

Thanksgiving Message - Pay It Forward

11/26/17 – Pastor Randy

Pay It Forward was a movie that came out in 2000, based on Catherine Hyde's 1999 novel. It is a story about a seventh grader's plan to make a difference in the world. On the first day of school, Trevor McKinney and his classmates are challenged by their social studies teacher, Mr. Simonet, to think of an idea to change the world—and put it into action. Trevor enthusiastically responded to the challenge.

One day as Trevor was riding home on his dirt bike he decided to go by a place where the homeless gather. He noticed a homeless man eating a chocolate cookie and, inspired by his teacher's challenge, Trevor invited the man to come and sleep in his garage. Trevor's mother, unaware of Trevor's actions was startled one evening as she happened upon the homeless man working on her broken-down pickup. Holding the man at gunpoint, she asked him to explain himself. He explained that he was there by Trevor's kind invitation and started the truck to show her that he had repaired it for her. He said, "Somebody comes along like your son and gives me a leg up, I'll take it. I can't mess up again, or I'll be dead. I'm just paying it forward."

The book and the movie have inspired many to respond to the blessings they have received and find ways to be a blessing to others.

Although the phrase, "paying it forward" is not found or taught explicitly in the Bible, it is absolutely a concept affirmed by, and embedded within scripture.

The term "thanksgiving" refers to an expression of gratitude or thankfulness. Thanksgiving simply means giving or expressing thanks. Today I want you to think about this word "thanksgiving" a little differently. Thanksgiving is a compound word where "giving" follows "thanks". Although this is not the meaning of the word, it serves to remind us that giving should be the natural response when we are thankful for the blessings we have received. An attitude of gratitude should produce acts of giving. Being blessed ought to provoke us into being a blessing. I have a friend who is a pastor in the Bronx and his church motto is "Blessed to bless". On this Thanksgiving holiday weekend God wants to challenge us to respond to His blessings with an attitude of gratitude that leads to a lifestyle of giving.

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2 Corinthians 8:1-9

We want you to know, brothers, about **the grace of God** that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you **this act of grace**. But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in **this act of grace** also. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.**

Here is the context, or backstory to this passage. The Christians in Jerusalem had been suffering due to an extreme famine. As Paul traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean planting churches and teaching the new Christians in these new churches, he requested that they raise funds among their members to send to their needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Christians he provided some instructions regarding how they should go about collecting the relief funds. In his second letter, we learn that the Corinthian church was the first to begin collecting relief funds, but for some reason their fundraising had ceased. In response, Paul challenged them to renew their efforts so they would have a generous offering ready to be sent when he arrived to visit them.

In chapter eight, Paul began his challenge for them to renew their previous decision to collect a generous relief offering and he began by inspiring them with the story of the generosity of the Christians in Macedonia.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul so beautifully to draw a connection between the grace of God which they had received— the generous, unearned, gift of

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salvation and reconciliation – and the generous monetary gift they were being challenged to give for their needy brothers and sisters.

The grace of God that had been provided TO the Macedonian Christians had produced the grace of God WITHIN the Macedonian Christians to the extent that they literally pleaded with Paul to permit them to give generously to the relief offering. Apparently, Paul must have expressed some concern that they were giving to much!

Here is the point: The motivation, the impetus, the driving force behind the call to be gracious givers is the grace which God has given to us and continues to give to us. Our awareness of and appreciation for what God has given to us ought to cultivate within us a willingness to pay it forward; to extend that grace to others as God provides the opportunity.

Now I want to share some important points about giving based on Paul's closing instructions:

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

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Although we don't know for certain why the Corinthian Christians stopped their collection, one thing is clear; they had experienced some anxiety about giving. We get a picture of a church whose spirits were like balloons filled with the air of generosity, soaring high with excitement over helping their neighbors. But anxiety and fear created pressure, sucking the spirit of generosity right out of them, leaving them grumbling at the thought of having to give.

In 8:12-14 Paul stressed to them that God wanted them to be ready and willing givers. God was not expecting them to give what they didn't have. Paul went on to emphasize that he was not asking them to give to the extent that it would place them under a greater financial burden than those they were being called to give to. It doesn't make sense for you to give away everything, creating a situation where you now need someone to provide for you! In chapter 9, Paul saw the need to stress twice, within the span of a few sentences, the importance of giving willingly as God enabled them and not grudgingly out of a sense of compulsion.

Along with Paul's challenge to give he sought to relieve pressure created by their fear and anxiety about giving by stressing the fact that no one, including himself, was going to tell them how much they had to give, or to pressure them to give. He even implied that God did not want anyone to give unless they could do so willingly and joyfully.

Paul appealed to them to overcome whatever hindrances there may have been to their giving by reminding them that:

1. You can't "out give" God.

Paul addressed their fear by reminding them that God is more than able to make sure our needs are met sufficiently. He said God is the one who supplies you with the resources he asks you to be generous with, and He will supply and multiply your resources so you can "*be generous in every way.*"

The second thing Paul did to inspire them to renew their commitment to help their needy brothers and sisters was to direct their attention to the

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great benefits that arise when they “pay their blessings forward”.

There are three awesome benefits that Paul identified:

1. People’s needs were being met!
2. God was being praised and God’s Gospel was being glorified!
3. The love between the donors and recipients will grow.

To sum it up Paul simply reminded them that:

2. It is better to give than to receive.

Paying it forward reminds us that we don’t “give to get”, we “get to give”.

There are two different meanings we can apply to that phrase. First, by it I mean that we recognize the purpose of “getting” – of attaining any kind of resource that is a blessing to us – is to enable us to be able to be a blessing. It is sad how many people have perverted the scriptural promises that God will bless those who are generous to mean that generosity ought to be a strategy employed for material gain. A personal relationship with God as our Father, gets turned into an impersonal relationship with God as our investment banker.

Someone might argue, “but Pastor Randy, Paul said if you sow generously you will reap generously”! There it is, black and white! Give so you can get! Not quite. Paul never communicates that the purpose of giving is to enrich yourself! He simply reminds us that God supports His work, and if we give generously to God’s work, God will supply us with more to give....so we can be even more generous! Paul teaches, “GIVE in order to GET in order to GIVE.” God has not committed Himself to helping you indulge yourself, but He has committed Himself to helping you become generous!

The giving forward concept helps because it frees us from giving to get. We want our giving to provoke the recipient to give, but not to us. The “give to get” mentality views giving as a means of enriching oneself for oneself. The “get to give” mentality operates with this perspective: The primary benefit of material blessings are that they provide the individual with the opportunity to bless others. The primary purpose of material things is not for conspicuous consumption but for compassionate contribution.

NOTE: Conspicuous consumption refers to extravagant spending on luxuries for the purpose of enhancing one's prestige or power.

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B. We “Get to Give” means giving is an opportunity more than an obligation.

Paul instructed them to not give, *“reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

I am using a play on words. “Get to Give” people don’t give because they “have to give”. They view giving as a privilege, an opportunity. They give because they want to, because the impact of God’s grace in their lives has transformed them into generous, giving people. Remember what I mentioned earlier about the Macedonian Christians. They pleaded for the opportunity to give. What an attitude!?! They pleaded for the opportunity to take part in this collection. The thankful no longer “give to get”, they now “get to give”. They value giving more than getting, and as a result they no longer practice giving for the sake of getting; they now practice giving for the sake of giving.

Those who value giving for the sake of giving do so because:

- a. They desire to see the needs of people met. They give because they care.
- b. They desire to see other people become inspired to give. Watching people pay their gifts forward is a reward in and of itself.

Several years ago my wife and I received a wonderful blessing. We were driving an old Ford Aerostar mini-van at the time. One of our family members was getting a new vehicle and graciously decided to gift us their used mini-van. Although it was used it was much newer and in much better condition than ours. This blessing we received enabled us to gift our old mini-van to someone in our church who needed one pretty badly.

If I had purchased the mini-van I would have probably looked to sell our old one, and we did consider selling our old mini-van, but when we considered how we had just been blessed it provoked in us a desire to be a blessing and give it away rather than sell it.

- c. Most of all, they view giving as an opportunity for their character to be formed into the likeness of their great, grace bestowing God! It is better to give than to receive simply because nothing is greater than becoming conformed into the character of our God!!

Embrace giving as an opportunity, don’t despise it as an obligation.

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3. To the grateful, God's grace is paid forward, not back!

The goal of God's grace is to make us like Him. God is the greatest giver...and He doesn't owe anyone anything; He has no debts to repay. His giving is never motivated by indebtedness or obligation. God never pays someone back.

We give forward to God rather than giving back to God. A gift is not something that requires, or expects payback. The notion of "payback" is, "Now that I have received a blessing I am obligated to return the blessing. In other words, it is the perspective, "I must give the gift back! That would be a loan, not a gift. An obligation to "pay a gift back" turns the gift into a wage. We can't pay God back so we shouldn't try. We should respond to God's gracious gift to us by becoming like God and giving forward.

If, after giving, we find ourselves waiting anxiously for the recipient of our generosity to return the favor, then our intention was not to GIVE but to LEND. Now there is nothing wrong with lending. I have allowed people to borrow my car on many occasions over the years but only once did we give a vehicle away. There is not need to give your vehicle to someone who only needs it for a few days while theirs is being repaired.

God doesn't want you to give as an attempt to pay Him back for his grace, He wants you to respond to His grace with gratefulness that motivates you to want to be like your Heavenly Father. ***The danger with attempting to "pay God back" for His grace is that you might end up thinking you have actually done so...and then His grace becomes something you think you deserve!***

When you are the recipient of a blessing, pay it forward.
When you are in the position to be the donor of a blessing, encourage the one you bless to pay it forward.

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