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Depth Perception

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Recent announcements in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* heralded the following news:

- a.) Total giving to charity is up! (Canadians too!)
- b.) Protestants increased their giving to local congregations!
- c.) Giving from corporations to charity also increased!

Doesn't this sound good?

Look a little closer, however, and you will discover all forms of giving are shrinking as a percentage of income. The total dollars may have gone up, but not at the pace of increased income or expense. In my career as a stewardship educator, I have only witnessed one method that works against this. It is not anything new or revolutionary. In fact, it is as old as Abraham (Genesis 14:20). That method is . . .

Tithing.

Now, the subject here is not debating whether tithing is required of a Christian. In fact, I don't even want to put this conversation in a religious context at the moment.

The focus is on the method.

When one ties their giving to a percentage of income, it increases far more rapidly than just seeing if they might increase last year's gift. And yes, tithing can also lead to a smaller gift if one's income is lessened – but the giver need feel no humiliation.

While I am glad the total amount of money flowing into charity is not shrinking – we cannot pretend all is well. The reality is fewer people are giving ever smaller percentages of their income. North American Christians with jobs should be the most generous people in all of human history, and it is time they began attaining that reputation. After all, they know the fullness of God's grace and they have the capacity in their wallets, their garages, their closets, their education and their life experiences.

How then can we increase in giving? Let's start by fixing our giving to a percent of income – the first check we write as a thank-you to God. Make the goal ten percent and beyond – even if you must work incrementally over a period of years to get there. Once we have begun we are in a much better position to ask others to do the same. Then, little by little and one by one, we can add steam to this great ship of generosity.

-mark

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