

Time of Grace Ministry
Roots and Fruit: Give Generously
2 Corinthians 9:6-9
September 29, 2019

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I want to talk to you today about God and money. You look thrilled! I told my dad at lunch today what I was going to preach on today; I'm going to talk about God and giving and generosity and he looked at me and said, "I'm not coming." But I think he showed up today and I hope you give me just at least two minutes to convince you that you should stay here, too.

I know I'm a pastor and I know lots of you have had bad experiences with churches asking for money. If that wasn't bad enough, you might notice we have cameras in our church; this message is going to be on TV and if you're watching on TV, it's probably going to be worse, right? A guy on television telling you to give money to ministry. We've all heard enough stories to realize this doesn't always turn out well.

Before you kind of cross your arms though and check out or walk out the door or change the channel, I want to say three really quick things. Here's the first one: I am not that kind of pastor. I try to be pretty transparent with you when I speak here in church and confess the things that I struggle with and there's a lot of things I struggle with but I thank God that the love of money and the greed and wanting more stuff from you has never really been a struggle in my life. I know that's easy for a pastor to say and maybe difficult to believe so I brought some pictures to prove that's true.

Take a look at the first picture. This is my car. My next door neighbor, when he found out our church was going to put messages on TV, he said, "Are you going to get a helicopter?" But this is the only helicopter I have; a Chrysler Town and Country. I am this close to hitting 200,000 miles and if you cut a million dollar check to our church today, do you know what I would be driving next week? A Chrysler Town and Country. I'm going drive it into the ground or until Jesus comes back.

Here's my second picture. This is the couch in my house. I got this off of Craigslist from Moses like way, way back in the day. This is - my couch is old enough to drive my Chrysler Town and Country. It's not a bad picture; those are stains on the left cushion, the middle one is torn. My wife despises this couch. In fact, my family started a fund to buy a new couch a couple Christmases ago and I spent the money on something else because I'm going to hold onto it until Jesus comes back. And you could write a \$2 million check today and I would keep that same couch in my living room.

Or how about one more picture - this is my closet. These are all, what, seven shirts that I own? All the shirts up top, those belong to my wife; she's taken over 80 percent of the closet. I have one suit - I'm a pastor - I own one suit for weddings, funerals, all the fancy things in between. And if you wrote a \$3 million check to our ministry, I'd be wearing the same shirt next Sunday.

And so, I want to tell you this - what I'm about to tell you - is not about that. It's not about fancy cars, it's not about bigger homes. You could give crazy generously more than you ever have before and I would drive the same car or have the same stuff, live in the same neighborhood, and not change my standard of living. Today is not about getting something from you. I hope in my prayers that God is going to give something to you; that's the first thing I want to say.

The second thing I want to say is that if you're kind of new to this and you're not convinced that Jesus is the greatest treasure in the world, I don't want you to give anything when this message is done. Like if your girlfriend brought you here to church today, your significant other, if you just stumbled across this program watching TV and you're not convinced like Jesus is worthy of everything, like if he's not the sun in your universe that everything orbits around, if you're not convinced he is awesome, amazing, and worthy of every dollar and every cent that you own, I don't want you to give a single dollar or a single cent. We believe that giving here at our church is a "get to" and not a "have to." It's something we want to do because we met Jesus and he is so generous and so good that we can't wait to give so that people can hear about his name. And so if you haven't heard that name just yet or you're not convinced it's worthy to be worshipped, you're totally off the hook today. No guilt trips, no fees, no dues, no expectation; just let the basket pass you by.

Here's the third thing: If you believe Jesus is worthy to be worshipped, the Jesus you worship, the Jesus you love, the Jesus you trust, do you know what he said about giving? I'll show you a passage from Acts 20. The Lord Jesus himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." So the Jesus who is God, who knows everything, actually said what would be even better for you than me giving you \$100 today is you giving \$100 as an offering. He didn't say it's like, well, you know, something you have to do or you really should do. He said if you want to be more blessed, than don't just try to get; set your heart to give.

But that's pretty difficult to believe, isn't it? I mean, when you're a kid, you definitely don't believe this. You can't wait to get the birthday presents. You care less about your little sister's birthday; you can't wait until it's yours because the presents come. And even as we grow older, it's tough to share ourselves of that idea. About a month ago, I had this lightbulb moment and I realized why that makes total sense. My lightbulb moment was when I was sitting down trying to write a check to give to our church and I hesitated. To understand why that was a lightbulb moment though, I need to tell you a little bit of my financial story. When it comes to people who've lived on this planet, God, I think, has spoiled me rotten with money. I mean, I was born in 1980 in the United States of America to an upper middle class family, which is crazy. Like, by world standards, I'm uber rich. But do you know what happened not too long ago? I was scared to give. It was like my quarterly taxes kind of lined up with the tuition payment for our kids going to Christian school and we're going to do piano lessons so I had to write that check and I actually missed two weeks of giving to church so I was putting like three week's offerings together and we made this commitment to give a certain percentage of our income to the homeless in our community and I haven't actually budgeted for that yet and I'm looking at the numbers and like hesitate with the pen and I was scared to give.

And it hit me - if God has stacked like the finances in my favor for my entire life and I can be afraid to give, what's it like when your financial story's been harder? What's it like for those of you who don't have two full-time incomes; you have one or a half or you're searching for work? What's it like when you graduated with thousands, tens of thousands of dollars of student loans and then you meet someone who also has tens of thousands of dollars in student loans? What's it like when you're trying to budget for the wedding? What's it like when you're trying to pay for the funeral? What's it like when you're trying to give the lawyers back the crazy amount of money they ask for the process of your divorce? What's it like when there's uncertainty at your job and you might have an income today but you're not sure tomorrow? I mean, if it scares me sometimes to give, what's it like to be the church?

And so, the number 39 percent, it didn't shock me; it made total sense. Because you can live in first world America and you can love Jesus and you can believe he's good and forgiving and yet when that pen comes out or you open up the app to give financially, something stops you and that something is fear.

And so when that lightbulb went on, I realized what I have to share with you today is not how but why. I preach a lot of messages about how to give. You know, here are the options - you can write a check, you can go to the app, you can go set up a payment online on our website. And here's what giving looks like, you know, God says you make a plan and you pray about it and you pick out a percentage and you give repeatedly with pleasure because you know Jesus, become a "5P" giver. But I realize that it just won't work, it won't deal with your fear, unless we tackle the question why? Why don't we Christians need to be afraid to give? Why don't we need to hesitate even though this or this or this or all these things might happen before the check is even cashed?

I know today, if we're going to become generous people, if we're going to have a strong give root as people and as a church that produces the fruit of joy and peace and kindness, we're going to have to answer that question "why," which is why I love this part of the Bible. About 2,000 years ago, the apostle Paul wrote a letter that you can find in the New Testament called 2 Corinthians and a big chunk of that letter is Paul's encouragement to a group of Christians who felt just like that. The Corinthians apparently had made this commitment that they were going to give a generous offering to help the poor believers in Jerusalem but between their commitment and actual giving of the gift, they felt fear and they hesitated. And so when Paul writes them this letter, he actually spends two entire chapters - I think it's the longest section in the entire Bible - on financial giving. And I wish I had time to walk through all those chapters today but I'm just going to zero in on three verses, three things that the apostle Paul says, and in those three verses we're going to find incredible motivation to become generous people.

So if you have your Bible with you or just want to follow along on the screen, let's jump into 2 Corinthians 9:6. Paul says, "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." Now let's understand Paul clearly. This isn't like a pyramid scheme that he's running; this isn't a way just like to get more money and use God as the tool in the process. Paul's not saying if you give \$50 today, by next season it

will be \$100 in return. Although, you know what happened two days ago as I was working on this sermon? God has a crazy sense of humor. I leave my office on the other side of that wall, I come in here, I go through my message one time, about a half hour, I go back into my office and I start typing and I look and there's something sticking under my keyboard and I lift it up and it's \$100 and I look around like what? Did like an angel fly this here? And I go down the hallway to my coworker and I go, "Tom, like was anyone in my office?" He says, "Yeah, some random guy just rang the doorbell and he just gave \$100 and said he wanted to give it to the church." And I thought, "Yeah, God." I mean, God has resources that we don't know anything about. You know, they don't end up in the budget but God is able to bless us in incredible ways and God might bless you that way. If you bring him in the middle of your finances, he might bless you financially or he might bless you in better ways. The harvest that you reap might not be more money; it just might be better relationships or more trust in God or more joy in spiritual things. Your standard of living might decrease slightly as your standard of giving increases but God says at the end of a season, you will not regret it. Some of you are wise enough to know that when you give to support the spread of the gospel makes you a part of the harvest of the gospel. And so when we put our hands together and we praise God that a woman is baptized right here in Jesus' name, you realize that even if your hand never touches the water, you were part of that! The church that existed that she got connected to, the staff that she met with to learn about Jesus, you were a part of that and you reap generously with every beautiful story. I think about the new member videos that we play at our church; people who say, "You know, I didn't really grow up in church. I didn't know that much about Jesus and then I came and I took the class and I joined a group and I'm so excited about my spiritual future." And even if you didn't teach the class and you weren't leading the group, I mean, you were a part of that! Do you believe that? Like when you gave, you helped change a person's eternity. And the best part is what most of you don't even see. Which people did I meet with this morning in my office? You have no clue. But if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be here and there wouldn't be an office to meet in. And so the Scripture we shared and the hope and the encouragement, you're a part of that! Which marriages were this close to falling apart after the affair but we met and your pastoral staff counseled them and they stayed together and they're thriving and they're still here? Well, I can't tell you that but you're a part of that. Which people from our community texted me this past month and felt so ashamed because of some sexual sin they didn't even feel worthy to come into church but I got to tell them immediately that there was forgiveness and grace at the cross of Jesus. I didn't have to wait until after work; this is my work because of you. You're a part of that. And little kids who stand on these stairs and they sing, "Jesus Loves Me This I Know." These little five year olds who go to our Christian school, you might not be their teacher, you might not have taught them that song, but if you give, you're a part of that.

And the more I think about that, like lives are changed and people are being saved and sin is washed away, I hope that even though you're not right in the middle of it, you actually are. And every time you give, it might seem so small but you are reaping generously. And the more you see that, the more the cycle of generosity just starts to snowball. You give money and then you hear the stories and you reap generously, which makes you want to sow even more generously and giving instead of being this reluctant "half to" becomes this incredible "get to." In fact, if you're taking notes, I'd love for you to write that down. What's the first reason why we would

give today? And Paul's answer is because givers get. We get blessed. We get to be part of something amazing. We get to join God in his mission to save people and to change lives.

But to quote the infomercial - wait, there's more! Paul's not done quite yet. Verse six is amazing but he's got something else to say in verse seven. He says, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver."

That makes me think of a couple months ago, my eight year old daughter and I, Mya, we were playing volleyball on like this 90-degree day with high humidity. She wanted to play with her daddy so she grabs a volleyball and we're in the front driveway hitting it back and forth and we hear something, we look across the street, and there's our elderly neighbor, Elaine, reaching up with a broom trying to get the leaves off of her roof. I can see her struggling and it wasn't going so well so we kind of realized it was time for us to help. So I went across the street and tried to use my go go gadget arms tonight to help her out and before you knew it, like we got the ladder out of her garage and it turned into this big project and I'm sweeping, like totally train wrecked this special time I had with my daughter, and just as I get up on the ladder, she runs away from my neighbor, across the street, back to our house. Not to pout and be mad, not to hide in the air conditioning from the sweltering heat. She ran into our garage to grab her little broom. And as I pulled the leaves off the roof, she swept them into a little pile and it was hot. I mean, blistering, sweating, uncomfortable hot and she didn't say a word. And we got done and our neighbor went inside to give us money to thank us and I said, "No, no, no; that's okay," and I told my daughter, "She wanted to give us money but I said no," and my daughter said, "Okay, daddy." And we walked across the street and I was so stinking proud of her. I mean, she did not whine, she didn't complain, she didn't roll her eyes, she didn't get mad, she didn't regret it. She gave to our neighbor with a cheerful heart and I loved it. I loved it so much I got out two spoons and a tub of ice cream before mom could come home and tell us not to spoil our dinner.

And do you know, that's how God feels when you give. When you see a need and you give, when you don't run away from the opportunity but you see someone in your family or in our community in need and you give. Like, you can't see his expression but Paul says this is his expression and he's so proud of his kids who give generously and cheerfully and not fearfully. You know, we've made it just kind of a habit here to clap when we sing and pray and praise and worship; when people are baptized. But I wonder if we shouldn't start a new tradition of clapping as we take the offering; as we join the saints and angels and God himself for applauding that great moment when we trust him enough to give. I know many of you grew up in the Lutheran church so this is probably not going to happen but just think about it, at least clap in your head, because Paul's not kidding - God loves a cheerful giver. And what you decide in your heart might be small and it might be great; it might be all you have to give and it might be a four-figure check. But God loves it when we think, decide, and we give.

Which brings us to the last thing that Paul's going to say today. In my opinion, he's saved the best for last; look at verse eight. He says, "And God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." That's so

good, isn't it? Like if you are afraid to give, if you're nervous, if you're skeptical, just like highlight those words, tattoo them on your arm: God is able. But Pastor, what if this happens? Yeah, but God is able. Well, what if my debt snowballs? But God is able. Well, what if this happens with my health? What if I lose my job? What about the stock market? Yeah, but God is able. What is God able to do? Bless you how much? Abundantly. God is able to bless you abundantly. Why would you give today with all the questions and fears? Here's Paul's second answer for us. Why give? Because God is able. And so if you're taking notes, I want you to write that down, I want you to circle it, I want you to put a little star next to it. It's our final fill in the blank. Why give? Because God is able. In fact, he is so able that Paul just has this like monsoon of big, beautiful words for us, doesn't he? He says, "So that in all things, and all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." You don't have to be a pastor to sense the repetition, right? At all times, God is able. Divorce times, tax times, braces times, tuition times, uncertain job times, God is able. Up times, down times, rich times, poor times, I have no clue where my next meal is going to come from times, at all times, God is able. At all times, God is able to give you all that you need. Do you know what you need to live a secure, stable, happy life? God. If God would become the greatest treasure of your heart, if you would believe not in this dinky, small, lowercase God but like leave the caps lock on, GOD who loves me, is with me, forgives me, and accepts me. If you believe that God is merciful and forgiving and took every one of your sins to the cross, you would have all that you need. And you wouldn't need a big house, a fancy car to be respected by people who see how much you have. Your heart would be so satisfied in God and he would be all that you crave. You see, that's why Jesus came. So whether you're rich or poor, you would have all that you need at all times because God is able to bless you abundantly.

And that's Paul's message. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to give, Corinthians. Don't be afraid to give, Christians. God is able and givers get. So what do you think? Are you ready to give? I hope you give in crazy ways. Not so I can get a second suit, right, but so that people can be saved. So people can meet Jesus. And some of you know the story, right? Five years ago, you didn't know Jesus and then you came here. And if you would stand up and tell your stories, you would say to this church: Thank you so much for loving people more than stuff. Thank you so much for planting seeds in the ground because it grew into something beautiful; my salvation. There are so many people who still don't know. So let's change that 39 percent to 44, to 49, to 65, to 82 because if God can do what he has done with 39 percent of us giving, imagine if we doubled it? Imagine if all of us gave cheerfully because we know that our God is able to provide and bless us abundantly because Jesus was not kidding; it is more blessed to give than to receive.

But some of you know that because you were here the last time I talked about giving. About six months ago, I stood on this very stage and I encouraged our church to do something crazy. We called it Break Your Jar. Anyone here for that? I challenged you in seven days to give \$31,128 to ministry to a cause yet to be named and do you remember what happened? You did it! You gave over \$40,000 in one week but that wasn't even my favorite part. When I got to call up the recipient of that gift and tell them that you had given \$40,000 even though you had never met, it was so beautiful. But what was so much better was not seeing what you did but what God did in you. When you showed up that next Sunday, we didn't like all mope into church and say, "Dang,

man, \$40,000 poorer." No, we felt so rich and so blessed and there was such joy and such passion and such excitement and we experienced what Paul and Jesus said; that those who give generously are blessed generously. That it is more blessed to give than to receive. So my brothers and sisters in the faith, don't be afraid of the give root. God will keep his promise and it will produce incredible fruit.

Let's pray.

Dear Jesus, we love you. We know that because you lived and died and rose from the grave that there is eternal treasure for us in heaven. I pray today that you would give us your Holy Spirit that we would be able to see things from your perspective; that we would see how incredible eternal life is going to be with you, how short this life is, and how much souls matter. God, we don't want a fancy church; we don't want more money for us. We want your name to be so beautiful that people would give up everything and treasure you. That they would lay down every crown at your feet, everything this world could buy, and they would realize that you are worthy of everything we have to give.

God, I'm so grateful for the generous people in our church's past. For those who have sacrificially given - not because they had to but because they wanted to - for their faith and their confidence, we thank you. We would not be here without them. And I pray, God, now we can take that baton and run with it. There are people, we pray, five years from now who are going to meet Jesus because we give. So, God, free us from fear, free us from reluctance, free us from compulsion. For everyone who is able to give, let each of us decide in our heart and not be afraid because you love and bless those who cheerfully give. Jesus, we pray this all in your beautiful, saving name, and all God's people who agreed joined their voices and they said, "Amen."



TIME OF GRACE®

Roots and Fruit: Give Generously

Study Notes

Summary

Everyone wants to “reap generously” and enjoy the blessings of God. But we often forget the apostle Paul’s classic line that only those who sow generously will reap a generous harvest. Paul was unashamed to say that being financially generous is a key to joy, blessing, and so much more. In the same way, many Christians have learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive, that having a “Give root” actually produces incredible fruit!

- Acts 20:35: The Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”
- 2 Corinthians 9:6: Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.
- Why give? Answer: Givers _____!
- 2 Corinthians 9:7: Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
- 2 Corinthians 9:8: God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.
- Why give? Answer: God _____!

Points to Ponder

1. Have you ever been a “5P Giver” (someone who Plans to rePeatedly give a Percentage as a budgeted Priority with Pleasure because of God’s love)? If so, what motivated you to start? If not, what is holding you back?
2. Read 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. List at least five truths about financial giving that you find in these verses (and take special note of 2 Corinthians 8:9 and the power of God’s grace!).

3. **Challenge:** Share your giving plan with a trusted friend, asking for encouragement and frequent reminders that our Father loves to give.

Homework for Next Week

Read Mark 16:14-16.

*“One person gives freely, yet gains even more;
another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.”
—Proverbs 11:24.*