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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

Reducing the Stress of Giving

The Christmas season is often touted as the Season of Giving. We give gifts to our family and friends, we give a little extra to charities, we give of our time to the church for Christmas preparations, we give baking to our neighbours, and the list goes on. As always, there is joy in giving but there can also be stress.

This past year, for example, I have felt the stress of continuing to give 10% of our income away while running a deficit in my savings that I need in order to pay for university next year. I have felt the stress of being away from my family in order to give my time to the church by attending council meetings, stewardship seminars, committee meetings, and capital campaign coordinating meetings. I have felt the stress of giving my talents to the church by practicing with the contemporary worship team, and when I have assisted as a worship leader. Giving of my time and talent to write a newsletter article every month can stress me out if I'm trying to get it done last minute and my kids are at my feet screaming for attention.

What is the source of this stress? Isn't giving supposed to be joyous and liberating? Have you ever felt this way?

I think I've figured it out...for myself that is. My main stress comes from being judgmental in my giving. I can feel stressed because I wrongly believe that everyone should be giving of their time, talents, and treasure with the same magnitude and passion that I do. "If everyone gave like me then I wouldn't be so burdened." I become critical of others. That is plain wrong, wrong, wrong...for there was definitely a time in my life when I gave nothing to the church, yet I expected everything from it.

For me there is a simple way around this stress of giving and I hope you will see it too. My stress comes from giving to the people of our church and expecting them to give back. It is a normal, understandable, (although dangerous) reaction to have. I have learned to change my attitude so that I no longer get stressed about giving. The solution: I don't give to the church. I give to God.

If giving your money to the church stresses you out, don't give it to the church, but give it to God. If giving your time on a church committee stresses you out, don't give your time to the committee, give your time to God. If sharing your talents with the church makes you nervous or fearful of how others will view your talent, don't give it to them, but rather, give it to God. Try shifting your motivation - give to honour God.

While it can be hard to give to the church with all its flaws (and flawed members), it is easy to give to God. God deserves all our gifts and it is truly joyous to share them with God who did, after all, give us more gifts than we deserve, and continues to do so every day.

Kyle Kushnier is a proud charter member of Abundant Life Lutheran Church in East St. Paul, Manitoba. When he's not stressed out giving to the church, he's bored. His solution? More giving, of course!!

