

The Chain of Love

A sermon by ruling elder Marc Hustek

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For those of you who know me, I always seem to find a song that resonates with me. The next in my line of interesting and fun, feel-good sermons – at least in my mind – is a song called “The Chain of Love.” This was written by Jonnie Barnett & Rory Lee in the 1990s and recorded by country artists including Charlie Pride and Clay Walker. I will be reading the lyrics to that song shortly.

Sometimes in life you give and never know if a good deed you’ve done helped – sometimes you give and know immediately what you’re your deed has done and that always you should give – and expect nothing in return.

Think of “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39), or the phrase “Pay it forward.”

Today the phrase is close to iconic – random acts of kindness are everywhere. Paying for coffee or meals in the drive-thru, extra tips, kind words, working at a food pantry... the list goes on.

The heart of paying it forward is based in Jesus’ statement in Matthew 7:12 where we hear “in everything, therefore treat people the same way you want them to treat you....for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Before I read the lyrics, I have two examples... okay, maybe three.

First, have you ever found one of those cute painted rocks? Maybe you were out on a walk – maybe you found it at the grocery store parking lot – or in the Metropark. You looked down and there is a colored object that isn’t supposed to be there.

If you are curious like me – you picked it up. On the occasion I did, there was a message that said, “Hope you liked this rock and please don’t keep it but share it.”

My next example is during the height of COVID in early 2020. The world seemed to want to help each other... there was a lot of checking in going on... food being dropped off for others... a sense of community.

A friend of mine worked in a restaurant that was closed down. He called me and asked if I was the one who sent him some money to get by that was sent in an unmarked envelope. While I wish that I had thought of it, I had to let him know it was not me... but what a wonderful earth angel he had!

My third example is what God does and wants from us.

Look who God used to pay his message forward: Moses, who was a fugitive from justice. David, a shepherd boy.

Then consider the people who came to Jesus: Matthew, the despised tax collector; Peter, the common fisherman. And many more with a variety of ailments and problems.

So... let's get to the lyrics I wanted to share:

*He was driving home one evening,
In his beat up Pontiac
When an old lady flagged him down,
Her Mercedes had a flat
He could see that she was frightened,
Standing out there in the snow
'Til he said I'm here to help you ma'am,
By the way my name is Joe*

*She said I'm from St. Louis,
And I'm only passing through
I must have seen a hundred cars go by,
This is awful nice of you
When he changed the tire,
And closed her trunk
And was about to drive away,
She said how much do I owe you
Here's what he had to say*

*You don't owe me a thing, I've been there too
Someone once helped me out,
Just the way I'm helping you
If you really want to pay me back,
Here's what you do
Don't let the chain of love end with you*

*Well a few miles down the road,
The lady saw a small cafe
She went in to grab a bite to eat,
And then be on her way
But she couldn't help but notice,
How the waitress smiled so sweet
And how she must've been eight months along,*

And dead on her feet

*And though she didn't know her story,
And she probably never will
When the waitress went to get her change,
From a hundred dollar bill
The lady slipped right out the door,
And on a napkin left a note
There were tears in the waitress's eyes,
When she read what she wrote*

*You don't owe me a thing,
I've been there too
Someone once helped me out,
Just the way I'm helping you
If you really want to pay me back,
Here's what you do
Don't let the chain of love end with you*

*That night when she got home from work,
The waitress climbed into bed
She was thinkin' about the money,
And what the lady's note had said
As her husband lay there sleeping,
She whispered soft and low
Everything's gonna be alright, I love you, Joe¹*

Paying it forward requires us to pay attention, to care for others. Recall Philippians 2:4 – “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interest of others.”

That painted rock... whoever put it there – a child, an adult, an artist – had no idea what would happen when they placed it there. They just had faith that it would change someone’s day.

Or my friend getting some money in an envelope... it affected him emotionally, it affected me to be more conscious of giving and caring for others. I’m sure it affected the others he called as well, whether it was to tip more, give a tip when you never have

¹ “The Chain of Love” written by written by Rory Feek and Jonnie Barnett, 1998 Pugwash Music, a division of Balmer Entertainment/Waterdance Music (BMI)/Melanie Howard Music (ASCAP)

or just volunteering to do something for someone, like putting together a care package for our police and fire, post office and city hall workers. It was all about paying it forward.

Or my third example – and the reason we are here! – trying to be a good Christian: being a good Christian is taking your opportunities and paying them forward with God's love.

It's what we do – we get involved, we help and encourage and we love.

Paying it forward requires us to look for opportunities to do good. The heart or person that truly wants to help doesn't care about the credit. That's what I love about the painted rocks. Those are left for others by someone who knows full well they will not get a thank-you.

Maybe paying it forward is a version of "God loves a cheerful giver." Giving from your heart and caring. Whatever you do to pay it forward – a gift of money, food, time, kind words or a cool, painted rock – keep the chain of love going.

Amen.