

Training cheerful givers

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In my much younger years, I remember having heated arguments with my parents about money—but not the kind of arguments you might expect. My parents tried to train us to have good money sense, which included talking about how we would spend our money. In my rebellious years, I didn't think I should give money to charity. I had an attitude that might be typical: "I earned it; why should I give it to charity? What did they do to deserve any of my money?"

We may have been the only family talking about the idea of tithing as we ate our family meals.

My parents had very good answers, and they must have sunk in, because I give money to charity now. My charities include the church and church camps, a variety of social justice organizations (all of them Christian, not all of them Lutheran), and other good causes. Along the way, I've returned to my parents to have discussions of what it means to give our money away.

If I give money to a friend or family member who is having money problems, is that the same as giving money to an organization that helps the poor? If I give away household goods, does that count as [cheerful giving](#)? Does it only count if I give away items I still like? Or can I be even more cheerful a giver if I'm getting rid of clutter while also giving away items? How does doing volunteer work count?

You may notice a spreadsheet mentality in those questions, and you would be right. What counts? What doesn't? It's not a very grace-filled approach.

My family talked a lot about the idea of tithing. My Lutheran pastor grandfather and grandmother had a simple approach to giving: for every amount that came into the household, they gave 10 percent to the church, 10 percent to savings, the rest to spend on expenses.

In my adolescent years, I asked my parents, "Why 10 percent? Why not 15 or 20?"

My dad once replied that 10 percent is enough so that you notice it; it's not an extreme hardship to give up 10 percent, but it requires you to be more intentional. But it's also a goal that can be met by most of us. My parents understood the importance of not setting up children to fail, and they saw the same thinking behind the idea of tithing.

My parents didn't mention the additional benefit of regular giving: most of us who give away part of our money notice that money loosens its grip on us. Most of us who don't give say that we can't afford it—I've been that kind of non-cheerful non-giver during parts of my life, so I do understand.

But I've noticed that when I give on a regular basis, I'm not as clenched about the idea of money and having enough money. My spreadsheet mentality loosens its grip on me. I begin to give out of a sense of gratitude, not because I think that God is making notes on that spreadsheet in the sky.

I give because I have and others don't. I give because I've had opportunities, and many of them came my way out of sheer luck, not because I'm more deserving. I give because I like the way it feels when I share. I give because when we pool our resources, we can accomplish so much more than when we try to hang on to what we see as ours with our clenched fists.

And in this way, I can transform myself into the cheerful giver that God wants me to be—not because of a spreadsheet, but because God has a vision of a world where everyone has enough.

What a wonderful, grace-soaked vision! And we can help bring it about by sharing what we have.

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