DAY 5

Muscle Memory

“Therefore, show . . . the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.”
— 2 Corinthians 8:24, NIV

Sarah grew up in a family that practiced tithing, and as a child she put ten cents in the offering plate from each dollar she received. She remembers receiving her first paycheck of $56 from her first job as a teenager, and her sense of achievement and delight when she gave $5.60 to the church. Now in her forties, Sarah has a high-paying job as a senior executive, and tithing continues to feel natural, a regular pattern of her life. She does it with ease and grace. “I love giving,” she says, “and I cannot imagine living my life or loving God without giving back. Giving is one of the great joys of my life. Tithing was learned and practiced so early that I developed the muscle memory for giving. Like practicing my tennis serve for so many years that I don’t have to think about each step, my giving is part of who I am.” For someone beginning to tithe, Sarah’s level of discipleship may appear unachievable. But with practice, anyone can develop spiritual “muscle memory.”

As those who consistently practice the tithe know, proportional giving (giving a set percentage of income) and tithing force people to look at their earning, saving, and spending through God’s eyes. It reminds them that their ultimate worth is derived from the assurance that they are children of God, created by God, and infinitely loved by God. God’s eternal love revealed in Christ is the source of self-worth; true happiness and meaning are found in growing in grace and in the knowledge and love of God.

Giving generously reprioritizes lives and helps people distinguish what is lasting, eternal, and of infinite value from what is temporary, illusory, and untrustworthy. The discipline of generous giving places people on the balcony, helping them look out at the consumerist society with new perspective, better able to see its traps, deceptions, and myths. The practice of generosity is a means by which God builds people up, strengthens their spirits, and equips them to serve God’s purposes.

• Read 2 Corinthians 8. Paul concludes by saying that our giving is a proof of our love for God. Can we possibly desire God to shape our souls without giving?
• If you practice proportional giving or tithing, does this practice affect your other spending habits?
• If you do not practice proportional giving or tithing, what are the obstacles to a greater generosity toward God?