

“An Important Point on Giving”
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The main point often drives everything. That is true in the sport of basketball. E.g., I recall last Monday Peyton and Eli Manning were providing commentary on the Saints game on ESPN 2, I believe that was the channel, and they brought in various guests during the game like Tom Brady and Drew Brees. They also brought in a woman who was a point guard for a WNBA team, and the Mannings were asking her about the role of a point guard and they discussed how it was like a quarterback in football. I played point guard in high school and I could relate to what they were saying in that the point guard kind of organizes a play and gets the play off and running. The same can be said about the main point of an argument, even though that main point may be disputed. E.g., I recall years ago there were funny commercials about Miller Lite beer, where groups of people on the commercial would be about to get into a fight as whether the main reason for drinking it is it tastes great, while others would argue that the main point is that it is less filling! In the ancient world they were used to the idea of arguing and getting to the main point, the point from which everything flows, and Paul does that on the topic of a promotion of collection he was taking.

READ 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 (pp. 183-184)

CONTEXT: Paul has been reminding the Corinthians about their financial gift they had said they would give to help the church in Jerusalem which was going through a hard time. Paul says the Corinthians previous commitment to this collection has inspired the churches in Macedonia to give generously. Paul wants to warn them not to procrastinate on this collection, but to do it in a way that will honor the Lord and be an example to the other churches.

READ v 6. “The Point: if the Corinthians don’t plant much they won’t get much; if they plant much they will get a lot! Cf. Proverbs 11:25.” Our NRSV translation, like the RSV translation before it, begin with the phrase, “The point is this”, while literally in the original language only two words are used with a literal meaning, “This is the thing”. Paul is giving a maxim that sets the tone for what is to follow, so the NRSV is correct in it’s translation— Paul is making his point. This point is taken from farming— if you plant a lot, you’ll get a lot; but if you don’t plant a lot, you don’t get much. If you have ever had a garden you will know what this is like. E.g., I recall when Elena and I moved to Lacombe to serve the church there, we lived in the parsonage where the pastor before me had a garden, and since the pastors who moved to another appointment were gone by June 15, I was arriving just as things started to bear fruit, and by the fall I had a nice yield from the garden— like tomatoes, from what I recall. It is in a similar way with giving toward ministries. E.g., recently I got a call from a pastor of a United Methodist church in New Jersey, a church affiliated with the Wesleyan Covenant Association, and he said he had a congregation member who wanted to give a financial gift to a church that had been hit by Hurricane Ida, so the pastor contacted me and we had a wonderful time of fellowship; he said that this gentleman often wanted to give gifts to those in need, and what a great blessing he is to us and to other ministries! Proverbs 11:25 states it well: “A generous person

will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water.” So how do we accomplish such giving?

READ v 7. “The Practical Point: the way to give is not with a sour face, but with a smile and sense of a privileged pleasure. Cf. 1 Chronicles 29:10-17.” In the Old Testament giving 10%, i.e., a tithe, of what a person earned was the standard of giving toward God. In the New Testament, we do not hear of a new legalism, but rather we are to give as the Holy Spirit calls us to do so. And if God was willing to give His only Son for our salvation, then surely, to my mind, 10% is the minimum goal for which we should shoot. Now for many people who hear this in churches they have a negative reaction to this idea of tithing— either people are upset because it is seen as an excessive amount to give and they claim they cannot afford it, or they think this is the height of foolishness— because, after all, one must save for retirement as well, right? I would suggest that for the person who thinks either of these two ways he or she is thinking from a human-centered perspective on giving and missing God’s perspective on giving. God’s perspective on giving is pure joy and love. He loves to shower you and me with blessings, and He expects His followers to want to pass on that joy. God reveals this side of His character with Abraham, who is an old man in his 90s and his wife past childbearing age and childless when God makes the promise to them of a child to be of number like the stars in the sky in Genesis 15:1-8 and make a great nation out of him. E.g., I recall when I was in the eighth grade my parents bought me an English racer, an expensive bicycle, and I could tell it was a joy for them to give it to me; in fact, I still have that bike and use it from time to time. Once a person knows the joy of giving the person wants to do it again. E.g., last month Kaylor, Debby, and Cheryl organized two Sundays of reaching out to our church and another church for donations to help those who had been through Hurricane Ida, and people gave generously and without manipulation. As we plan our giving

for the Lord's work for 2022, the Lord wants us to know His joy as we do so, because we are giving to best cause around-- the gospel. God gives because He knows the blessing we will receive, and we participate in His joy when we do the same.

So how do we get the ability to change our perspective on giving from sourness to joy? “The Power Point: the foundational reason this point works is because it is entirely based on the God who can— who reciprocates generously. What does this mean?” God gives to us generously, and when we give back to Him generously in praise and worship and obedience, He reciprocates and gives back to us more than we can imagine. He teaches us how to be generous, and His Spirit makes us like Himself. Now, how does He give back to us? There are many preachers who misunderstand this and claim that God necessarily wants to give back to us to make us rich materially— the health and wealth gospel. E.g., I recall reading one health-and-wealth preacher's book, where he said when he once entered the massive house of someone, he said wanted God to bless him with such a house, and he had a vision for it. While God may grant us material wealth, that is not necessarily the case for everyone. In fact, in v 8 it is clear that God wants to give us what is sufficient. And the goal is that we can share abundantly in good works— and in the context this means the Corinthians were to share their financial gifts to the mother church in Jerusalem. God gives to us so that we can give to others. E.g., it reminds me of when I was little our church would have a Christmas bazaar where people sold things they made, and my parents gave me some money to buy Christians gifts for others in the family; now, I could have kept the money for myself and bought snacks, but I knew the purpose was to bless others. In a similar way, God has given us sufficient to our needs, so we can bless others in His name.

“The Picky Point: what is God saying to you and me as we make plans on giving for His Kingdom’s purposes in 2022?” I would like to share two things in closing as we consider giving. First, we give in a way that honors the God who have His only Son for us. Second, we give where God wants us to give, regardless of whether you are a member or not a member yet of this church. Elena and I focus the majority of our giving on this church because this is where we serve the Lord primarily, though we do give to other ministries. Lake Vista UMC has this stewardship Sunday to make a budget and plans for 2022, and your prayerfully considering making a pledge for 2022 would be a blessing to us.