



Giver's Remorse

Every man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all you need, you will abound in every good work.... You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God (2 Corinthians 9:7-8, 11).

It all started in the parking lot of the church. Before exiting the family van, Dad turned to five-year-old Timmy and said, "Timmy, in church today they will take up an offering. I am giving you a dollar bill so you can put it in the offering plate when it's passed to us. Do you think you can do that?"

Timmy nodded in affirmation. In the parking lot, he was agreeable to giving away his dad's money. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

But with each minute that passed between the parking lot and the church service, the more Timmy developed a close relationship with that dollar bill. It took only a few minutes for Timmy to feel that the dollar bill was rightfully his. After all, that dollar could buy him candy, ice cream and other necessities of life.

Church services started. The congregation sang some songs, heard some announcements and then the offering music started to play. Offering plates started being passed. Dad smiled at Timmy. Timmy felt that dollar bill sticking to his sweaty palm—it seemed like it was coated with super glue.

Dad received the offering plate, and then held it in front of Timmy. With a visible grimace and an audible groan, Timmy let the dollar bill go, saying good-bye as it dropped into the offering plate.

As the dollar bill descended, a shock wave of "giver's remorse" surged through Timmy's soul.

Suddenly, a scream shattered the stillness and silence of the sanctuary:

"I want my dollar back! I want my dollar back!"

Mom and Dad scrambled to end Timmy's screaming, and after an eternity of about 15 seconds, they succeeded. As Timmy struggled to compose himself and control his grief, the pastor started the sermon, opportunistically reminding everyone that we all have our moments when "giver's remorse" overcomes us. We may not say it, but there are times when we may think, *I want my dollar back*.

Generosity is learned behavior. Of course, one need not be a Christian to be generous, but Christ-centered generosity is a God-given basic attribute, a common denominator in the lives of Christians.

There is a direct relationship between our acceptance of God's grace and our transformation from reluctant "I want my dollar back" givers to cheerful givers.

Being a cheerful giver is all about the new life which Jesus lives in us. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Giving thanks is also a learned behavior. Many parents diligently teach character traits such as sharing, generosity and gratitude to their children. The home is a wonderful place (for children, parents and spouses) to cultivate and practice such traits.

Living under the same roof offers constant opportunities for postponing our own gratification in favor of helping and serving another.

When we live in God's house, under his roof, our heavenly Father transforms us, as his children, from self-centered misers into cheerful givers.

As Christians we are thankful and we are generous because God has first demonstrated his love to us, in the person of Jesus.

COMING SOON!



Greg Williams and wife Susan

Conversations About JESUS

Beginning on the first Sunday in January 2009, our online church, *Christianity Without the Religion (CWR)*, will offer *Conversations About Jesus (CAJ)*. CAJ will be a once a month sermon/discussion, aimed at a younger audience, engaging them in the life and teachings of Jesus.

If you attend CWR, then you'll want to be a part of CAJ. AND, CAJ can be a great introduction to Jesus, for new or young Christians, perhaps not yet interested in our primary worship services at CWR.

You and your family—anyone who is young at heart—will want to join your host, Greg Williams, for *Conversations About Jesus*. Greg lives with his family in Atlanta, where he is engaged in youth ministry. Pastor Greg has effectively ministered to youth for many years—and he's looking forward to leading this monthly discussion, available exclusively at www.ptm.org.



COMING IN
JANUARY 2009
AT WWW.PTM.ORG

commentary

Giving, in our lives, flows out of God's own never-ending generosity expressed to us. God's grace produces giving hearts in his children.

Giving, and giving thanks, is given birth in the fertile breeding ground of God's own generosity. When we know God, when we know his peace and his presence, when we experience and live in his grace, then giving and giving thanks flows through us. Joy and contentment thrive in such an environment.

As we live in "the house of the Lord" (Psalm 23:6), God's grace flows deep into our souls, grounding us with faith and hope. By God's grace we become grateful not only for physical things, but for the presence of God in our lives, for the green pastures and the still waters he provides (Psalm 23:2)—and for the eternal love-relationship we enjoy with him, because of Jesus.

During this month, those of us who live in the United States often ask each other, "Are you *ready* for Thanksgiving?"

Is being *ready* simply a matter of having a turkey in the freezer, cranberry sauce in the fridge, pumpkin pie in the oven and, of course, fresh batteries loaded in the television remote-control, prepared for those Thanksgiving-day football games?

For Christians, Thanksgiving is not just about stuffing a turkey and then stuffing ourselves. The day of Thanksgiving isn't just a matter of an obligatory, ritualistic prayer of thanks for all the stuff (and the stuffing) which God gives to us.

For Christians, Thanksgiving is not just a day—it's a way of life. For Christians, thanksgiving as a way of life includes gratitude for material blessings and possessions, but our thanksgiving goes much deeper.

A few years after Paul wrote about being a cheerful giver, he found himself in prison, writing these words: "...sing and make

music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:19-20).

The thanksgiving that Paul urged and exemplified was gratitude in spite of adverse circumstances.

For Christians...the day of Thanksgiving isn't just a matter of an obligatory, ritualistic prayer of thanks for all the stuff (and the stuffing) which God gives to us. For Christians, Thanksgiving is not just a day—it's a way of life.

Paul wrote while he was in chains, during a time when he was beaten and punished. He was unjustly accused and brutally treated. Paul was victimized, but he didn't sound like it!

Languishing in a harsh prison environment, separated from brothers and sisters in the Lord, Paul's soul overflowed with gratitude!

This Thanksgiving, and every day, let us:

- Give thanks for here-and-now material blessings.
- Give thanks for past blessings.
- Give thanks for family and friends.
- Give thanks even in the midst of adversity you may be experiencing.
- Give thanks for the body of Christ—your brothers and sisters in the Lord—known or unknown to you.
- Give thanks for God's presence in your life—his relationship with you.
- Give thanks for God's love, mercy and grace.
- Give thanks for Jesus, the greatest Gift of all. □

—Greg Albrecht

THE PLAIN TRUTH