

Giving or Receiving

Theresa Carroll

Most of you know that in 2011 I was diagnosed with cancer and almost died. I am now well, thanks to God and all of you allowing the Spirit to move you to give to me in many creative ways.

What would happen if no one received?

What are some of the obstacles to receiving?

The first one for me was that I didn't want to admit that the problem was too big for me to solve alone. Too bad, truth is, all problems or challenges are too much for one person to solve by herself. And even if I can handle it myself, who am I to deny some one to share their gift with me? I surrendered.

Next obstacle: this one was hard for me to get past. I don't want to impose on anyone, I trust myself not to take advantage. When I was really truthful about this one, it actually was this: I didn't want to be judged as taking more than my fair share. So, I was in special circumstances, I HAD to allow myself to receive. Once again I had to be honest with myself and let go of what people might think, and surrender. To God, my family, my church family, to people I didn't even know, to my community. It continues to be an act of courage to let people touch me with their loving hearts and accept God's grace coming to me through their gifts. The gifts these days are everyday gifts, a smile from an acquaintance, a lunch tab picked up, an invitation to do a task. Thank you, Pastor Diane, for many loving coaching sessions.

The next big obstacle was thinking I didn't deserve to be the recipient of all this generosity. Why were people so generous with me, when I knew of others who were in circumstances similar to mine, but they weren't receiving nearly as much as I?

I think it was because I committed myself to being the man on the pallet, forced to depend on friends, willing to receive God's grace. I committed to trusting that one day I would be in the giving position again. I am willing to be as honest as I can about what I need and what I have to give. It was/is a commitment to set aside my en-cultured idea that receiving is less than giving, that only giving brings me grace. I committed to being honest with myself and telling the truth as I understand it.

So, I started telling the truth about what I needed. I released my fear of being humiliated, and actively chose to let my community be inspired to take care of me. What happened?

I was lifted up. The creativity and range of the gifts surprised me. Truly, the Holy Spirit is here. Meals were cooked for me and my family. When my siblings came from far away places homes were opened, thousands of dollars were donated, and my bills were met. One person came once a week and helped me fill out (and turn in) all the overwhelming forms. Over 80 individuals provided rides for me. My housekeeping was done. I was given massages, healing sessions, and manicures. I couldn't help my daughter with her college and scholarship applications, and a loving friend assisted her. If you all were willing to stay until tomorrow morning, there are more examples. It wasn't always easy to be gracious, but it was easy to be grateful.

Folks told me that because I asked for a prayer group, their prayer life deepened. I learned that because of my stance to trust myself, some people learned to give with no expectation for how the gift was used. My sisters reconciled, folks have come together as friends who wouldn't know each other otherwise, a friend discovered her vocation, the community got to see itself as a whole community. There are many other examples which I don't feel free to mention here. In short, by letting myself receive I ended up giving to others.

I thank you all, anyone who put money in the collection plate, who paid taxes, you gave to me. I realize each gift was from the heart of the giver and the range of presents just goes to show that we each have unique talents to use and to share.

We are taught that it is better to give than to receive. I happen to believe that receiving and giving are equally important.

Even if we concede that giving is better than receiving, it doesn't mean that receiving is bad...or wrong. Think about how wonderful we feel when we give generously... I mean with a generous heart. How does it feel to give freely? Give with no resentment, give with no strings attached, give knowing that your gift is useful, will delight? Make a difference in a life?

I feel GREAT when I can give this way, especially when it's a stretch.

Don't we know from personal experience, that we receive in intangible ways MORE than we give? We feel appreciated, loved and most importantly, we know ourselves as loving. Sharing allows us to feel connected to our own goodness, to God and our neighbor. At its best, giving allows us to feel compassion, and expand our experience to include another's circumstances.

What would happen if there were no one willing to receive?

What happens when a gift is received ungraciously? What feelings arise? What

decisions about sharing again get made?

How does it feel when you offer assistance to someone just to hear, "I'm fine, I don't need anything." Then there's that awkward pause because no one is fooled. That's one of the ironic things about denying anything is wrong, everyone knows anyway. Out of an unwillingness to embarrass or intrude we give each other passes on those polite lies.

To my mind this is dishonest; with ourselves, God and our neighbors. Both parties miss the opportunity to let the Holy Spirit inspire them. For me, this is why receiving is as important as giving, receiving lets the Spirit in.

Both people miss the opportunity to manifest the Spirit, especially the person who is in need. Oh boy, I said something dirty. At least most of us think of "I need, I want," as forbidden to say out loud, sometimes even to ourselves. Both John and Matthew tell of the man who had to let his friends carry him to Jesus on a pallet because he couldn't walk. There will be at least one time in every life when God will ask you to lie on the pallet and surrender to Him through your neighbor's grace and goodness.

God promised to provide for us. Our promise to Him is simple: love Him with our whole mind and heart, and love our neighbors as ourselves. God has a heck of a time keeping His promise because we refuse His goodness when we refuse to receive from our neighbors. In it's worst form, this becomes a denial of God's presence in our lives.

When we deny or keep silent about our needs we deny God's grace in our lives. God is present with us and within each of us ALL the time.

When we deny some one inspired to offer us support or comfort we are denying God's grace and presence in our lives. We are refusing them the chance to experience the goodness of giving.

If no one were available to receive, how could we enjoy the richness of giving?

I didn't deserve the outpouring any more than anyone else. But that's my point. We are all beloved of God, we all deserve the full bounty of His Grace. And all that keeps Grace from us is our refusal to receive it.

The Biggest Obstacle to receiving is letting ourselves feel and know how beloved we are.

(This next part was not read)

So, next time some one asks if they can help you, take a deep breath, look for God in his eyes, and even if you can't see Him, say yes. Let yourself know you are beloved. Then notice what happens – for both of you, for all of us.