateful that he becomes a decidedly happy, and giving man. The story is not in the Bible, in case you were wondering, but several biblical principles appear in the story:

- ◆ 1) It is more blessed to give than receive. (Acts 20:35)
- ◆ 2) It is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 19:23)
- ◆ 3) God has special attention for the poor (Lk6:20). And so on...

◆ In this last part of the study I hope to demonstrate that the closer we walk with God, the more fun generosity becomes. Which brings us to our first observation.

◆ **1. To really find joy in giving, I need to find joy in God.**
(8:5) People all over the world just experienced the Christmas tradition of giving each other gifts. Kids and parents alike have ripped excitedly through colorfully decorated packages to find

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surprising new things, toys, gadgets, clothes, jewelry, etc. And there was great fun involved in the whole deal. However, fun and joy may be defined differently. Giving is a wonderful thing to do. For example, God says that we were created in part to do good things!

◆ *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10, NIV.*

◆ However, it is possible to give or do good things in such a way that they are not actually good at all. And we find that at these times the joy is missing too, or short-lived. For example, if we give for the wrong reasons (like to make ourselves look good, or to obligate someone to us, or grudgingly, or in an effort to make up for guilt we feel, or to outshine others) –give for any of these reasons and it's really not that much fun in the end. Maybe you've felt this from time to time:

◆ The thought of gifting someone brings up some anxiety. When exchanging gifts with someone you worry about fairness, or whether your gift will look adequate. Or maybe hearing about someone in need actually agitates you. The church asks for a contribution and for a moment it kinda ticks you off. Or lets say your spouse wants to give someone way too much in your book. Or that cashier asks if you'd like to add a donation to St. Jude to your bill and you think, "Great! I really don't want to do that right now. But if I say

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no I seem uncaring. But I'm not uncaring. I tithe through my church a few hundred bucks each week! But I don't want to look bad so I guess I better give 'em a buck." I'm guessing these are pretty common. There's not much joy in it that way, is there?

◆ But whenever we give to others in imitation of God, or like God does it, joy is a natural overflow. It's not hard to conceive, after all God is the most joyful being of all of us! So it stands to reason.

◆ Verse 1: "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches." 2 Corinthians 8:1, NIV.

◆ Notice how Paul describes their giving as a grace that started with God?

◆ *Mike Erre, in the December 7 entry of Men of Integrity (November/December 2008) writes* "My wife and I refinanced our house and cashed out what was (for us) a large sum of money. I spent several weeks dreaming of ways to spend it. It was near Christmas, and I had been studying the birth of Jesus and what it would have meant to those who heard about it first. As I was praying and prepping for the messages I would teach in the weeks of December, God brought into my mind that to take this whole "love thy neighbor" thing seriously, my wife and I should give away more money than we spend on ourselves this

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Christmas. (Although I didn't realize it at the time, God had placed the same message in my wife's heart.)

◆ With tears of great joy and freedom, my wife and I agreed and then proceeded to ask the dangerous and wonderful question, "Okay, Lord, who's going to get all this money?"

◆ We had a blast giving it away and living the revolution of Christmas as we celebrated the giving of God's Son—what Paul called "a gift too wonderful for words!"

◆ **2. The Joy of Giving comes in giving up the fear of needing.** Many folks tend to think that it would be easier to give if we just had more. This of course is untrue and statistically proven so. Poorer citizens tend to give a greater percentage to charity than the wealthier. In fact, as income goes up, giving goes down. One report I read showed what we in America like to call "poverty level" people giving around 5-6% while each increasing level of income gave less and less, with those making over \$100,000 a year giving barely over 1% to others. Still we tend to think that if we had more we could give more happily. More does not make me generous. Security makes me generous. It isn't the "more" in the equation. It's the security we falsely think that the more will give us. If we were secure, and believed that our needs would be taken care of –then we could give joyfully. Or, if we did not care so much about our needs; if we were open to accept sufferings, and deprivations because other things were more important to us (like being close to people,

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deep friendships, meaningful moment, spiritual growing, knowing our life is loved and purposed -sound like security to you?) –then too we could give joyfully since here as well we are not concerned so much with our own provision.

◆ Again our answer to the predicament of giving lies in the character of God.

◆ “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” 2 Corinthians 9:8-10, NIV.

◆ Do you want to be a more giving person? Ask God to supply you so that you can. Ask him to be your supply. Ask him for the gift of trusting him. John DeVries, founder of Mission India speaks often on college campuses and gives the students a challenge. He challenges them to support Mission India, and because all supply is of God, to ask God for some funding to give. So he says, if your willing, stand with me right now, right here and lets pray that God will give you \$20 in the next week in some extra way –that they could give to Mission India. Not money they already have, but a supply from God, unexpected money.

◆ I say, lets do it! if you are willing to ask God to supply you this week with \$20 extra, stand right now and we will pray

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for him to do just that. And we'll send all of it to Mission India. Not only will it show us that God can supply, but it will be an encouragement to Mission India as well.

Whatdoyasay?

◆What is beautiful about all this is that you and I can learn to give up the fear of needing, so as to become generous, as we come to believe that God will supply us!

◆*"I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."* Philippians 4:18-20, NIV.

◆2Cor.8:3 This verse makes the point, doesn't it? The Macedonians were poor! But God enabled them to give more than they had! They were giving beyond their means. Whereas many of us are living beyond our means! Most of America spends more than they have and live in debt. And this too is why we are not more joyful in being generous. Do not spend more than you have, and you will cut back on anxiety and stress! So lets learn to give beyond our means instead of live beyond our means.

◆Stephen G. Post, professor of bioethics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, headed a comprehensive study of altruism where he evaluated 50 scientific studies of people who regularly volunteered their time. One of the studies, from Cornell

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University, spent 30 years following 427 women who were married and had children. Researchers found that only 36 percent of women who regularly volunteered had experienced a major illness, while 52 percent of those who never volunteered had a major illness. Post writes, "Surprisingly, they found that numbers of children, education, class, and work status did not affect longevity."

◆ Other studies indicated that those who volunteered their time lived longer than those who didn't. In fact, people who volunteered frequently had a 44 percent reduction in early death when compared to non-volunteers. Scientists also identified precise areas of the brain that are highly active during empathic and compassionate emotions. Commenting on these areas, Post said: This is extremely important. This is the care-and-connection part of the brain. It is a very different part of the brain than is active with romantic love. These brain studies show this profound state of joy and delight that comes from giving to others. It doesn't come from any dry action—where the act is out of duty in the narrowest sense, like writing a check for a good cause. It comes from working to cultivate a generous quality— from interacting with people. There is the smile, the tone in the voice, the touch on the shoulder. We're talking about altruistic love.

Jeanie Lerche Dacis, "The Science of Good Deeds" webmd.com (11-28-05)

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◆ **Conclusion:** Lets return to A Christmas Carol. Which Scrooge was the more joyful one? The keeper or the giver. Take a look... (show Muppets Christmas clip: ending scene at Cratchets house.)

◆ While old Mr. Scrooge's story isn't particularly a Christian tale, it does present a Christian truth: it is more blessed to give than to receive. And biblical principles work even for people who don't believe in God. Becoming a giver will bring you more joy.

◆ But there is really something far more important than learning to be joyful giver, or learning to feel blessed. The most central truth in human existence is that there is a God and he is a giver. He gave us life in creating us. And he gave his son's life in redeeming us from our own evil and sin. All those who believe in his name and sacrifice have the promise of eternal supply, eternal life, and joy in God's presence without end! So it's a little paradoxical: to really find the greatest possible joy, involves receiving instead of giving. The forgiveness and the love of your Creator is accessed not by giving, or being kind and good. These are but responses. It is found by bowing your head and receive the free gift of God, eternal life through Jesus.