

Giving vs Generosity

Resonate reader and avid journaler, Chelsea Riviere, 28, heard about our money issue and was keen to share her passion for giving with attitude.



My earliest memory of giving was in a church that my family was visiting. I was young, maybe four years old, and was entrusted with some money for the offering bowl. A whole fifty cents. Enough to buy a lemonade icy pole. I gripped it tight in my fist and considered, for the entire duration of Shine Jesus Shine, if anyone would notice if I slipped the coin into my pocket instead. I actually remember looking along at the people in my row as I weighed up what to do. Icy pole – offering – icy pole – offering. When the moment came, I dropped my big shiny, sliver coin into the bowl.

FOR ME, THE ACTION OF GIVING IS ALWAYS EASIER THAN THE ATTITUDE OF GENEROSITY.

I suspect I was motivated by:

1. the fear of getting caught, and
2. the idea that it was the right thing to do.

I did give that day, but it was certainly not with a cheerful heart!

As I've grown up, it has been easy to dismiss the first motivation. And I've since enjoyed many a lemonade icy pole. But the second motivation – giving out of duty or obligation – has been harder to shake. I haven't had difficulty giving to causes, but I haven't necessarily had a generous heart as I've done it. For me, the action of giving is always easier than the attitude of generosity.

I've never consciously asked myself 'What will be the impact on me if I give?', but the answer is one that has guided how, when and how much I give. Will I have enough for what I need? Will I have to cut back on what I want? When I've thought first of my own situation and considered how much I can give without actually feeling any impact, I'm not giving from a place of real generosity.

I want to cultivate a generous heart, but how do I do it?

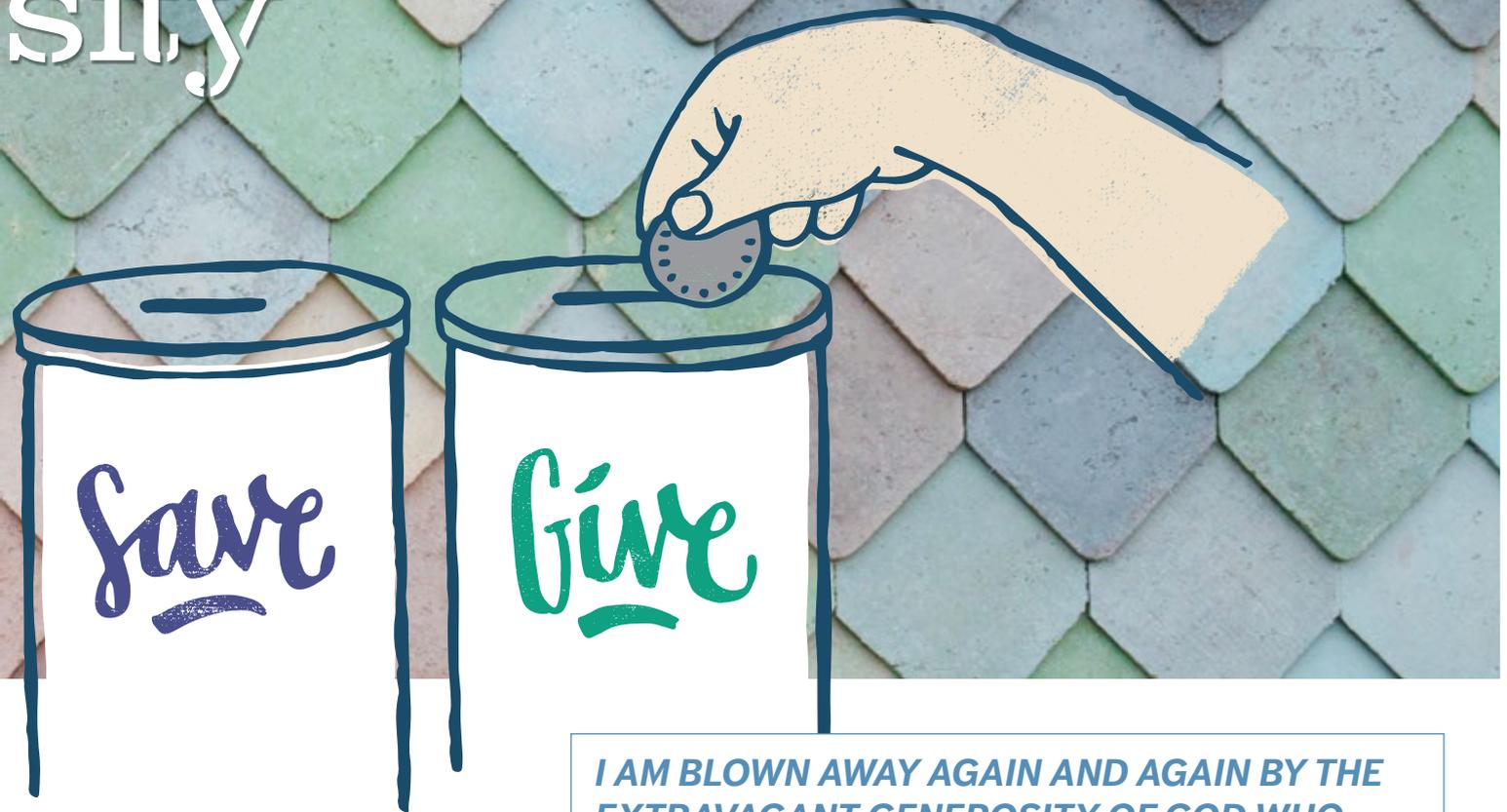
I think that it starts with an attitude of thankfulness.

I can thank God as the provider of what I have, and also recognise the gifts from others that have contributed to who I am, like my high school science teacher who believed in me and my grandma who prays for me. When I am thankful, my focus shifts to what I have – my resources, my passions and my gifts – rather than what I lack.

Learning to be humble is also part of the process of becoming generous. I remind myself that all I have not only comes from God, but remains His possession. Paul wrote that we start with nothing and in the end we'll leave everything behind.¹ When I truly see that I am simply a steward for the time I'm here, it changes me. I no longer think about me, me, me, but consider how I can best use what has been entrusted to me.

A thankful heart helps me to recognise all that I already hold. An attitude of humility gives me the freedom to hold it lightly.

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I AM BLOWN AWAY AGAIN AND AGAIN BY THE EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY OF GOD WHO WITHHELD NOTHING, NOT EVEN HIS SON.

Another idea is to recognise who, not what, I am giving to. Paul writes about the church in Macedonia giving themselves first of all to God, and then to others². When I give myself (not just my things) to God, I again take the focus away from me and can join in with what God's already doing. When I get close to God, I get close to His generous heart and can respond with His compassion. Now that's a whole different experience to giving that comes from a will powered and duty-bound place.

I'm not pretending that it is easy. When I was 16, I won an award that had a cash prize. I didn't have a part-time job so I really valued this money. I held on to it and was waiting for the right thing to buy. Soon after, the Boxing Day tsunami hit and I watched image after image of people who now had physically nothing. When I thought of my money in light of this disaster, there was no way that I could justify spending on myself. I still wanted to buy clothes, but I felt an obligation to give.

Of course, my donation would have been put to good use regardless of my motivation, but how much better for me to have given out of thankfulness instead of looking at what I would miss?

My perspective makes a difference. When I set my eyes on the limitless time, energy and riches of heaven, rather than on the finite resources I have here, I am encouraged to be generous. We're called to store up heavenly riches³ and we are not going to lose out! I've found that when I focus on the eternal, the things I have now become less important, and the reasons I hold them tightly lose their power. I can open my hands and offer what I have. I can let the coin drop.

**So how can I give with real generosity?
By being thankful and humble.
Recognising God as my provider and
setting my sights on heaven.**

Recently, before setting off for half a year away from home, I was on the receiving end of generosity that overwhelmed me. A friend of mine, an incredible woman, who was once a refugee, handed me an envelope. 'It's not much, not much,' she almost apologised and asked me not to open it immediately. Later, while sitting in my car, I opened the envelope to find ten folded notes inside. As tears welled in my eyes I thought, 'who was I to receive such a generous gift?'

I was blown away by my friend's generosity and I am blown away again and again by the extravagant generosity of God who withheld nothing, not even His Son. Being his followers, let's come humbly with hearts that are thankful... and let the generous giving begin!

1. 1 Timothy 6:7
2. 2 Corinthians 8:5
3. Matthew 20:6