

THE SECOND MOST SATISFYING EXPERIENCE OF YOUR LIFE

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Malachi 3:10; 1 Cor.16:2

I took a few minutes out yesterday to take Jodi and one of her little friends down to the Plaza to see Santa Claus make his grand entrance in a helicopter. It was kind of slushy and, as you know, the wind was anything but warm. The helicopter was late in arriving. That, combined with slushy snow in which the children just *had* to stick their feet, the icy wind and crying babies created anything but a festive mood. The big Irish cop who was trying to keep the landing area free was muttering under his breath and, as I looked around, I could see the dark clouds of martyrdom creeping across the faces of many dads and moms who shivered in the morning air.

And then, with a flutter of rotors and a fanfare of exhaust, the helicopter bearing Santa came roaring into view and passed right over our heads on its sweep across the parking lot. I took a peek at Jodi and her eyes were as big as saucers! The grin that flooded her face as she waved excitedly to Santa was duplicated on the shiny faces of a thousand other children.

In an instant the atmosphere changed. The grumbling was replaced by a wave of good-natured laughter. Instead of "Don't slop around in that slush!" one could hear parents saying, "Look, Tommy. Look, Carol. He's waving at you!" And the children screamed their welcomes, "Hi, Santa!". One little kid about five yelled, "Hi, Santa! It's me, Dickie!". Even the big Irish cop, who never had a smile for anyone unless he had his collar on backwards, caught the contagion of the moment and there was a warm, ready grin on his square countenance which made him look almost human.

The miracle of Christmas had happened once again. The air was filled with the magic of the holiday season. As I started back to the car, the fellow just ahead of me spied one of his friends or neighbors and called out, "Happy Thanksgiving, Bill!" And Bill leaned out of his car and answered, "Same to you, Carl. How's the wife and kids?"

It was a wonderful moment. Made you feel all warm and good inside. Because even though it wouldn't last long, the world had entered into another of those magical moments which bring out the best in people.

That's the beautiful part of the holiday season to me. It gets our minds off ourselves and our little irritations. It's the one time in the year, above all others, when we pause to give thanks to God and to our fellow man for the blessings which they, and He, have brought into our world.

We have so much to be thankful for this year, don't we? For the first time in a seeming eternity our cannons are still. Our boys are not dying on some foreign shore. The world is at peace. A spirit of cordiality prevails after a tiring era of bitter words and cruel acts.

To be sure, the peace is shaky. The foundations of security are unsound. But let's be grateful for the little bit of peace we have and then work for more. Let's not take our bounties for granted. Rather, let's put "Give" into our Thanksgiving and share a part of what God has entrusted to us with other.

And that's the theme of my sermon this morning. Last year I spoke on "Let's Put 'Thanks' Into Thanksgiving." Today I want to speak on the theme "Let's Put 'Give' Into Thanksgiving." It's only then that you can have "The Second Most Satisfying Experience Of Your Life."

A fellow who read my sermon title said,

"Why settle for second best? Why not 'Go For Broke' and aim at the number one experience, whatever that is?"

So I told him a story:

I explained how, as a boy of 15, I led my first soul to Christ. I described the thrill which held me in its grasp at the thought that God had used me to give someone else the gift of eternal life. Because of my simple witness, someone had been born again and now had help for today and hope for tomorrow.

It was a thrill I will never forget. As a matter of fact, I get a thrill out of it to this very day! Every time the Good Lord uses my heart or mind or lips to lead another soul to Christ, I get a thrill which sends me into the stratosphere. And how I covet that thrill for you. How I long for the day when every member of our church will be a soul winner. The day when, having settled your own destiny, you will be privileged to lay an infant soul, a baby Christian, at the feet of Jesus as a trophy of your love for Him. There is no more satisfying experience in life than that!

But right next to it, in terms of honest-to-goodness, deep-down satisfaction, is the act of giving. For make no mistake about it,

“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

I suppose someone is saying,

“Oh, no. Here comes another sermon on money.”

If you’re thinking that--you’re right! A man came up to me the other day and said something we have all heard before.

“I don’t go to church because the church is always asking for money.”

I guess we have all felt that way at times. But how many of us have asked ourselves “why?”

Is it not a fact that God doesn’t need our money? Doesn’t the bible say,

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof?”

If silver and gold are His, and the cattle on a thousand hills belong to Him then, in the truest sense, God doesn’t need our money. He could just as easily have arranged to finance His work by some mechanical means which would ensure an ample supply of the stuff with which the Church--which carries out His work on earth--could pay It’s bills.

Yes, He could have done that, but He didn’t. Why? Because God is not only powerful, He is also wise. He knows we only grow as we give. He knows that if we are not taught to share our possessions, we will never learn to share ourselves. He knows, with absolute wisdom, we need to give our gifts infinitely more than He needs to receive them. For, as our choir sings so beautifully each Sunday,

“We give Thee but Thine own
What ‘ere the gift may be.
All that we have is Thine alone
A trust, Oh God, from Thee.”

I’ve decided to speak about giving today for two reasons. First, it’s Thanksgiving time and a more natural setting for a sermon on tithing could not be found. Secondly, about the only time you hear a sermon like this is when the church is in a financial drive of some kind and is concerned with raising a budget which will enable it to do a greater work for Christ. As a result, I have often felt that, because of our preoccupation with our budget, we are in danger of losing sight of the primary reason for giving which is not to raise budgets but to grow souls.

Well, this morning, I don’t have the weight of a budget on my shoulders. I am not trying to raise a special Thanksgiving offering as has been our custom in the past. Your wonderful response to the Program For Progress has made that unnecessary. Nor am I motivated by a need for money in any amount for some worthwhile project.

I am speaking to you first of all as a friend who wants you to share a thrill that has been mine for many years. And, secondarily as your pastor who wants you to grow a well-rounded soul; one that is equally developed in every realm of life. For just as we want our children to have strong arms and legs as well as minds and souls, even so God wants His children to be “All Around Christians” whose total personality is committed to the idea of growing into the likeness of Christ.

There are four standards which God has established and which should govern us in our giving. The first of these is --

The Principle of a Definite Proportion.

In the Old Testament, it was the first tenth of everything someone possessed. This was the tithe. The Mosaic law was specific in stating that “the tithe is the Lord’s.”

In the New Testament, we do not have any such specific amount mentioned. But, we have something more important. The words of our Lord who said,

“I did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it” (Matt.5:17).

When He gave His new commandment, that “we love one another,” Jesus did not do away with the other commandments. It is still wrong to murder. To covet. To worship idols. It is still right that a child should honor his or her parents. It’s still profitable to set aside one day each week for the worship of God. And, it is still beneficial to give one-tenth of our income to the Lord. The only difference is that now we do it out of love and not out of coercion.

If we abide by the new commandment Christ gave to the world, and learn what the first great commandment really means:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength”

we will want to give and give freely. We will not quibble over amounts. Rather we will be motivated to give at least one-tenth because, being under God’s grace, we will want to do as much or more as the people of Old Testament times who were under God’s law.

The second standard which God has established to guide us in our giving is

The Principle of a Definite Person.

I Cor 16:2 says,

“On the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by Him in store
as God hath prospered him..”

The message of scripture is, at one and the same time, both universal and specific. “Every one.”
“Of you.”

The reason for this dual appeal is that tithing is both democratic and fair. It is democratic because it spreads the responsibility over the entire church. And, because each member only gives a tenth of his income, it is fair. If the church were to require a specific sum from each one as a kind of dues,

it might not be a challenge at all for rich people. But, for the less fortunate, it could be a serious burden. But by following God's plan of tithing, the rich and the poor stand on equal footing. They grow side by side as fellow pilgrims in the adventure of New Life. They both know that each, according to his or her ability, is trying to be responsible for the Kingdom of God.

The person who earns \$1,000 a week and gives \$100 is no greater than the widow who gives a tenth of her small pension. Both of them have the wonderful satisfaction of knowing they are obedient to their Heavenly Father. Only infinite wisdom could have devised a plan so fair and so democratic.

The third standard to guide us in our giving is --

The Principle of a Definite Place.

Malachi 3:10 says

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse.”

A definite person - you - is to give a definite proportion - one-tenth - to a definite place - the storehouse of the Lord, the church.

Now, a word of explanation is in order. In the early days of Christianity, many of the charities now carried on by the community were carried on by the church. But, because the church failed to emphasize the scriptural method of giving, it did not have enough funds to fulfill its obligations to its members, let alone the community it sought to serve. Therefore, the state or privately organized groups began to do many of the things which originally were the task of the church to do.

As a result, present-day Christians face a serious dilemma. Shall we give our whole tithe to the church and give to secular charities as something over and above? Or, shall we divide our tithe, giving perhaps 80% to our church and 20% to activities like the Community Chest, March of Dimes, and so forth?

Lucille and I have felt compelled to do the former. The first 10% of our income goes to the unified

budget of our church. The second 10% (and sometimes it goes beyond that) is divided among our building fund which I feel is a special, once in a lifetime project which requires over and above giving, and the many other secular charities in which a minister will want to share.

Now, I don't expect you to give 20-25% of your income and neither does God. But as your shepherd, your pastor, I want to lead you to the best of my ability. That includes the matter of giving. I can't do it in actual dollars, for obvious reasons. But I can try to do it in spirit.

Furthermore, you may be one of those who has great interest in some of our Baptist missionary institutions and are giving part of your tithe to them. I think all of us need to seek God's guidance in how our tithe is to be distributed. But if we determine to be fair with Him, God will give us the direction we need. The important thing to remember is that "the tithe is the Lord's" and, as such, should be dedicated to Him.

The final standard to guide us in our giving is --

The Principle of a Definite Purpose.

Luke 6:38 says a definite person (you) is to give a definite proportion (10%) to a definite place (the Church) for a definite purpose. And what is that purpose? Listen to the words of our Lord:

"Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down,
shaken together and running over, for the measure you give will be the
measure you get" (Luke 6:38).

Notice! Not one word about the needs of other people. Or the needs of the church! These are worthy motives for giving. But the primary motive, says Jesus, is what it will mean to you personally.

Now, I am not suggesting that if you tithe you will suddenly get a raise, or be given a bequest from a long-lost rich uncle. Some people claim they have prospered financially from the moment they began to tithe. In our case, we haven't found that to be true. But we have been given rewards no

amount of money could ever buy. And I think that's what Jesus was getting at. The blessing you get will be the blessing you most need. It may be material. It may be spiritual. In all likelihood, it will be a bit of both.

For one thing, tithing develops character. If everyone here this morning were to take the first tenth of his or her income and, in gratitude to God, set it aside for the Lord's work, that would mean new and increased responsibility over the remaining 90%. It would mean careful budgeting. In learning to be careful with the 10%, you would learn to use the remaining 90% more wisely. In other words, tithing brings the spiritual rewards of discipline, a sense of responsibility and wisdom, all lead to a stability which, in turn, cannot help but result in material reward. I can't tell you how many folks have said this to me,

“I don't know how it works! But since I began to tithe, the 90% goes further than the 100% did before.”

Tithing also strengthens faith. We often hear it said that “faith without works is dead..” By that we mean that if we have faith we will produce good works. Well, the reverse is equally true. Good works will lead to faith. You begin with weak and stumbling steps to serve God and, as you serve Him, He becomes more real to you and strengthens you. So while it's true that tithing springs from faith, it is also true that faith issues from tithing. Someone has said,

“God gives His Spirit to those who fight His battles,
not to the armchair critics.”

Now these are just two of the multitude of benefits which will accrue to you when you take God at His word and begin to practice scriptural giving. 1 Cor 16:2--a definite proportion by a definite person to a definite place for a definite purpose. Of course, it is one of those things you must prove to yourself in the laboratory of your own soul. As your pastor, I can entreat you, encourage you, seek to stimulate you; but in the last analysis, you must try it on your own. Remembering the reason I encourage and cajole you is not because tithing is a money-making scheme, but because it is one of the foundation stones upon which your soul is built. As someone far wiser than I has observed,

“(Those) who know that God is the central fact of (their) life, who feel His daily nearness, who see about (them) the evidence of God’s love and who give (themselves) to God in return are a transformed people. The purpose of tithing is to secure, just not the gift, but the giver. Not just the possession, but the possessor. Not just our money, but each and every one of us in a new and great way for our Lord.”

That is my Thanksgiving message to you.

“Let’s Put ‘Give’ Into Our Thanksgiving.”

Take God at His word. Begin with what little faith you have and watch it grow as a definite person gives a definite portion to a definite place to a definite purpose. I believe you will have

“The Second Most Satisfying Experience Of Your Life”.

I did. And, you have the word of Christ for it:

“Give and it shall be given unto you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken up, and running over. For the measure you give will be the measure you get.”

Happy Thanksgiving!