

"Motivated To Give"

Some time ago I read a fascinating book called *Why People Give*. It looked at the psychology behind giving – the motives behind why people give to the church or to charitable causes. One of the things it stressed was *the complexity* of motives people have in giving. Most students of motivational psychology would agree that rarely, if ever, do we act from a single motive. Our motives are mixed, and that holds true in our giving also.

Let's look at some of the less desirable reasons people give. (Since this is a church service, I'll focus a bit more on our giving to the church).

We can give so we can claim it on our income tax. I've had people send in a check the last week of December – and that's the only time they give to the church. You kind of know what's in their mind!

We can give to keep our church membership "in good standing". Kind of a like "I've got to pay my dues" attitude.

We may give thinking it will help show that we're a good or righteous person. We may even think it will help get us into heaven! David Head wrote a little book called *He Sent Leanness*. It's a book of funny, but honest prayers (prayers we'd probably never pray out loud). One is the prayer of a natural (unconverted) man in the face of death: "I suppose I've nothing to be scared of, but I can't help wishing I'd put a little more in the collection plate last time I went to church."

Similarly, some may give to bargain with God. If I'm generous in giving to the church (and good causes) I should be able to expect God to do me some favors – like keep me safe on airplanes, or keep me healthy.

Others give to exercise control over those who receive the gift. I've had people in the church stop giving because the church did something they didn't like. It's a way of trying to control what the church does.

We can give out of guilt. We've messed up in some way, we've done something wrong, and try to make up for it by giving something extra to a local charity or the church building fund. A pastor praised a young woman in his church for what seemed to be a generous amount of giving. Her reply was, "It's so insignificant. You see, I have so many sins to pay for."

Then too, we can give simply out of habit. Giving regularly as a habit can be a good thing. But it can also become an empty habit. Our heart's not in it. We just write out a check without much thought or put money in the offering basket without much thought or commitment.

We can give as a substitute for further involvement. If I give my money, I can feel less uneasy about not being involved in the ministry of the church or the hands on work of the organization.

These are just some of the reasons why we give that aren't the most noble! It's good from time to time to examine the *motives* behind our giving. *Jesus, for example, seemed to be more*

concerned about our inward motives than just our outward acts. Now, all of this does not mean that before we give anything we have to be sure that our motives are 100% pure and commendable! If this were the case, we'd never give anything to anyone, because we rarely if ever do anything from a single, simple motive!

So, why should we give? Especially if we say we are "Christians"? To get some answers, let's look at 1 Chronicles 29 in the Old Testament. King David is near the end of his life. His son Solomon will become king. Solomon is about to start a project that David wanted to do, but was forbidden by God: he will build a temple for the Lord, a place set aside to worship their God. David asks the people to give so this can happen, and then he prays a beautiful prayer.

The account begins: "King David said to the whole assembly, 'My son Solomon, who alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great; for the temple will not be for mortals but for the Lord God. So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able,'" (1 Chronicles 29:1-2a). Notice, "So I have provided for the house of *my God*, so far as I was able." "The house of *my God*." This relationship with God motivated David to dip into his own personal wealth as Israel's king: "Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God" (1 Chronicles 29:3).

Authentic giving is rooted in our relationship with God. First, we recognize that everything we have comes from God. James 1:17 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...". Sunshine and rain. The food we eat. The friends we have. Everything! It comes from God. He is our Creator and sustains our every breath.

When we don't sense this "given-ness" of life – that everything we have comes from the gracious God who created us – we're not going to be nearly as motivated to give – whether it be to the church or any other worthy cause. If God isn't a part of my daily life and factors into how I live my life, I'm going to be less motivated to give.

We also recognize God as our Redeemer. Jesus came that we can be forgiven of our sins and be brought back into fellowship with our Creator. He came to *save us*. If you yourself aren't saved you're probably not going to have much of a concern to get the gospel of salvation out to others.

Then too, when we have a relationship with God we're going to be more prone to realize that God not only gives us everything we have, but God owns it all! This is *stewardship*. (I talked about this in last week's message). Stewardship means God owns everything, we don't. It's all His. He's just loaned it to us for a while. King David understood this. David prays, "Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; *for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours...*" (1 Chronicles 29:11-12). He also prayed, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and *of your own have we given you*" (1 Chronicles 29:14). And also, "O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is *all your own*" (1 Chronicles 29:16).

If you have a problem giving, or are resentful being asked to give, you probably haven't yet grasped this Biblical truth: I don't own anything; it all belongs to God. So I'm just giving back a portion of what is His – what He's entrusted me with.

Healthy motivation for giving begins in our relationship with the God who is our Creator and our Redeemer, the God who owns everything we have!

Another healthy reason for giving is this: *We give out of love.* King David expressed this by talking about his *devotion to God.* "I have a treasure of my own gold and silver, and *because of my devotion* to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God" (1 Chronicles 29:3). How much are you and I devoted to God, how much do we love God? How much are we devoted to God's work (and not just our own agenda)? People who really love God are generous! They don't have to be coaxed and arm-twisted into giving to God and God's work!

When you love someone, you want to give to them, right? Do you have grandchildren you love? Children you love? Boy friend or girl friend? Don't you love to give to them? (If not, there's probably something wrong with you!). John Oxenham has a brief poem:

"Love ever gives, - -
Forgives – outlives, - -
And ever stands
With open hands
And while it lives,
It gives.
For this is love's prerogative - -
To give, - - and give, - - and give."

What we give says a lot about how much we love and value the recipient! Do you love your church? Do you love what God is doing through a certain mission or ministry? If so, you want to give! Freely! Willingly! Generously! 1 Chronicles 29:9 says, "Then the people rejoiced because these had given *willingly*, for with *single mind* they offered *freely* to the Lord." Notice, they gave with pure motives – a "single mind". You want to talk about the right motive for giving! Here it is: we give out of love!

This story in 1 Chronicles 29 shows us another good reason to give: *We give out of gratitude.* "Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name" (1 Chronicles 29:12-13). Notice verse 13: "And now, our God, *we give thanks* to you, and praise your glorious name."

Is there any one of us who can truthfully say we haven't been blessed? Sure, there are some of us, perhaps, who are struggling to make ends meet. A lot of people in our country are struggling just to get by financially. The price of just about everything is going up (need I remind you?). But we have to put it in perspective. For instance, I've been to Kenya 4 times, preaching and

teaching church leaders in a little village called Musese. I've been a guest in homes that are the size of a room in our house. No running water. No toilet facilities. And yet many of these sisters and brothers in Christ are gracious, thankful people. Any of us that poor? There have been times I've gone over there, and they've given me an African shirt, or some other item, that I know they couldn't afford to give. And it humbled me.

We're blessed, aren't we? There's something ugly about people who are ungrateful. Who take the good things God gives them without having a thankful heart. Who want to keep for themselves and not share it with others. You know what I mean, don't you?

And for the Christian, it's not just the material things God showers on us, but the spiritual blessings, the eternal things! Forgiveness of our sins through Christ. A place in His family as God's adopted daughters and sons. The promise of life with Him forever. All of these gifts are things we can easily take for granted – but what if there were no Jesus, no Bible, no promise of forgiveness, no hope of heaven? A lot of people – an increasing number of people in our culture – live without that hope. And the church has been entrusted with this message of salvation. We give out of a grateful heart.

So there we have it. It can be interesting to look at the reasons why people give – why *we* give. We've looked at some not-so-good reasons behind our giving. I've suggested that some of the *best* reasons for giving are that we recognize everything we have comes from God, and belongs to God; we give out of love; and we give out of gratitude.

Over many years working as a pastor I have taken one Sunday a year specifically to talk about giving, and the Biblical basis of our giving. What you've just heard is that sermon for this year! I saw this cartoon that shows two guys standing outside the front door of a church. They've just come out of a church service, and they're standing there, stripped down to just their polka dot undershorts. One guy says to the other: "That was the best sermon on giving I've ever heard."

I doubt that this is the best sermon on giving you've ever heard! I don't expect you to be so moved that you're going to give the clothes off your back. But I hope that we will give willingly and generously to the Lord's work, and that we'll give for the right reasons!

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