

Reasons to be Cheerful: 1...2...3

In the challenging social climate of Britain in the early 1980's, Ian Dury's above titled song could often be heard, reminding people there was still plenty to smile about.

"God loves a cheerful giver", was Paul's message to the church at Corinth, encouraging them to make positive decisions about their giving. How do we keep giving and stay cheerful about it in the current economic climate? These 3 small steps may help.

Step 1: Look Behind You!

How seasonal; but not just a line from a pantomime! The Psalmist states that goodness and mercy are following us continually. When we sense that God's unfailing love has got our back, and that fear has no place in our lives, we can continue to give as in the good times. When Job mistakenly thought that his trouble had come from God, he nonetheless asked a very valid question, "Will we indeed accept the good from God but not accept the adversity?" Our giving should not depend on whether times are good or bad but on whether our God is good or bad – and God is always good!

In the Old Testament, we frequently find God's people reflecting on what he had done for them and recalling his faithfulness to earlier generations, especially while they were suffering difficult times themselves. We can use the same strategy. A favourite scripture for me is Psalm 37:25, "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread". Start talking about what God has done in the past in your church or personal life and you will soon see your joy, good cheer and faith returning.

Step 2: Look Out!

Definitely not a warning but a command to consider others. The Bible says that when Jesus looked at the masses, he saw they were lost, like sheep without a shepherd and had compassion on them. If life is difficult for us in the church, think how hard it must be for those with no faith and no hope; those with very little; those struggling to feed their children; those depressed by accumulating debt. Jesus' compassion turned to action as he healed the sick among them and preached the gospel. Your financial giving supports the mission and ministry of your church and is needed now more than ever. Providing warm spaces, food, fellowship, hope and life has to be our priority and when we see people blessed by our actions, it is certainly heart-warming and causes us to keep giving.

Step 3: Look Up!

I had a teacher, who would always say, "Look up here a moment" when he had something very important to say and wanted our undivided attention. The writer of Hebrews says the same, "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus..." (Hebrews 12:2 EHV) Who is it that you are really giving to and why? If we think that our hard-earned cash is going into some black hole and we give grudgingly, we can hardly expect to be cheerful about it! If, however, we keep Jesus at the forefront of our minds, we will live according to his word and act to please him.

Our generosity will increase in every area of our lives and we will find it impossible to hold anything back. Therein lies our blessing.

May you know his blessing on your gifts as we remember his gift this Christmas.