

ENGAGING CONVERSATION BY ASKING BIG QUESTIONS: “HOW ARE WE TO GIVE?”

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“Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1-4, NIV)

I had the fortunate opportunity to go fishing a short while ago with a good friend and the fishing was incredible. In fact, the fishing was so good, one of us would catch a fish and the other one could catch it again as it was being released. For that fish in the water it was simply instinct that took over and the appeal of the lure was too much.

When it comes to giving, that too is the case and I think we all give based on some form of instinct. I think the default and most common instinct is people giving to be noticed or praised. For some, the lure of human recognition is too much so they give based on a self-satisfying instinct. A trademark of this instinct is the internal desire or wish of someone knowing about what or how much you are giving and to whom. That is not God's desire.

This passage in Matthew talks about what God desires to help transform our giving instinct into. I think God's desires to change our giving instinct into one that gives naturally; in fact so naturally that our right hand doesn't know what our left hand is doing. I don't think Jesus meant that every time we give we have to do so in the strictest of secrecy, although there is a time and place for that, but I think Jesus was getting at something bigger. I think Jesus was addressing an instinctual change; instead of giving for earthly rewards of praise, we are to give without the thought of rewards at all. I think Jesus is getting at the act of giving that becomes instinctual, and so instinctual that your right hand doesn't even notice what your left hand is doing.

Have you ever realized what your dominant hand (right or left) does all the time? It instinctually picks up your fork, your pen, your phone, and throws a ball. You don't have to think about it or even make a choice because it is “natural” or “instinctual.” I think that is God's desire for our giving and our care to those in need. I think God's desire is that it would be completely natural and not something we have to think about or decide upon, but a natural extension of who we are. I also think that it should be so natural we don't think or entertain the thought about what reward we would receive either materially or immaterially.

If we learn and start to practice that in our lives or at least pray for God's help to transform our giving instincts, then we will be rewarded by God. But what does reward mean? I don't think we can tell God what that reward will be...maybe it will be material, but wouldn't it just be enough that we are rewarded with the joy of giving to God?

There is no doubt that giving is important in our spiritual lives and a discipline that is important to practice. The challenge for those of us who give is to ask God to help us give naturally or instinctively, like reacting for a fork with our dominant hand.

My hope is that as followers of Jesus we would each desire and grow in our discernment of which lure we will follow. That the lure would not be on the instinct of praise, but instead, our instinct would develop by the work of the Holy Spirit into such a response that we wouldn't even think about anything in return for it.

Like always, this article is meant to promote thought and discussion and if you disagree, it resonated with you, or you were challenged, please feel free to let me know. I am always open to talking - feel free to call, drop in, go for coffee or email me (bryce@devonalliancechurch.ca).

- Pastor Bryce Ashlin-Mayo