

The Freedom of Giving Money Away

As we continue our series on spiritual practices, one that carries some considerable baggage is The Freedom to Give Away Money. Perhaps it is or always has been easy for you, but it can also be that sticky place in our spiritual practice; money touches matters of security, success and status, big things we cling to as humans. That's why Jesus talked and taught so much about it. It was clear money could be the 'treasure' of our lives, instead of loving God. But I think Jesus also talked so much about it because he knew it was a way of freedom. If you can give away money with gratitude, there is an interior freedom that is wide and vast and surprising. But it takes some trust and regular practice to keep it so.

I remember when giving away money was so easy. I was child, holding my dime to put into the offering plate at church. I couldn't wait for the plate to get to me to add my money to the bills and envelopes already there, and watch it as it was passed along, everyone adding to it. Then to watch it carried up to the pastor and put on the altar seemed like I was part of something good and great by my offering. And I was. Then I became wise to the world, and doubts crept in when I was asked to give money away: Would they use my hard-earned money well or squander it? Could I really spare it? And I really wanted that new _____. There never seemed to be 'enough.' And the ease of giving away money became laden with guilt as well. "I should tithe. I should help the poor. I have so much more." But I lost that initial joy of giving. Until a building campaign at church when my husband and I were stretched to give beyond our means and miraculously, abundance happened! And we experienced what it means "that is better to give than to receive."

Jim Fredrickson of Seward Lutheran Church has a similar story about giving away money:

"I have been a Lutheran all my life, I was raised to give an offering every Sunday and have done so out of habit during the times in my life that I have been a regular church-going Christian. However, it was always just a pittance, not even close to a tithe.

It wasn't until later in life when I once again began attending church on a regular basis that I learned the value of tithing and giving in general. After having lived in the bush (King Cove, AK) for nine years, my family and I moved to Soldotna and attended Christ Lutheran. I became involved in a Wednesday morning men's breakfast there and we read a book entitled "God's Miraculous Plan of Economy" by a Baptist preacher whose name I don't recall. It was a real awakening for me. He talked about how God has promised over and over in the Bible that we will be rewarded here on earth for practicing good stewardship. He related many stories of how that has been proven, such as in John D. Rockefeller's life in which he didn't learn to give until on his death bed and how it changed his life for the better. Anyhow, I decided to try it, and voila! It has really improved my life ever since.

Stewardship is a way of life. It's a routine that one gets into, just like brushing one's teeth everyday. And, just as tooth-brushing leads to good dental health, stewardship leads to good spiritual health -and a happy and prosperous life. It's a testament to one's faith in God. Investors practice a leap of faith in various investment brokers

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that their investments will pay off in big dividends. Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. My main investment broker is God. So, I ask people - "Do you really think that God will let you suffer financially or otherwise because you gave money (or your time and talents) to His Church?" What kind of a loving God would do that? Rather, I have found over and over that giving to God's kingdom (Church, the poor, various charities, etc.) has resulted in big dividends for me and my family. It has made me, as I have told others, one of the "richest men in the world." It's important that people realize what the word "rich" means. It's not just money, it's happiness."

Being free to give away money is an important spiritual practice: a woman named Louise began this practice by simply changing her attitude. "I decided to love paying bills," she said. "I decided to be grateful that I had enough to pay them and that the creditor trusted me enough to follow through. It was time to stop worrying about money, realize it's all God's anyway and trust abundance instead of being a tightwad."

How free are you to give away your money? With gratitude? When and how is it most difficult for you? If you saw it as a spiritual practice, a way of reforming your faith, would that make a difference?