

BETTER TOGETHER – GENEROUS GIVERS & GRATEFUL RECEIVERS

SEPT. 11, 2016 – Pastor Randy Eliason

Intro: In April 1972, Bill Withers released the song, “Lean on Me”. It was his first and only song to be a number one hit.” It is one of the most popular songs of the past 40 years. It is a song with a simple tune and simple lyrics. What made this song so popular when released is what continues to make it popular today is that it resonates with a basic human experience and need. We all want family and friends that will be there for us in our time of need and we want others to let us help them in their time of need.

1 Corinthians 12:12-21

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, “I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,” that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,” would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” The head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you.”

I am in a series of messages about “the church”. Last week we learned that the church is frequently described in the NT as the “Body of Christ”. This metaphor is important for the following reasons:

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1. It communicates that Jesus is continuing his redemptive work through His church. The body of Christ performs the will and work of Christ.
2. It communicates that Jesus plan for His church is for it to be a group of interdependent people. The ear can't say, "I am not needed because I am not an eye.". Every part has something to give. The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you". Every part has something to receive from the others. Interdependency means depending on one another. It means that the members in the group rely on one another.

This means Jesus has designed His church, the body of Christ to be a community where each part gives and receives.

We are better together when we are generous givers and grateful receivers. If we had read through verse 25 we would have seen that the responsibility for the care of each part of the body is a shared responsibility. We are better together because "together" provides us the opportunity to give and receive.

We all need to be **GENEROUS GIVERS** and a **GRATEFUL RECEIVERS**.

GRATEFUL RECEIVERS

There is a myth that needs to be abolished. It is the myth of "I can make it on my own" or the myth of the "self-made man". First, this notion ignores the person or persons who provided for your physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs growing up. Second, it ignores the work and efforts of numerous people who have gone before us and provided for us what we enjoy. Where did you get your knowledge and education? Where did you get your food and shelter? Shoprite and Acme

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SEPT. 11, 2016 – Pastor Randy Eliason

didn't just appear out of the thin air! All of us to one degree or another take the work of others for granted. "I need help" is not a dirty phrase.

We will all be in need at some point in our lives. God wants us to be generous givers and gracious receivers. Some people view the world as if it is divided into two categories of people: Givers and takers. That is not accurate and it creates problems. I have met many people who, not wanting to be placed in the category of takers, resisted the efforts of others to help them. They cheated themselves from receiving help that was warranted. You are not a taker because you accept help from someone.

"Just a few" years ago I was in college at VFCC. We had a guest missionary by the name of Mark Buntain. He was a hero of mine because of his selfless, sacrificial ministry to the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India. I was in the school cafeteria speaking with my friends and I mentioned that I was heading to work, hoping I would make it back because I had very little gas and no cash. All of a sudden a hand reached in front of me with \$10. It was Mark Buntain. He had been sitting down the table from me and heard the conversation. I tried in vain to tell him I couldn't take his money. I am the only pastor I know who, rather than giving money to Mark Buntain, took money from him! Being a "receiver" doesn't necessarily make you a taker!

We had a saying in college: "Don't rob me of a blessing." Let me help! "I need help" is not a dirty phrase.

When someone offer you help or wants to bless you just say, "Thank you!" I have a response you are welcome to use. I say to those who

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SEPT. 11, 2016 – Pastor Randy Eliason

have blessed us, “It wasn’t expected, it wasn’t necessary, BUT it IS greatly appreciated!”

If you struggle with feeling like you are receiving more than you are giving there is a simple solution. Pay it forward. Be grateful and then be generous. As Jesus said to His disciples, *“Freely you have received. Freely give”*

GENEROUS GIVERS

1. Giving is good for the person in need.

The primary reason we should be generous givers is because the love of God should motivate us to help those in need. Giving is one of the greatest expressions of love. It is the right and godly thing to do.

2. Giving is good for you.

A. It makes you more like our father and our Savior

For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son... - John 3:16

Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us” – Ephesians 5:2

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. - Matt. 20:28

B. It brings God’s blessing to equip you to be an even greater giver.

One of the issues Paul addressed in his second letter to the Corinthians was their need to follow through on a commitment they had made to collect an offering for those who were suffering from a famine in Jerusalem. (See 2 Corinthians 8-9)

Paul told the Christians at Corinth that God blesses generosity. He wrote, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” He went on to write, that

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SEPT. 11, 2016 – Pastor Randy Eliason

the reason God will enrich those who give generously is so they can continue to be generous.

3. Giving inspires giving.

Not only does generosity provide a blessing to the giver, it also inspires others to be generous. Paul also told the Christians at Corinth that their initial decision to collect a generous offering for the poor stirred the Christian churches Macedonia to action.

I know of a minister who was pastoring a small church on a small salary. His father, a person of means, offered to lend his son the money the son going to need to finance the purchase of a used car so the son would not have to pay interest to a bank. One day the father was visiting and saw that the son had a picture on their refrigerator of a child they were supporting through Compassion International. After he went home he called the son and said, I don't want you to pay me any more. I saw the sacrifice you were making to provide for that boy and I want to help you do that.

When I was in youth ministry in Syracuse, NY our youth developed a partnership with the Syracuse Rescue Mission. They had a community center on the south side in an area where there were many needy, underprivileged children. One October day we scheduled to take the kids on a hike. Very often October is a great time for a hike in Syracuse. But not always, and not this day. The night before our hike the area received a few inches of a mixture of snow and sleet. It was wet, cold and miserable. In preparation I dressed in layers and put on my nice, new warm gloves. As we were ascending up the mountain a young boy began to tug on me. He said, "Mister, can you tie my shoes?" He was

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SEPT. 11, 2016 – Pastor Randy Eliason

clearly old enough to tie his own shoes and I was about to tell him that, but then I noticed his wet, ice cold “ungloved” hands. So I got down and began to tie his shoes. But first, I had to take my gloves off. As I was tying His shoes I sensed the Lord speaking to me telling me to “give the boy my gloves”. This was not exactly an encouraging word from the Lord. But I knew I had to obey so I gave him my nice...new...WARM...gloves and suffered the rest of the way. When we arrived at our destination and were hanging around the campfire I went over to the boy I gave my gloves to and one of my gloves was missing. Now I was frustrated. I said to him with an accusing tone, “What did you do with the other glove? You lost it already? He said, “No, no.” Then he pointed to one of his friends he had given the other glove to. Giving inspires giving.

How do I become a Generous Giver and a Grateful Receiver?

My answer is saturate yourself with the gospel of God’s grace. Meditate on the cross daily. Reflect on the sacrifice of Christ continually.

The more you aware you are of the grace of God in your own life, the more you will be willing to give freely to others. The cross shatters the myth of the self-made man or woman. It shatters the pride that keeps us from recognizing and accepting that we need help. Grateful Receivers understand that the only thing they have contributed to their salvation is their sin. They are not too proud or too self-sufficient to embrace the truth that we are helpless sinners and cannot be made right with God by “pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps”. They gratefully embrace the grace of Jesus who has lifted them from their sin by allowing Himself to be lifted up on the cross for them.

BETTER TOGETHER – GENEROUS GIVERS & GRATEFUL RECEIVERS

SEPT. 11, 2016 – Pastor Randy Eliason

When we start by realizing that we were in desperate need of help from God and that Jesus has done for us what we could never have done for ourselves – He made us righteous though we were unrighteous – THEN we will have the humility to receive the help for other things that God wants to provide for us through His people.

When the gospel gets a hold of you, you will become a generous giver. Why? Because when you recognize how much God has blessed, how much He has done for you, it frees you to bless others. Simply put, if you view your basket as full, you will have an easier time distributing what's in your basket to others.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32

This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God has already provided for our greatest need at the greatest cost imaginable, the greatest cost possible, the sacrifice of His son...then how can we have any doubt that he loves us enough to provide for all our lesser needs. We don't have to be afraid to give because we have a God who will supply for ALL our needs according to His riches in glory.