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Rev. Dr. Tim Archibald

Growing Spiritual Essentials: Give

Matt. 6:19-20; Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35

Today is the fourth in our five-part Worship Series on growing the spiritual essentials which allow God to work more fully in our lives and help to close the gap between the Christians that we are and the Christians that we hope to be. These five essentials were practiced by Jesus and by people of faith for thousands of years. Do you remember them? Worship (Give Thanks), Study (Scripture and Growth), Serve (Practice justice and kindness). Give (live generously). Share (Tell others). Five fingers. Five essentials.

Today we turn to Give (living generously). Generosity is putting love into concrete action. It shapes of our heart and the way that we outwardly live. We were made for generosity. Methodist preacher, Adam Hamilton points out that in the Bible, the word “love” shows up about 700 times. Justice or just appears about 600 times. Words like kindness, compassion, and mercy appear fewer times. But if you take all those words together, they appear about 1600 times in Scripture. Yet if you look for the word **give** or **gave**—any guesses how often it shows up in the Bible? 1864 times. More than all of the other virtues combined. Generosity is a big idea in Scripture.

The generosity of Scripture begins with God. Generosity is central to the inherent nature and character of God. The first thing we read about in Genesis is God creating the universe and generously offering it as a gift for us. God gives the air that we breath, the water that we drink, the food that we eat, the beauty and wonder of creation, and the very gift of our individual lives. Throughout Scripture we hear of God constantly giving and providing for his people—freedom from slavery in Egypt; water and food in the wilderness; a land of milk and honey; prophets to speak truth and justice; and the Word made flesh in Jesus. The complete self-giving generosity of Jesus Christ on the cross offers our forgiveness, our new life, our new hope. Worship is how we say “thank you” to God. When we recognize everything and every day as a gift we discover our greatest joy.

Scripture tells us that we are created in the image of God—which means that we share God’s capacity for amazing generosity. We may never be so much like God as when we are being generous and giving to others. We look for ways to give ourselves away and in doing so we discover what it truly means to be human. God blesses us so that we can bless others. This is the basic rhythm of life—we receive and we give, we receive and we give.

Yet consumer culture is rapidly leading us away from wisdom rooted in this rhythm of receiving and giving. None of us are exempt from the tendency to view the things around us as simply ours—rather than as gifts of which we are stewards or trustees. We need to continually work against this destructive tendency that goes with the culture of entitlement. To keep us from succumbing to this tendency prayer and worship is not enough, we must regularly give some of our money away. Frank Hanna asserts: “Only actually and regularly giving away some of our money fosters the spirit of detachment we’re all called to have towards the goods of the earth.” Regular giving keeps me mindful of the meaning and purpose of my money. Writing a cheque, sending an e-transfer in giving is a moral counterweight to the selfishness that lurks in the souls of all of us and that would take us over if we let it. Giving is only learned by doing. The more we do, the easier it becomes. Generosity **today** awakens in us greater generosity **tomorrow**. Better still, our example of giving can awaken generosity in others, especially our family. In an age of self-centred entitlement, we must teach our children to give. And if we want to teach others generosity, we’ve got to be generous ourselves.

Jesus teaches us that what we give away, including the gift of ourselves, grows and multiples in the giving—just like the five loaves and two fish that fed a multitude. Jesus invites us to believe in a world transformed by generous giving. Feeling grateful isn’t enough we must act and give. Winston Churchill wrote: “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

In our Luke reading Jesus says something similar: “give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” Jesus wasn’t meaning that if you put \$50 in the offering plate that you can expect the same to arrive back to you in the mail. Jesus meant that there is something about giving that blesses the giver. It brings us joy and a sense of fulfilment and meaning. A multitude of scientific

studies have shown this very thing: giving blesses the giver. From brain scans, scientists have observed that when people give, it lights up the brain's "reward centre" that makes us feel happy. At the same time, giving diminishes the amount of activity in the amygdala—the part of the brain that produces feelings of worry and anxiety. Thus, giving reduces stress and increases our sense of well-being, therefore increasing health and longevity. It even lowers our blood pressure. Jesus was right on the mark when he said that, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

When we daily listen for and are open to the guidance and nudging of the Spirit, we may just become the answer to someone else's prayers. Carol tells about a large apartment complex in her small neighbourhood. During the spring lockdown of 2020 she sensed the Spirit nudging her to contact the manager of that large apartment complex to see if there was anyone who was behind on their rent because of the pandemic. The manager identified several families in need; so Carol organized a collection in their small neighbourhood to pay the rent for these families for a couple of months—until they could get back on their feet. The recipients didn't know who had paid their rent, but several did write heartfelt thank you notes. Carol and others in her neighbourhood became the answer to other's prayers.

I suspect it was similar with the giving that St. Andrew's offered to Claire House in December when we delivered gift cards to 32 households, plus an extra amount for each of 29 children—for a total of just over \$4000. I think you enjoyed that, because it was certainly far beyond our original goal of \$2,500. Our giving to the church, makes possible the ministry of the church and its witness in the world. This is our way of saying thank you to God for all that we have received. While some were afraid that the pandemic would prevent St. Andrew's from fully funding our valuable ministry in 2020—by year end a planned for (pre-covid approved) deficit of \$18,000 was reduced to almost nothing. Thank you St. Andrew's for your generosity.

So what is the rhythm of generosity in your life? Are your tips the bare minimum? Do you have to have the absolute rock bottom price when negotiating a major purchase, or do you want it to be fair for both you and the seller? Do you give generously when there is someone in need? Do you resent being asked for money—by your church, or by others? Or do you look forward to being asked and having the opportunity to give?

Like a pianist who practices a new piece until they know it by heart—so we practice generosity every day. When we practice it over and over, it becomes part of the rhythm of our lives, our hearts become attuned to God's desire for us, and we come to walk more closely with Jesus.

Rob's church had challenged members to do 30 acts of kindness to bless other people. So Rob decided to do this and discovered that one single act of kindness had brought him more joy than he'd had in an entire year. He writes, "Last Saturday on my way to Costco I decided I was going to do an act of kindness. I noticed a woman behind me in the checkout line. When she saw that I only had one item she invited me to go first. I went ahead and as I gave the cashier my credit card I said, "Please also use my card to pay for the next person's purchases." I had to stay in line to wait for the return of my card. Twice the woman behind me tried to pay for her purchases—then the cashier said, "The man in front of you has paid for your items." She smiled and tears ran down her cheeks—and I told her about our initiative at our church. When I got in the car and drove home I realized that that was the happiest day that I'd had since my wife of 53 years passed away about a year ago. I had tears on my cheeks too, but they were tears of joy. In the midst of sorrow and loss, Rob rediscovered happiness.

So try it, I dare you. Why not set a goal to become a more generous person. Resolve to make giving more of a priority than buying. Start to give on a regular consistent basis, or to stretch your giving in a way that's going to produce in you a new level of generosity. Giving our money is one of the holy habits we are called to practice. It helps us keep money in its proper place, but it also mirrors the Jesus who generously sets the Table with his life, for us. So taste his bread, drink his cup, know Christ's blessing—so that you too can go out to set the table for others with your own life—and bless others and discover the life that's really life.