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Does the Lord get a kick out of generosity? I think so...

Sports and I have a strange relationship. Through the first 12 years of my life, I was distant from any sport that didn't involve a dirt bike. In 8th grade, my sudden growth spurt made me a candidate for basketball. I proved early that awkwardness and enthusiasm does not make an athlete. While it took a couple of years for the coaches to harness that energy into substantial playing time, I wound up more of a fouling machine than a scoring machine. By varsity, I helped lead the Felicity Cardinals to a 2-18 record.

As a not-so-involved sports fan, I determined that as a pastor, I would learn enough to interact with the sports fans in my congregation. The connectivity was important and worth my effort. It also yielded its own form of embarrassment. I once engaged in an Ohio State conversation with the question, "Is Woody the quarterback?" Ugh! And another time, "Is the Masters [Tournament] going to be in Kansas City next year?" Ugh! After enough dumb looks, I learned to check and recheck every sports-related fact prior to using it as a sermon illustration; I probably never fooled anybody.

However, if giving were a sport, then ... the **billiards giver** gives strategic, precise and well-calculated gifts. The **skeet giver** responds very quickly to needs and hits the target with a bang. The **soccer giver** gets an enthusiastic celebration for a long-anticipated, momentum-shifting gift. The **marathon steward** gives very consistently and for the long run – and in the end is entirely spent. A **baseball giver** sometimes strikes out; sometimes hits a grand slam. The **football giver** gets a kick out of giving. And the **Nascar giver** goes round and round about giving, rarely taking time for a quick pit stop.

The Apostle Paul, a sports fan himself, told the Corinthian church about a particular kind of giver of which God is a fan! In fact, God loves the **cheerful giver**:

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a **cheerful giver**. 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," 2 Corinthians 6-9.

The great apostle had other nice adjectives at his disposal, such as **BIG giver**, **faithful giver**, **consistent giver**, **regular giver**, or **champion giver**, but he chose the simple word "cheerful." Cheerful, from the Greek, *hilaros*, means merry, happy, prompt, willing and even hilarious! Now there's what giving and sports have in common. They are joyous, merry, often hilarious events. God loves the **hilarious giver**! I realize it's a stretch of the imagination, but please allow me a little slack here – I have pastored many nice sports fans and personally witnessed them on the edge of their seats, physically moved to jump up and make some noise at a great moment in sports. The joy is universal, whether it is the Major Leagues or a parent watching the bat make contact with the T-ball.

Does the Lord get a kick out of our generosity? Imagine the Lord, along with some of the heavenly host, watching over the earthly kingdom, preferably on 60 inches of HD. There's a young couple that just tithed their income for the first time and God is on the edge of his seat. There's a retiring farmer who deposited life assets into a charitable gift annuity and the Lord stops clapping just long enough to do one of those ear-piercing whistles that requires two fingers. A family on a modest income, barely above poverty themselves, sacrifices their own needs in order to help a friend and the Lord gets so excited he spills his Diet Coke on some nearby saints.

If giving were a sport, if donors were athletes and if generosity were a game, the Lord would invite us to a game we can all play. God loves a **cheerful giver**. The **cheerful giver** learned to

trust the Lord with the gift. The **cheerful giver** trusts the church with the gift. Let's win one for the Lord!

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Mark E. Lail, director
Stewardship Ministries

ECFA's "Recession-Proof your Ministry" on 16-City Tour

In light of the current giving/budget challenges churches are beginning to experience, Dan Busby, president of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability has announced that ECFA is hosting one-day workshops in 16 cities to serve churches and ministries in these challenging times.

ECFA has compiled some of America's leading experts and speakers on generosity, finances, governance/leadership, stewardship, budget planning, and tax/legal issues to serve church pastors, staff, and leaders at these events.

Brian Kluth, pastor, bestselling generosity author, and keynote speaker for these seminars has prepared a short invitation video for you to learn more about attending one of these events for just \$49 person (after the \$50 discount).

Go to www.kluth.org/ecfa.htm to watch the video to get more information.

Who is my beneficiary?

One item that can be easily overlooked in estate planning is keeping beneficiary statements up-to-date. Stories abound of inheritances flowing to unintended individuals, such as ex-spouses or ex-sons or daughters-in-law, who were a valid beneficiary at one time but, due to life changes (death, divorce, re-marriage), should no longer be included in inheritance planning. If you have made, or are considering making changes to your estate plan, don't forget to update accounts or assets that have designated beneficiaries.

Life insurance policies, company retirement plans and Individual Retirement Accounts are the most common beneficiary statement assets. The beneficiary statement on these assets will determine distribution of the account upon your death, even if your will or revocable trust has different instructions. So, be sure that you cover all the bases and that the beneficiary statements are coordinated with your other estate-planning instructions.

The Church of the Nazarene Foundation would be happy to assist you with charitable giving ideas and strategies. You can contact the Foundation toll-free at 866-273-2549 or visit their website at www.nazarenefoundation.org.

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Thanks for reading!

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