

Feb. 12 Extravagant Generosity

2 Corinthians 9:11 You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity

Billy Graham is quoted as saying, "Tell me what you think about money and I can tell you what you think about God"

Last week we talked about Radical Hospitality, one of the five practices of fruitful congregations. Today we consider a second practice: Extravagant Generosity. But before we discuss generosity, money, let's remind ourselves...

Why do we attend church?

For our own spiritual well-being, our spiritual growth

For the greater work of God, out there, beyond the walls of the local church

Many aspects of our spiritual growth are easily seen by those around us:

Can we, do we, talk about what we are reading in the Bible and learning about how to live each day as a faithful Christian.....

Do we participate in the Body of Christ, the family of God, the local church, and in what ways?

People around us can get an idea of our relationship with God through how we act and how we talk. But for some reason, we are more reluctant to acknowledge how we use the financial resources—our money—that God has made available to us.

Talking about money makes us uncomfortable. And I really don't want to preach about money. But I do want to talk about generosity, and that includes how we use our money.

Extravagant Generosity is giving of our time, talent and money which exceeds expectations. Just as Radical Hospitality is welcoming, receiving, accepting and caring in ways that exceed expectations, in ways that go beyond just the minimum, Extravagant Generosity, also, is giving way beyond the minimum.

Why would we want to be extravagantly generous? To give in ways that exceed expectations?

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The first—and probably the most important reason—is that scripture tells us we are to give.

It is in the Old Testament we read and learn about the tithe. A tithe is one-tenth of the total: if we earn \$1000 each month, our tithe, one-tenth, would be \$100.

We first read about the tithe in Genesis 14:19-20 when Abram returned from rescuing his nephew Lot, who had been taken away by the kings of Elam and Goiim. When Abram returned with Lot, he was blessed by Melchizedek, priest and king of Salem:

(Melchizedek) blessed (Abram) and said,  
"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;  
And blessed be God Most High,  
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."

Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of all.

Jacob promised God one tenth of all he had if God watched over him as he journeyed to his father's relatives for safety.

Genesis 28:20-22

Leviticus 27:30-34 tells us a tithe of the land, of the seed of the land and of the fruit of the tree, one-tenth of every flock and herd belong to God. The one-tenth is God's; the tithe is God's.

Other references to tithes are made in Deuteronomy 14, 2 Chronicles 31, Nehemiah 10, as well as other places.

It also is in the Old Testament that we read of God's commandment to give God the first portion of what we have – not what's left over, but the first portion.

In Proverbs 3:9-10 we find the commandment to give back to God the first fruits so your barns will be filled to overflowing

Festival of First Fruits – the grain harvest in the spring

Festival of Ingathering – the fall harvest

And when we bring the first portion of all we have to God, God blesses our efforts

Malachi 3:10-12 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My (the Lord's) house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."

The teaching on how we use what God has given us continues into the New Testament.

We remember the story of the widow's mite: Luke 21:1-4

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As Jesus watched people bringing their offerings in to the temple, he noticed a widow put in two small copper coins. In verses 3-4 we read, “And He said, ‘Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them, for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.’”

The widow demonstrated for us Extravagant Generosity Paul wrote of extravagant generosity in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul commended the churches of Macedonia who gave beyond their means in collecting money to send to Christians in Jerusalem who were in need

And our text for today 2 Corinthians 9:6-11: sow sparingly, reap sparingly; give generously, God will bless our generosity

Jesus challenged his listeners in Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also  
We give, give generously, because God commands us to give.

We give because we see a need:

- Donations increase immediately following a natural disaster
- Such as flood, hurricane, tornado
- Gofundme sites raise money for special needs.

The story of the Good Samaritan is a story of someone who saw a need and responded with extravagant generosity. Not only did the Samaritan take the injured Jew to a village where he could receive care, but the Samaritan also told the innkeeper, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.” Luke 10:35

We give because we see a need

We give because we are passionate about something: fatherless kids going to a faith-based camp like Camp Lake Louise, for example, or save the whales. We don't give because we have to, because we're supposed to give. We give because we believe passionately in something. If we believe in something, we are more likely to give to it, and give generously.

Let me give you a personal example: in addition to what I give back to God through the church, last year I also donated through the organization donorschoose. Public school teachers submit requests for money for special projects, for supplies that will improve their classroom for their students. It might be games in the Spanish language so students learning Spanish can practice what they're learning. I'm passionate about education because I was an

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educator and because my youngest son and daughter-in-law are teachers. I give through donorschoose because I see the value of education and of helping teachers do their job.

We give to what is important to us; we are more likely to give generously when we passionately believe in the work of the recipient, the organization to which we give our money

Where does the church fit into your giving? Are you passionate about the work of the church?

We tend to feel uncomfortable talking about money at church. And when we're asked to give, we often say, “Well, there really isn't enough money to go around, what with living expenses and all.”

Twenty years ago, teaching Organizational Behavior, I came across a study that concluded that most people thought life would be comfortable if they just earned \$20,000 more than they currently earned: if they earned \$20,000, then life would be easier if they earned \$40,000; if they earned \$70,000, then life would be easier if they earned \$90,000. It didn't really matter what the starting income was—if they just had the extra \$20,000 they could pay all their bills and have enough to really get ahead; they would be comfortable.

And then Jesus says: ‘Remember the widow's mite – she gave out of her limited resources; she gave all she had.’

Extravagant Generosity is an attitude, not a particular amount of money. The question that honors God is “What can I share?” That question comes from a giving spirit: giving to God first. We acknowledge God's claim on our time, talents, and treasure And we have faith in God's promise of blessing when in obedience to God, we do give to God first.

I want to tell you two stories of extravagant giving in the church. Tim and Ellen were active members of their local church. When there was a need for workers, Tim and Ellen were ready to help. The annual stewardship emphasis came in the fall one year. Out of curiosity, Tim and Ellen figured what percentage of their income they gave to their church each year. They were disappointed to discover they gave only about 2% of their income. It seemed so much more! It seemed like even that amount put a strain on their budget. Yet, they understood where they wanted their hearts to be. They asked themselves hard questions: do we really need to trade for a

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different car? How much would we save if we ate at home more often? Gradually they set new goals and made different choices. They agreed they would increase their giving each year 1%: this year they gave 2% of their income; next year they would give 3%. Each year they would increase until they reached the tithe, 10%. Asked to talk about their decision, Tim and Ellen explained to the congregation the difficulty in changing their lifestyle choices but also the satisfaction of knowing they were following God's leading, and in doing so were being blessed by God.

Extravagant Generosity offers us the opportunity to ask tough questions about our choices and our priorities. Extravagant Generosity offers us the opportunity to put God first in all we do and to discover the pleasure of giving.

A second example: The church's trustee committee wrestled with finding \$435 to make a needed roof repair. There was no money in the church budget to cover the \$435. They struggled with various options: a special fundraising event, a challenge to everyone to give "over and above" their regular giving. No option gained support of a majority of committee members. Finally, the chairperson confronted the committee: "Any one of us could write a check for \$435 and cover this cost. It isn't that we don't have the money, that we don't have the resources. Rather, for some reason we don't have the will to follow God's leading. Let's each give as we believe God is asking us to give and trust God's provision." When all contributions were totaled, not only was the \$435 roof repair paid for, but an additional \$1600 was raised and designated for children's ministry. God had provided once the committee members put God first.

People who participate in Extravagantly Generous churches give because scripture teaches them to give, because they see a need and because they are passionate about spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. That's our church's mission statement too: "Furthering the Good News of Jesus Christ and Reaching New People for the Kingdom of God." These churches emphasize their mission and purpose. They connect money with mission. And that's one of those two reasons we attend church, why we choose to be part of a church family: to proclaim the Good News of Jesus' life, death and resurrection so others can develop a relationship with Christ

And Extravagant Generosity helps us grow spiritually, helps us to become more like Christ. As one author put it, "Generosity enlarges the soul, realigns priorities, connects people to the Body of Christ, and strengthens congregations to fulfill Christ's ministries." We give because as Christians we need to give; we are called to share what God has given us. Spiritually mature Christians would be extravagantly generous even if their church had no need for their money.

Extravagant Generosity is an attitude: a matter of the heart. We can thrive with the joy of abundance rather than starve with a fear of scarcity.

As 1 Timothy 6:18-19 reminds us, we are to be "rich in good works, generous and ready to share."

We are the heirs, the beneficiaries of those who came before us who gave generously to make possible this facility, FBC, to continue worship at this place

Original organ came from a Baptist church in Chicago  
Money was donated by two other churches--Kalkaska and one other

Those who came before paid for renovations and updating—heat, electricity, running water.

Now it is our turn to give generously for the generations to come

Extravagant Generosity: along with Radical Hospitality, two practices of faithful individual Christians and practices of fruitful congregations.

What we EARN belongs to God – use it as a follower of Christ  
What we SPEND belongs to God – spend it wisely on that which enhances life, not that which diminishes life

What we SAVE belongs to God – invest in ways that strengthen society

What we GIVE belongs to God – give generously in ways that strengthen the Body of Christ