

Because we are entering week 2 of a series on Renewing our Covenant, I would like to take a moment to connect back to last week...

Baptism calls us to lead a life of commitment to God’s will, a life of Christian discipleship. Baptism has significance throughout our lives, therefore it is in order to acknowledge and to celebrate the grace of God bestowed on us in baptism and to lay claim to that grace every day. This is what Martin Luther (theologian) did through his oft-repeated phrase, “I am baptized.” Whenever Luther’s faith was weakening, or the challenge of evil before him was threatening, he would remember his baptism and find new strength and courage. In renewing his covenant with God, Luther experienced again and again its power and meaning. Baptism is to be the referent point for our daily lives, with all that it means renewed through daily repentance and faithfulness in discipleship.

At the conclusion of last week’s message, we pulled our reminder of the power of our baptism together with our call to IMPACT. Perhaps you remember what Gary Williams said about Impact: Pursuing Change, Being Changed. He says, *“Pursuing Change...Being Changed means once we are “in Christ” everything changes - our perspective, our priorities, our values, our actions, our relationships, our heart. Growing in Christ requires change. God is making all things new, even me.”* Dare I say this was at work throughout this week in a variety of ways. Thank you to all who got connected and engaged.

The reason we made that direct connection between baptism and Impact is the definition of I.M.P.A.C.T. is a great vessel in which we can dig deeper into understanding our covenant relationship with God more passionately. Impact can be broken down into: ***I***mpant. ***M***ultiply. ***P***rovision. ***A***bundance. ***C***onsecration. ***T***hanksgiving. It would be too much to try to tackle all of these at once, therefore, we are going to take them 2 x 2 x 2.

With these words in mind, I would like to invite us to hear Paul’s letter in 2 Corinthians 9 once again. With his trademark relaxed assurance, Paul offers what has become called “A Philosophy of Christian Giving.” He speaks of general principles such as consecration, readiness, proportionality, and definite purpose. He highlights methods such as having someone to push (inspire), honesty (transparency), psychological smartness coupled with the Holy Spirit, and persistence. And he includes motives such as giving is a test of love, giving is modeled after the self-giving of Christ, and giving produces profound spiritual results.

Read **2 Corinthians 9**

Two general points before we get into the “I- Implant” and “M-Multiply” of I.M.P.A.C.T.

The first is... We have all been found “Needing.”

In her book, [searching for sunday; loving, leaving, and finding the church](#), Rachel Held Evans writes, “The tangible, tactile nature of the sacraments invited me to touch, smell, taste, hear, and see God in the stuff of everyday life again. They got God out of my head and into my hands. They reminded me that Christianity isn’t meant to simply be believed; it’s meant to be lived, shared, eaten, spoken, and enacted in the presence of other people. They reminded me that, try as I may, I can’t be a Christian on my own. I need a community. I need the church.”

“Serving others is what we are to do, as Christians, as people. All of us have or will have times of some sort of need or support. If you say you haven’t, you haven’t lived long enough.” Bill Wither’s “Lean on Me.” (John Tinsley)

The second is... We have no greater “need” than the grace of God.

And good news for us, God is ready, willing, and able to pour out God’s grace upon us. Upon God’s grace is what Paul hangs his entire Philosophy of Christian Giving. Paul wanted more than anything for the Corinthians, and subsequently us, to know of God’s grace, because to know God’s grace is to be empowered with the greatest of all gifts and to be empowered with the greatest gift means you are able to do all God asks of you to be faithful. “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” (9:8) God’s promise is limitless: God is able to make all grace abound toward us. God’s grace is relevant in all things at all times. God will provide all that we need. God will enable us to abound in every good work. There is no reason under any circumstances for us as believers to ever feel spiritually limited.

Both of these are reinforced by one of the most fundamental, core beliefs of the church: “THE WORK OF GOD IS TO BE DONE BY THE PEOPLE OF GOD GIVING ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD.”

Let’s dig into the “I” of I.M.P.A.C.T.- **Implant**. Paul writes in verse 6, “**Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion...**”

To sow means to scatter (seed) over land, earth, etc., for growth; to plant; to implant, introduce, or promulgate; seek to propagate or extend; disseminate. We may think

here of the parable of the Sower, in which Jesus teaches that some seed falls on hard ground, some in good soil, some among the thorns, etc., highlighting the importance to sow and plant seed in good soil for it to grow. But, as the definition suggests, we don't just sow seeds. We also spread or introduce ideas or feelings, in the hope that they will carry widespread impact or development.

And we don't just sow seeds, aka scatter them about and hope for the best. This is where I like the synonym implant. To implant offers deeper roots and a more intentional purpose with the giving and sharing of our gifts. To implant offers a longer lasting relationship and establishment.

Paul's reminder here to sow, or implant our gifts generously, is in reference to giving and sharing our gifts with God and God's purposes. And the juxtaposition with giving generously, like God has given abundantly to you, verses sparingly is telling. For it is only possible to reap something that has been sown, implanted. We can't expect to have the fruit of a tree if we aren't willing to plant and tend to the tree. I have said for quite some time and really do believe that you get out what you are willing to put in. The more you invest you more you yield.

We are to implant, however, I believe there is an important recognition that must be made. Another "I" word – "initiative"- is required for anything to happen. "Desire precedes duty in the grace of giving." In Jesus Christ, we have been liberated eternally. We celebrate this in baptism and communion. And because of the freedom Christ has given us, we are able to give wholeheartedly and unreservedly to God. God allows us to exercise this freedom by our own determination and initiative. Looking back at our text from Paul, this was the principle at work in the Macedonians when they gave "entirely on their own." They took the initiative in giving, exercising their freedom in an expression of true generosity.

"Freely you have received, freely give," said Jesus to the disciples when he sent them out to preach the Gospel. They had been freely given the redemptive truth of Christ, and with God's empowerment, they were mobilized to go forth and give it away to others. As their lives had been changed, others' lives would be changed by the same transformational truth.

Christ has given beyond all measure, all at his personal initiative. How can we not as stewards live with the same initiative and choose willingly to give our all for Christ? To do God's will, we must exercise our own. How? Take the initiative in giving to the plight of the poor. What does it look like to love the poor and help the poor in a Christ-like way? We can pray for them, of course, but the need is best met through giving money, giving time, and

giving care to the poor. Take the initiative in giving to the cause of Christ. Take the initiative in giving to the spread of the Gospel. Jesus is not a way, a truth, and a life. Jesus is THE way, truth, and life. By giving for the sake of the Gospel we are ensuring that the message goes forth.

We all must impart to others, to the church, that which God has given us and bestowed on us, and oh how the harvest will be plentiful.

Plentiful? That brings us to our “M” in I.M.P.A.C.T.- “Multiply.”

A concept of gospel math is a faith thing. How else does one describe the feeding of the 4000 and 5000, casting out a legion of demons, salvation to millions with one act of loving and gracious sacrifice, the trinity- three in one, one in three? Gospel math supports that there is nothing else that gives you the return on your investment like faith in Jesus Christ.

God enables the giver to give beyond the ability to give.

Oswald J. Smith was one of the most influential Christian leaders of the 20th Century. For nearly 50 years he served as senior pastor of Toronto’s famed People’s Church, considered by many to be the most mission-minded congregation in North America. During Dr. Smith’s eventful tenure at the church, it was not unusual for more than half the annual income to be invested in missionary endeavors around the globe. Oswald Smith did not shy away from the subject of giving to the Lord’s work; indeed, he spent much of his time calling upon believers to contribute as generously, sacrificially and energetically as possible. A prolific writer, he authored numerous books and coined more than his share of memorable phrases. But undoubtedly the most enduring is a term still widely used: the “Faith Promise Offering.”

According to Pastor Smith, a Faith Promise Offering is a commitment to give a specific amount to God’s work based upon God’s future supply of the funds rather than one’s present ability to give the money. The essential idea is to make a specific promise by faith, relying upon the Lord to provide and enable fulfillment of the promise. As the reasoning goes, if God doesn’t supply, you don’t give, because it’s up to God to provide. And, as thousands upon thousands of testimonies confirm, God will supply, and God will bless the one who puts faith in God’s ability. To Dr. Smith, this wasn’t hocus-pocus or some kind of mysterious occurrence. It was simply God keeping God’s word and providing for God’s children as they trusted in God explicitly.

The lesson for us is that we can give beyond our ability to give only by choosing to rely upon God’s supply rather than our own. If it is an act of faith, God will honor the trust placed in God.

Of course, the return on investment I am speaking to is spiritual. However, there are some natural returns that come with the miraculous multiplications Jesus enacts.

George Muller hadn't faced a situation quite like it. Before him were 120 orphans, expectantly seated at long dinner tables. But something at this mealtime tested the mettle of Muller's heart. On the dinner plates at the table was nothing but crusts of bread. Eager faces looked toward him, as if to say, "What's for dinner?" But he didn't know; the cupboard was bare and the refrigerator and freezer empty. There was no milk, and no money to buy food or drink. What would George do? It didn't take long for him to decide. He would do what he had done every other mealtime. He would instruct the children to bow their heads and join him in thanking God for the meal they were about to eat. He would praise God for the faithfulness of God's provision. And so he did. Muller prayed simply, directly, and with a heart filled with faith.

When the "amen" was pronounced, the plates still had nothing but bread crusts. But as the eyes of those 120 youngsters turned again to the head table, a knock sounded at the door. One of the boys was sent to answer. A moment later, he called out, "Mr. Muller, it's the vegetable man! He's got a lot of stuff for us!" "Coincidentally (and you all know how I feel about that)," there were many vegetables that would spoil if he didn't do something with them. While the vegetables were being unloaded, another person came to the door- the butcher! He had run out of ice at the end of a hot day and faced the prospect of awful, rotting meat. Could the orphanage use it? No sooner had he spoken the words than another amazing "coincidence" occurred. The milkman's wagon pulled up, overloaded with milk and dairy products and needing desperately to do something with them! Needless to say, it was quite the banquet that night. And it was the finest lesson in faith those orphans ever received- the spiritual law of miraculous multiplication. God honored their simple faith with supernatural supply.

Would the same thing have happened had Muller not prayed, believing God for the provision ahead of time for it? We don't know, but we do know that Jesus said we have not because we ask not. What does it mean to walk by faith? How can we believe God above and beyond our ability, our resources and our strength? In what ways can we trust God to provide supernaturally on our behalf? In faith, we are to have confidence, obedience, and courage.

Or, in the words of Diane Stroud, *"I love that the opportunities to serve during IMPACT week uplift neighbors in our own community. It is encouraging when I feel that there is too much brokenness in the world for me to make much of a difference. I read in Mike Yaconelli's book Messy Spirituality (pages 139, 141, 152), "Spirituality is about doing the tiny work of God, little acts, small responses to God's presence in our lives. . . .Tiny acts become huge when Jesus is involved. . . .The spiritual life is a tiny life, filled with little decisions, tiny steps toward God, tiny glimpses of His presence, little changes and small movings, tiny successes, and imperceptible stirrings." Participating in even one event during IMPACT week might seem insignificant, tiny. But "every tiny contribution we make to His kingdom is noticed and remembered, and one day we will understand just how beautiful our thin sacrifices are."*