

“God the Giver”
by Jodie Nychuk
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Romans 8:32-39

A few Sundays ago, the Rev. Frances Savill shared excerpts from *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* by Miroslav Volf. This led me to re-read this book and to the title of today’s message. Frances has asked me to deliver a message again in August which will focus on ‘God the Forgiver’.

Miroslav Volf is a Croatian protestant theologian who is the director of the Yale Center for faith and culture. His father found the ‘God of Love’ or rather God found him in a communist labour camp. He describes his mother as having a yearning for God. His nanny displayed a non-judgemental goodness and led a life filled with joy and hope.

In looking at today’s gospel reading from Romans: “*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*”, we know that all things come from God.

Everything we are and everything that we have belongs to God. He provides for us in order that we can be blessings to others. The love of God is so great that it compels us to pour out love. We are not just the intended recipients of Gods gifts – we are also their channels.

Volf emphasizes that *it’s not by our generosity that we’re saved. We are saved by God’s generosity.* Most of us don’t “get” the extent of God’s giving. We believe that we can stand on our own two feet, independent of God and still affirm that God is the creator of everything. But that doesn’t make sense. To live in sync with who we truly are means to recognize that we are dependent upon God for our very breath and are graced with many good things; it means to be grateful to the giver and attentive to the purpose for which the gifts are given.

The first thing to which God's gifts oblige us is FAITH. Faith is the way we as receivers relate appropriately to God as the giver. It is empty hands held open for God to fill. Faith honours God. It is an expression of the fact that we exist so that the infinite God can dwell in us and work through us for the well being of the whole creation.

I often hear people wonder why God allows there to be so much poverty in our world. Volf clarifies that God has already provided more than enough. If everyone in the United States gave 10% of their earnings – world hunger could be eradicated.

Let's recall the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2: 15-17. God put Adam in a lush garden and said to him "*You may freely eat of every tree in the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.*" The tempting serpent easily convinced Adam and Eve that God didn't want them to eat from that single tree because he was "stingy" and "jealous", but Adam and Eve should have concluded just the opposite.

The one forbidden fruit reveals God's overwhelming generosity and goodness in that He so aptly provided for them with a multitude of wonderful choices. Like Adam and Eve, when we treat gifts as entitlements and complain about not getting more that makes us poor receivers and it wrongs the giver. The proper response to God's gifts is to receive them in faith and be grateful to the giver.

A story that follows closely on the heels of Adam and Eve is that of their sons Cain and Abel. Both brothers brought offerings to God – Cain an offering of the fruit of the ground and Abel the firstlings of his flock. There are many indications that Cain was a proud, wealthy and miserly first born, whereas Abel was a humble, poor and generous second son.

Cain was in competition with Abel, and in his mind, he was way ahead. He was first in the order of birth as well as in power, wealth and honour. But where Cain was a taker who grudgingly presented his offering to God, Abel was a giver, who in gratitude for what he had received, gave generously.

That is why God in Genesis 4 had regard for Abel and his offering but no regard for Cain.

Let's imagine that this ball represents our wealth – never forgetting that everything we have has been provided to us from our heavenly Father. Wealth can be time, talent or treasure. Now I can hold onto this ball all day long - but how much fun is that going to be? What is the purpose of a ball (throw or bounce)? If I just hold onto my wealth what good is that?

The only way to give is to let go (throw the ball to someone and have them throw it back to me). Often that wealth will come back to us, as Jesus says, "give and you shall receive". Sometimes by sharing the wealth that God has provided it is multiplied as it is shared with many (throw the ball to someone who throws it to other people).

Miroslav Volf shares a story about a person who anonymously paid for someone's gas. Shortly afterward that person went on to witness the receiver of his gift of free gas helping out a person who was homeless. Volf emphasizes that we were created for communion with one another, not just with God. As we read Paul's letters it is striking how frequently he uses the little phrase "one another" - close to 100 times to be exact!

I want to talk a bit more about the "wealth" that we just passed around. We often think of wealth in terms of money, but we are also wealthy in terms of time and talents. Giving someone your time can be one of the greatest gifts of all. God also gifted us with many different talents enabling us to work together to do good works.

1 Peter Ch. 4:10 & 11 state *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."*

In Genesis 12 God gave Abraham a double promise. The first was *"I will bless you"*, the second was *"I will make you a blessing"*.

We are givers because God made us that way. If I block the flow of God's gifts, I haven't just failed our giving God, I've also failed the intended recipients. God gives for the benefit of others and so should we.

I'm so thankful to belong to such a giving church family. As a member of the Mission and Outreach team I am blessed to see how many benefits from God's giving through us - as we regularly support *The Gathering Place*, the *Food Bank*, the *Salvation Army & Hope Awaits Ministries*. This year we were able to provide Yefim with great opportunity to study and learn English, which is helping him achieve his goal of completing his business degree. We continue to help our fellow churches provide for and eventually bring 12 orphans from Sudan to Canada.

In terms of time, I'm sure that we can each think about many of the wonderful outreach opportunities such as *LOGOS*, *The Coldest Night of the Year* and *Lettuce Reach Out*, just to name a few. We demonstrate fellowship by breaking bread together and reaching out to a brother or sister in kindness. Indeed, our various teams with their many God-given talents work for the glory of God – as do each one of us! Thanks be to God!

Prayer:

Loving Father, we come to you today with grateful thanks for the gifts and promises you provide. Help us to have generous hearts that flow from Your own generosity – grateful hearts that are full of trust and thanks for You who has done so much for us. We ask that you give us wisdom to know what to give, when to give and whom to give to. Hear our prayer, Lord. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.