

Wednesday, April 22

1 John 4:19 *We love, because He first loved us.*

2 Corinthians 5:20 *We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.*

On Monday I used the drive-through at a nearby Starbucks to order my Green Tea Frappuccino. The vehicle in front of me was a BMW X3 M Competition painted in a Toronto Red metallic color (I Googled it because it was so unusual). I was admiring the car (ok, maybe there was a tinge of envy) as we each waited for our turn to order, pay, and pick up.

When I pulled up to the pick-up window and held out my smartphone to be scanned for payment, the barista said, "Don't worry about that, the car in front of you paid for your order." You're kidding! What an unexpected blessing – particularly because my drink is one of the more expensive ones.

*Pay It Forward* is a novel by Catherine Ryan Hyde, released in 1999. The plot centers around 12-year-old Trevor McKinney who begins seventh grade in Atascadero, California. His social studies teacher gives the class an assignment to create and put into action a plan that will change the world for the better. Trevor's plan is a charitable program based on the networking of good deeds. He calls his plan "Pay It Forward", which means the recipient of a favor does a favor for three others, and in turn, they "pay it forward" to three others.

It's thought the phrase "pay it forward" was coined as early as 1916, and yet . . . I think its life came into existence much earlier than that. In Matthew 18: 21-35 Jesus taught that "paying it forward" is a requirement for those who have received God's forgiveness.

He told the parable of a man who had been forgiven a huge debt by the king, because the debtor had begged for mercy. But, after being freed from the debt, he found a man who owed him a very small debt, by comparison. Even though, he had been shown a great mercy, he refused the same consideration to this man who pled for more time to pay. When the king found this out, he was angry, and threw the original debtor into prison until he paid the entire debt.

Jesus summarized the story by saying, *That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.* Powerful words.

Another teaching of Jesus is this (Luke 6:38) *Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back – given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.* (Message paraphrase)

I would submit to you that Jesus went far beyond "pay it forward." He paid it forward and backward. He gave Himself for the sins of all – past, present, and future. Ephesians 5:2 *Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.*

Paying it forward may seem to be a fairly modern idea, but it's as old as the work God is doing with humanity. He's given us life, and *abundant life*, and everything else we need to achieve our potential. Let's take the good things God has done for us through the sacrifice of Jesus and do our part to pay them forward. *Love like that.*

(And if you're wondering if I paid for the car behind me – the answer is no. I didn't have cash on hand, nor did my Starbucks app have enough money in it, and with the cars lined up behind me, there wasn't time to reload. But I did ask God to bless that person, keep me grateful, and remind me to serve others.)