

Give What You Got!

Rev. Michael J. Mattil

Fred and his wife Edna went to the state fair every year. Every year Fred would say, "Edna, I'd like to ride in that there airplane." And every year Edna would say, "I know Fred, but that airplane ride costs ten dollars, and ten dollars is ten dollars." This happened year after year until finally one year Fred said, "Edna, I'm 71 years old. If I don't ride that airplane this year I may never get another chance." Edna replied, "Fred that there airplane ride costs ten dollars, and ten dollars is ten dollars." The pilot overheard them and said, "Folks, I'll make you a deal. I'll take you both up for a ride. If you can stay quiet for the entire ride and not say one word, I won't charge you, but if you say one word it's ten dollars." Fred and Edna agreed and up they go. The pilot does all kinds of twists and turns, rolls and dives, but not a word is heard. He does all his tricks over again, but still not a word. They land and the pilot turns to Fred, "By golly, I did everything I could think of to get you to yell out, but you didn't." Fred replied, "Well, I was going to say something when Edna fell out, but ten dollars is ten dollars."

Ten dollars is ten dollars. Eleven weeks ago, many of you received a ten dollar bill from Mission India as seed money, which you then put to work to return an increase. Next week is the time for you to turn in your proceeds. Some of them have already come in. We have already collected over \$5000 for this project, which is more than five times the seed money we passed out, and I know there is a lot more still to come in. Praise God for the way He has blessed our efforts to share the Good News of Jesus as Savior with so many children in India!

It is not a coincidence that this campaign for Mission India in ending the same time we are drawing our **stewardship** drive here at Grace to a close. I wanted you to be actively working on giving to something outside of our congregation while you considered your giving to the ministry of this place. Our stewardship, using the resources God has entrusted to us, needs to be about more than providing for ourselves and our needs and wants and desires. It needs to be about serving God. Stewardship is recognizing that it all belongs to Him and using it in a way that will please Him, give glory to Him, and share the message of His Son as the Savior of all people. Yes, we are doing that here. But we have had the opportunity to think about how we can use ourselves and our abilities in new and different ways to support the proclamation of Jesus. And I think having participated in this Multiplication Project for Mission India will inspire you to continue to give of yourself and your resources both here and elsewhere.

So far, we have not received as many pledges this year as we did last. Sixteen fewer families have turned in a pledge than did last year, but I'm sure many of you will still turn in a pledge. Even so, with fewer pledges received, the total amount pledged so far for the support of our shared ministry here at Grace in the coming year is very close to the total amount pledged for this year. I am confident that when the remaining pledges are received we will surpass that amount. I believe we are seeing an increase in the financial stewardship of our members, and for that I say, "To God Be the Glory!"

If you have your Bibles, open them up to Matthew 25:14. (Pew Bibles p. 689) I want to read this parable of the talents with you.

Matthew 25:14-30 *"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. " 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

When you think about giving, something you always need to remember is that you are not asked to give what you don't have. You are not asked to give what you have not already received from God. You ARE asked to use what God has given you, to put it to work, and to return the increase to your Lord. All of this is done in response to the forgiveness and life and salvation He has given you through Jesus, and recognizing that all of life and life's resources come from Him.

I like to think of this in terms of **Give What You've Got!** You cannot give what you haven't "got." But you've "got" a lot. God has blessed you with resources and talents and skills and abilities and time and opportunities. That is what He wants you to give.

There is an old story about a lady who took her children to a restaurant. As the meal arrived, her six-year-old son asked if he could say grace. The bowed their heads and he said, "God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all! Amen!" Along with laughter from the other customers nearby, one woman remarked, "That's what's wrong with this country. Kids today don't even know how to pray. Asking God for ice cream! Why, I never!" The boy heard this and burst into tears. "Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?" The mother assured him that he had done a terrific job and God was certainly not mad at him. An elderly gentleman approached the table, winked at the boy and said, "I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer." "Really?" the boy asked. "Cross my heart." Then in a theatrical whisper the gentleman added, "Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes." The mother bought her kids ice cream at the end of the meal. The six-year-old stared at his for a moment and then did something incredible. He picked up his sundae and without a word walked over and placed it in front of the woman who had made the disparaging remark about his prayer. With a big smile he told her, "Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes, and my soul is already good."

You and I have souls that have already been made good because of what Jesus did in our place with His perfect life and His death in our place. He paid the price for all of our sins so that our souls could be good. One of the earliest hymns I remember learning was "There is a Green Hill" from the old children's hymnal.

***There is a green hill far away without a city wall.
Where our dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all.
He died that we might be forgiven, He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven, saved by His precious blood.***

That truth, that we are made good by what Jesus did for us, is what motivates us to live a new way, to share the message of love and forgiveness for Jesus' sake, to give what you've got!

I want to share another story with you that I read in one of the Chicken Soup for the Soul books. This was written by a fellow named Jerry Harpt.

Forty-three years seems like a long time to remember the name of a mere acquaintance. I have duly forgotten the name of an old lady who was a customer on my paper route when I was a twelve-year-old boy in Marinette, Wisconsin back in 1954. Yet it seems like just yesterday that she taught me a lesson in forgiveness that I can only hope to pass on to someone else someday.

On a mindless Saturday afternoon, a friend and I were throwing rocks onto the roof of the old lady's house from a secluded spot in her backyard. The object of our play was to observe how the rocks changed to missiles as they rolled to the roof's edge and shot out into the yard like comets falling from the sky.

I found myself a perfectly smooth rock and sent it for a ride. The stone was too smooth, however, so it slipped from my hand as I let it go and headed straight for a small window on the old lady's back porch. At the sound of fractured glass, we took off from the old lady's yard faster than any of our missiles flew off her roof.

I was too scared about getting caught that first night to be concerned about the old lady with the broken porch window. However, a few days later, when I was sure that I hadn't been discovered, I started to feel guilty for her misfortune. She still greeted me with a smile each day when I gave her the paper, but I was no longer able to act comfortable in her presence.

I made up my mind that I would save my paper delivery money, and in three weeks I had the seven dollars that I calculated would cover the cost of her window. I put the money in an envelope with a note explaining that I was sorry for breaking her window and hoped that the seven dollars would cover the cost for repairing it.

I waited until it was dark, snuck up to the old lady's house, and put the envelope of retribution through the letter slot in her door. My soul felt redeemed and I couldn't wait for the freedom of, once again, looking straight into the old lady's eyes.

The next day, I handed the old lady her paper and was able to return the warm smile that I was receiving from her. She thanked me for the paper and said, "Here, I have something for you." It was a bag of cookies. I thanked her and proceeded to eat the cookies as I continued my route.

After several cookies, I felt an envelope and pulled it out of the bag. When I opened the envelope, I was stunned. Inside was the seven dollars and a short note that said, "I'm proud of you."

When I tell you to "Give What You've Got," that includes forgiveness. The old lady in the story gave us an example of that. That needs to be part of all of our lives as stewards who have been entrusted with incredible wealth, both spiritual and physical, from our God.

I think the lady in this story also gives us a picture of how God blesses us. When you young man did the right thing, not only did he receive forgiveness--He received additional wealth and blessings. I've said it before, but I can never say it enough: You cannot out give God. When you **give what you've got**, you got it all from Him, and He will continue to give to you.

If you get a chance this week, send me an email or give me a call to tell me about what you did for **Mission India**. I'd like to share some of your stories next week.