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I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness. They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

—Psalm 145 NRSV

Four Generations of Generosity

I can remember sitting impatiently in the car ready to visit relatives who lived a few miles down the country road. We were waiting for Mom to finish preparing the basket of farm cream, eggs and vegetables to take along for our neighbours. “Why does she always take something along when we go visiting?” I wondered. I was 14. I didn’t really understand generosity at that time. I just observed it. Now I wonder about those times and think a little more deeply about them.

Mom was born in Romania and grew up on a prosperous farm. Her family had a brick factory and also a general store. The family, including the children, worked very hard and did quite well. Mom told me she had hoped to go to school to become a nurse, but when the time came, her father had denied her that privilege. Working at home was more important. She could have been bitter, but wasn’t. She went through life without having formal secondary education, but she used her God given talents and shared them with others.

War loomed on the horizon and one day soldiers announced that the family had only a few hours to pack up their belongings and vacate the area, or risk being killed. They left their home, farm and factory, never to return. How did Mom feel about that? She never showed any signs of hatred.

Her brothers were enlisted in the army. All but one died fighting. The family traveled throughout Europe for nine years, desperately trying to get out of the conflict surrounding them. Fortunately, an uncle in Canada offered to sponsor the family to emigrate in 1949. That was the first generation of generosity.

My mother worked on her uncle’s farm for a few years and then at

a store in Weyburn, not far from her new home. She married and moved further west to start a farm. The farm required a lot of work, but that was nothing compared to the gift of freedom. My parents worked hard growing crops, milking cows, raising chickens and other livestock. And yes, they had three children.

Mom loved children and spent many years teaching Sunday school. She would take gifts, too, of cookies and milk. If there was a picnic, the children would get more food. That’s all she had to give, but she gave unselfishly.

She sold eggs and cream to residents in Gravelbourg, respecting all her customers and greeting them with a smile. The money she earned would buy groceries, shoes and clothes. She made clothes for herself. I know we didn’t appreciate her generosity nearly enough. Farm life was tough, but she didn’t seem to mind.

Mom loved the Lord and made sure that we went to church every Sunday. This was her renewal time and a chance to visit the neighbours. I remember going to church one particularly rainy Sunday. The roads were muddy and it took us 20 minutes to travel the four miles to church, only to find out that it had been cancelled. For Mom, it was worth the effort.

My mom definitely was the second generation of generosity.

That makes me the third generation. I had learned and truly believed that the more you give, the more you receive. When I started to earn money, however, I was unsure of how much I should give.

Tithing seemed an ancient term, too ancient for modern times. A concept I have

A Steward's Story "Four Generations of Generosity", continued...

come to understand better is 'proportional giving'. The more you have been blessed, the more you return to God.

Together with my wife and children, I attended church regularly and every Sunday we would write a check that would represent our 'proportional gift'. Sometimes when I wrote out the check, a little voice in the back of my head would say, "Are you sure you are not giving too much? Couldn't you use the money for something else?" This persisted until one Sunday, during a sermon given by Pastor Wally Kurtz, I was taught about commitment. Pastor Kurtz suggested that the check for a gift be written out at the beginning of each month.

We have donated using that method for the past 15 years. Some months, it was tempting to save it for emergencies, or pad the bank account, or pay down the mortgage. But we had made a commitment and decided that giving was more important. We truly believe we have received more than we have given. We are content with our lot in life - good health, good parents, good children, good friends and good relationships in our family. We know that 'good' is not defined by a large bank account.

That brings us to the fourth generation of generosity. How does one teach children generosity? We have been generous with our time, volunteering for Sunday school, church council, community services, confirmation classes and youth retreats. Our children are also generous with their time in volunteer capacities.

We have been generous with our talents, singing in choirs, preparing and serving meals, repairing broken items and the like. Our children offer their gifts of musical talent to church and school functions. They lead Bible studies and encourage others in the Word.

But how do you teach someone to give financially when they don't really have any income? The opportunity came when our daughter was preparing to go to university. She thought that she needed a digital camera. Rather than saying no, I suggested she make a budget for herself for the year. I asked her to do the first draft thinking about food, tuition, books, transportation, clothing and entertainment. It was definitely a learning experience for both of us. I didn't know how costly university really was. She didn't realize how much was provided for her at home. The digital camera (and other wants) fell by the wayside quickly, at her suggestion.

As I reviewed her draft budget, I realized that she hadn't allowed any funds for charitable donations. A reminder of how our family donated to the church lead to an

addition in her budget. She gives proportionally to her income. She has even inspired her younger brother to do the same. It is satisfying to see them offer their gifts each month at church. They have made a commitment and they give freely.

In John 6:27, Jesus says, "Do not work for food that spoils. Instead, work for food that lasts into eternal life." (Good News Bible).

This is the lesson of generosity that Jesus taught. This is the lesson that we are to model and teach to others.

Ed Miller is an engineer living in Wilcox, SK. He is married to Susan and they have two generous children, Eleah & Bob. They all like to make a difference in the world.

