

Travelling Light: generosity

Reconnect – January 10, 2010

Text: Ephesians 4:28; II Corinthians 9:7-8

Key Thought: The life God wants us to enjoy with Him is generous: honest, hard-working and giving.

If you are a thief, stop stealing. Begin using your hands for honest work, and then give generously to others in need. Ephesians 4:28, NLT

Pre-Intro: Give It Away [Chili Peppers song]

Intro: A Christmas Shocker

- It was just three days before this past Christmas that the world's news media reported on a strange story out of Britain: an Anglican priest had advised his congregation to shoplift if they needed to
- [read excerpts]

OK to shoplift at big stores, priest tells poor

Canwest News Service Published: Tuesday, December 22, 2009 (National Post)

A British Anglican priest is facing criticism following a controversial sermon in which he advised his congregation to shoplift, providing the thievery takes place at large chain stores. Rev. Tim Jones, 41, told his followers stealing from such stores is sometimes the best option for the poor. He said it is better for people to steal than resort to prostitution, mugging or burglary. He also said it is better to steal from large, national businesses rather than small businesses.

The Daily Mail reported that Rev. Jones said his sermon at St. Lawrence Church in York did not violate the biblical commandment "Thou shalt not steal" because God's love for the poor is more important than the property rights of the rich.

"Let my words not be misrepresented as a simplistic call for people to shoplift," Rev. Jones was quoted as saying. "This is a call for our society to no longer treat its most vulnerable people with indifference and contempt."

The sermon has drawn fierce reaction from police, retailers and politicians in Britain. A spokesman from the North Yorkshire Police called the sermon highly irresponsible and encouraged those in difficult circumstances to seek government support. A spokesman for the British Retail Consortium told The Daily Mail that stealing from big stores was just as wrong as stealing from small stores. He also encouraged use of the welfare system.

Church leaders distanced themselves from the comments. "The Church of England does not advise anyone to shoplift, or break the law in any way," Richard Seed, Archdeacon of York, told Metro news.

Q: What do you think of this story? What jumps out at you? (love for the poor, welfare system instead)

Q: Do you think the minister has a point?

- The story has reignited an ongoing debate about how Christians are to live, and it got lots of play during a slow news time
- With all of the talk of generosity and gifts at Christmas, here was another “take” on the Xtian lifestyle, contrary to established teaching and doctrine
- The Bible has a lot to say about stuff – material goods, including money – what to do with it, what NOT to do with it, and how it can quickly become a substitute religion for anyone
- We’re talking about “Travelling Light” – living a life that is rewarding not only for us but one that has the power to transform our families and neighbourhoods
- Last week was simplicity – this week is generosity
- And the section of the Bible that we’re looking at this week is very short – just one sentence
- But if that sentence was actually followed – if people actually did it – our world would be revolutionized – just about everything we know and experience would be different

Read text: Ephesians 4:28

If you are a thief, stop stealing. Begin using your hands for honest work, and then give generously to others in need.

- There are three parts to this – sections that could each take a month’s worth of discussion – but I’d like to take them each in turn:

Stealing (“If you are a thief, stop stealing”)

- Greed is the problem – we want what we don’t have, and even what we can’t have or SHOULDN’T have
- Giving is an antidote to greed, but greed is at the route of so much theft (not all – some is desperation, but Paul assumed that people’s needs were being looked after – just as our system is supposed to do here in Canada)
- it's not the big things - it's the little things - taking something of value that's not already yours or hasn't been given to you... ? Better definition of theft/stealing?
- Good for discussion - situational ethics/grey areas - make your conscience healthier, not dimmer
- Can we be generous with stuff that’s not ours?
- Oceans clip – it’s not wrong – no-one really gets hurt (stealing) – or it’s just a faceless company

Q: What do we steal that we might not figure that we actually do?

- Cable?
- Downloading?
- Wi-fi?
- Something else?

Work (“Begin using your hands for honest work”)

- It’s not very politically correct to talk about hard work as a way to success these days
- We get embarrassed about our work, embarrassed to enjoy it – we shrug and feel guilty when we have to leave home to go to work – a reaction to the workaholism of an earlier generation, perhaps – but work is God-given – we were meant to work, and there will no doubt be (meaningful!) work in heaven, too – there was work in the Garden of Eden, after all
- Out of misguided loyalty to our family, we perpetuate the myth that work is a drag, which is passed along to our kids – or something better is passed along to our kids
- Or we buy into the fantasy that work is a necessary evil – that if we could only win the lottery, then we could actually enjoy happiness, through luxury and lollygagging around
- There is enjoyment in work – in doing something well, in meeting a challenge, in being able to apply yourself – even doing the most menial tasks you can find some satisfaction - if we’re allowed to sit on the couch all day, we fall apart – look at celebrities and the wealthy, who rarely end well – booze, pills, drugs, partying, and they fall apart, because they don’t have meaningful work to keep them rooted (among other things)
- The crime of our society today is that we give without giving any avenue of giving back – we create a state for people where they are forced to rely on the government for support because of unavoidable situations – that’s fine – but then there’s no inducement to contribute back, and it leads to a destructive lifestyle – it’s chips and dip, a remote control and a beanbag chair, and it will kill you, body, mind and soul - it doesn't help anyone, them or us - it's not generosity, it's damaging

- Malcolm Gladwell, in Outliers, from the Acknowledgements section at the very end:

“This is a book about the meaning of work, and I learned that work can be meaningful from my father. Everything he does – from his most complex academic mathematics to digging in the garden – he tackles with joy and resolve and enthusiasm. My earliest memories of my father are of seeing him work at his desk and realizing that he was happy. I did not know it then, but that was one of the most precious gifts a father can give his child.” (298-299)

- Again, from Outliers: a Chinese peasant rice farmer proverb in a chapter on working hard and persistence:

“No one who can rise before dawn three hundred sixty days a year fails to make his family rich.” (249)

Generosity (“give generously to others in need”)

- It’s an antidote to greed, and a chance to ensure that you don’t get tangled up with your stuff – tied down to it
- Hoarding is not healthy – the National Post story on Friday – Stuart Donnelly, won 2 million pounds as the youngest winner of a British lottery when he was 17, but died just last week a recluse at 29, estranged from his family
- Canada – around .35% of GDP spent on foreign aid, but still not that .7% figure that gets talked about – but still not enough? .3% of income given to charities on a personal level?
- Toronto Sun story from December 14th – the Fraser Institute released its “Generosity Index” – comparison of US/Canada personal giving patterns to charity

Canadians trail U.S. in charitable giving

By QMI AGENCY

Canadians may feel like we’re a warm and generous nation but when it comes to giving to charity, we may be a bunch of Scrooges.

The Fraser Institute has released its 2009 Generosity Index and the findings are not flattering for Canadians versus our American friends.

The Generosity Index measured both countries for the 2007 tax year and examined the percentage of tax filers who gave to charity and the percentage of income which they gave to good causes.

Canada is far behind the United States when it comes to giving to charity and fewer of us are giving each year. In 2007, Americans donated 1.6% of their aggregate income to charity while Canadians donated less than half, at 0.73%. In dollar figures, Canadians donated \$8.5 billion to charitable causes, but if we had given at the same rate as our southern neighbours, the total would have been \$10 billion.

“This will open a few eyes. It’s a commonly held belief that we are more generous,” said Charles Lammam, a policy analyst at the Fraser institute. But the data states otherwise.

In fact, only Manitoba cracked the top 25 most-giving jurisdictions for Canada.

At the pinnacle of charitable donations is the state of Maryland, where 39.9% of the tax filers gave to charity and Utah where residents donated 3.66% of their aggregate income to charity.

In Canada, Manitobans come out on top with 27.1% of tax filers giving to charity. This was followed by Prince Edward Island with 25.8% and Ontario and Saskatchewan tying for third place with 25.7%. Among the provinces, Quebec is last with 21.9% of tax filers giving to charity. Of the territories, Nunavut is last with 10.3%.

Manitoba also led the provinces in the category of percentage of income donated to good works with 1.02% of their income being donated. Alberta and Saskatchewan are second with 0.86%, and Ontario is third with 0.84%. Again, Quebec is last with 0.33% of income going to charity and Nunavut is last among the territories with 0.22%.

Although actual donation data is not part of the study, it showed that Alberta is No. 1 in Canada when it came to the total amount of cash given, with \$2,298, B.C. is second with \$1,796 and Ontario third with \$1,729. Newfoundland and Labrador came last out of all the provinces and territories with the average charitable donation being \$953.

Lammam said that there are no concrete reasons behind why people in some regions - such as the prairie provinces - give more while others give less. He said there may be stronger or weaker cultural or religious influences at work. It may also be some regions have the attitude that the government is taking care of charitable concerns for them, he said.

The Generosity Index also points out more bad news for Canadian groups that rely on our generous hearts: The percentage of people donating to charity is dropping. Data shows that in 10 out of 13 of the provinces and territories, there have been decreases from 1997 to 2007. For example, in Saskatchewan, the percentage of people who donated has fallen from 28.7% to 25.7% during those 10 years, a 10% decrease, while PEI saw a similar 9.1% decrease. Only B.C., Newfoundland and Labrador and the Yukon saw increases in this area.

Lammam said this decline in giving is troubling and limits the power of charities to help those in need in our country.

The good news out of the data is that the percentage of income Canadians are giving appears to be growing. In this category, Manitoba saw the biggest growth from 1997 to 2007 with a 31.5% increase, while the Yukon saw a 28.9% increase. Only Newfoundland and Labrador saw a decrease in this category with a 5.4% drop.

- In recessionary times, there are even less inducements to give – after all, if we give, won't that leave us vulnerable to surprises?
- Or – “we would give, but we're finding things tight as it is” – the Rexall commercials – we need Rexall relief!
- Give generously - what does that look like? to charity? friends? people you don't know? your time i/o your money? what do you have less of? generosity is demonstrated when we give away what we only have a little of, not when we give away what we don't need... !
- Even with time being more valuable than money today, there's still something to be said for giving away your money/stuff – Mammon will always be a powerful idol, and many times, our time is being spent in the quest for money/stuff, too – “it's all about the jack”
- You can be a deal-hunter and generous at the same time
- Our example - Jesus, who gave everything he had - died with nothing, gave even his life, no possessions, they divided his long johns by gambling for them while he lay dying - he gave it all away - Phil 2 - live a life of love...
- **Tipping – having the chance to demonstrate who you are in a single encounter with someone**
 - If you've ever worked for tips, you're likely a good tipper – if you never have, maybe not...

Key Thought:

The life God wants us to enjoy with Him is generous: honest, hard-working and giving.

You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully. And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.

II Corinthians 9:7-8, NLT

Getting to the generous life:

- It's a spectrum – a chain of links – where are you coming into it? Are you a thief? In something small? (this is harsh) Or are you living off the system? (Paul found that too - work or you don't eat - Thessalonians -
- 1) ask God about your “weakest link”
 - 2) be honest about it with yourself and a friend
 - 3) do one radical thing about it

Conclusion: a new you?!?

A New You in the New Year - Coaching

The New Year is an excellent time for new beginnings. This could be your opportunity to create the changes you want. Making changes and creating new habits take on renewed energy during this time of year and you can tap into that energy to help you create a new you. What does it mean to create a new you? Only you can answer that. A new you, for some, may mean little minor changes. For others, it might be a major overhaul. The good news is you can customize the new you to be anything you like.

Creating a new you simply means refining and rebuffering so that the best of me comes out even more. Like those products we see in the store that say "New and Improved," the essence of the product is the same. What has happened is improvements were made to the original that make it better in some way. The concept of creating a new you is taking the best of what is already there and adding new elements that make you an even better you. Creating a new you means you take a good you and make it better.

[Play Song - This Is How We Know (Matt Redman)]

Response: Q & A