

**Text:** [1 Corinthians 9:11-15 \(CEB\)](#)

**Date:** February 11, 2024

**Title:** “The Ripple Effect” – Releasing God’s Blessings, week 3

**Theme:** The church specializes in ripple effects – the echoes of small acts of love and generosity we share with others.

## 1

I read a story recently that captured my imagination

It happened a few years ago now

A couple in Burlington, Vermont stopped in to make a donation to a shelter  
that cares for homeless and runaway teens

On the surface, it was nothing special – folks dropping off a bag full of  
clothing

Like any of us might do when we clean out our closets

But this couple was special

And this gift was important – not just because it was going to help a young  
person who needed it

But because it held an even deeper meaning

See, the couple was returning to the place where they had met, years  
earlier

Not as volunteers

Not as employees

But as clients

Each of them was formerly homeless

And each of them felt called to pay the help they had received forward to  
benefit another young person in need

So, as they were preparing to celebrate their fourth wedding anniversary,  
and though they might not have had much,  
they wanted nothing more than to help an organization that had meant so  
much in their lives<sup>1</sup>

## 2

We talk often about the idea of “ripple effects” of our actions

But we often do so kind of flippantly

Like Laura Numeroff does in the “If You Give a Mouse a Cookie” book  
A leads to B leads to C leads to D  
But that feels silly and unrealistic to us  
We might feel good about something positive we do

But we don’t consider what that action might mean long-term  
How it might spark someone else to kindness or generosity  
Maybe because we don’t want to give ourselves that much credit  
But what if the result is that we’re not taking our impact seriously enough?

The ripple effect is a real thing  
I spent a lot of time throwing stones into ponds as a kid  
That was just part of my childhood: fishing, catching frogs, skipping rocks  
Even a tiny stone creates a wide-ranging effect

Anyone who has ever been on a boat knows this too  
Even a small boat passing by can create a wake that can cause you to  
    sway dramatically

### 3

The church specializes in ripple effects  
That’s how I read the portion of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians that  
    we shared earlier

“...this service to God’s people isn’t only fully meeting their needs but it is  
    also MULTIPLYING in many expressions of thanksgiving to God”  
“Multiplying in many expressions of thanksgiving” sounds a lot like ripple  
    effects to me

Remember, the purpose of this letter was to engage the wealthy church at  
    Corinth in a project to provide relief for poor and hungry Christians in  
    Jerusalem

But Paul, in trying to raise money, didn’t primarily focus on the people who  
    would be helped –

his letter wasn’t one of those late-night ASPCA videos  
Talking about how much people were suffering

Instead, he spoke about the *ripple effects* – the wide-ranging consequences of a small action – a simple gift  
He talks about the prayers of thanksgiving, the deep bond of connection that would grow between the churches, and the inspiring example that Corinth would set by obedience to Christ's call

#### 4

The church specializes in ripple effects  
In fact, I count on them

What else are preachers aiming for when they stand up on Sunday mornings?  
Words – even good ones – don't have the power to change a thing by themselves

But when our words inspire those who are listening to do something different because of their faith:  
To take a moment to check on someone who is hurting  
To stand up for someone who can't stand up for themselves  
Or to open up a hand in generosity  
In Jesus' name

THAT's what matters  
It's not the words themselves  
They can be pretty, they can be clever  
But that's not really the point, is it?

The point is that everyone, including myself, feels convicted enough by the power of the Spirit  
That we go out and live differently  
The ripple effect is, in fact, the whole point of Church

The splash is nothing:  
A "blump" and then quiet  
It's the ripples that remain  
You can hear them against the side of the boats tied up at the dock for a long long time

But what's great is that you don't have to be a preacher to experience the ripple effect  
No, anyone can

Teachers – of course – teachers do all the time!  
Anyone in healthcare or a mental health field – naturally!  
Anyone who leads anyone else – if you're in management, if you're in HR –  
If you own a business and you treat people fairly and with respect  
Last weekend – at the celebration for Barb – we heard about the ripple effects of starting a bell choir!

In fact, I don't think it's overstating the case to say  
That if you interact with ANYBODY in ANY way at ANY time  
There's a potential for your actions to have a ripple effect

#### **4B**

You know why I think we don't tend to think about them?

Well, first, because by their nature they are hard to predict  
Who would have imagined that two formerly homeless youths would get married and then return to support the shelter where they'd met?  
We just don't hear the stories that often – maybe that's a good reason to share them more

Second, because we don't want to get a big head  
If we really believed that by showing Jesus' love to one person we could dramatically change things, to influence others to do the same  
We'd recognize just how powerful we can be  
And I think that idea just frightens us – because then EVERYTHING we do matters

Third – and this is related  
Because recognizing the potential for ripple effects requires faith  
The ripple effects are not OUR work – they're God's work  
It takes a deep trust and hope that God can take a small thing that we do and use it to make truly amazing things happen

## 5

The Church specializes in ripple effects  
We gather here on Sunday mornings with no other hope except that in  
    worship,  
God will give you something that you'll go out and share with someone else  
That's the work we do

And we've been talking about how we invest in that work  
By sharing some of what God has given us to bless someone else

Today you'll have the chance to touch a life through one of our mission  
    partners in Trenton  
Last weekend, you made a difference for victims of domestic violence just  
    by buying some chocolate covered pretzels

This week, you're going to receive a packet asking you to pray about how  
    you'll support the ministry of Medford UMC in 2024  
Maybe some of you will make your first ever gift – that's great!  
Maybe some of you will step into regular giving by setting up recurring gifts  
    to the church  
Maybe some of you will move toward tithing by giving another ½ or 1  
    percent of your income to what God is doing through us

Wherever you are, what's important is this:  
Trusting that God has the power to multiply our gifts, so that they overflow  
    in thanksgiving  
So that more and more people come to know God  
As we've come to know God through Jesus Christ

As the Creator who loves  
The Savior who forgives  
The Spirit who wants to see every single human live out of the joy of  
    knowing that we've been made for a purpose

Consider that this morning something like 200 or 300 people will worship with us – here in this space and online all over the country, and even across the world

Picture what happens if every single one of those people goes forth believing in

God's power to bless every positive, loving interaction we have with a ripple effect this week!

How many lives could the love of God touch because we were here?

This is why we give

This is why we serve

And this is why we believe

Because Christ's Church specializes in ripple effects

Amen.

**By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ**

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/this-pay-it-forward-story-will-warm-your-heart\\_b\\_7477278](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/this-pay-it-forward-story-will-warm-your-heart_b_7477278)