

“All In: Giving God Our Possessions” | 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

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(Discussion questions on page 7)

As a church and as individuals, I long for us to experience the freedom and fruitfulness of Romans 12:1, where Paul calls us to hold nothing back, but to go *all in* for God:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Rom 12:1).

It’s likely we all are dedicating our lives to something—the Christians says, *let my life be a sacrifice unto God*.

Last week we began looking at this idea of going all in for God. We noted that with faith—as with other things—going all in was a necessary part of how things worked. If we want the peace of God, we must really trust in God. If we want the Joy of the Lord, we must go all in to seek Him.

We also noted last week a danger with the call to go all in for God. It was the common danger that all spiritual things suffer from—**abstraction**. It’s easy to verbally or emotionally assent to a spiritual idea; it can be hard to actually know how to put it into practice.

Hence our plan over three weeks is to ask how we go all in for God, by getting more specific. We present our lives as a sacrifice for God (go all in) by *giving God our plans, possessions and hearts*. Last week we considered how we give God our plans. This week we turn to our possessions.

The Power of Money

In Scripture, possessions, refer to wealth, money, riches—*mammon*. Jesus has more to say about possessions than he does about heaven and hell combined. Why might that be?

I think it’s because money has **godlike powers**. It offers us security, safety, and access to joy and pleasure. Money offers us relationships—if we have it, people seem to notice us and befriend us.

Peter Kreeft, in his book *Back to Virtue*, treats this topic and writes:

Money is ubiquitously tempting because of a kind of umbrella principle, covering everything money can buy. It also is (or rather falsely promises to be) a security blanket against change. It apes divine self-sufficiency.¹

¹ Peter Kreet, *Back to Virtue*, 109.

Another writer notes that how we spend our money may reveal who or what our god is:

It's always effortless to spend money on that which is your real God; the money just flows into the treasury of your real temple.... Money will always show you what you do worship.²

Jesus is blunt:

You cannot serve God and money (Matt 6:24).

None of this is to say that money is inherently evil—it's necessary, a means of commerce, part of how we ensure basic needs are met. Nor is it to say that money is a danger only for those with it—you can be just as controlled by a lust for money when you are poor as when rich.

But we must recognize that if we are to talk seriously about going all in for God—about giving him our lives—we have to understand this must entail presenting him with our possessions.

Consider this hypothetical: Imagine that at the end of this service, I give everyone an opportunity to give their lives to God—to recommit, or commit for the first time, to Jesus. I imagine many would do it. But what if instead I gave everyone an opportunity at the end of the service—if this were possible—to get out a check and give God all of their money. Not to me, not to a church, but if you could imagine handing a check for all you have to God and saying, “God, this is now yours. I trust that you will take care of me as needed and use this as is best.”

Which would be harder for you to do? Most of us would say giving the check—which shows us how money cuts to the heart.

Here is what we'll do with the rest of our time: we will look at a test case from an early group of Christians, who were learning how to present their lives to God, by giving Him ownership of their possessions.

Learning from the Corinthians about Giving God Our Possessions

The group is the Corinthian church. In the letter known as Second Corinthians, Paul spends two chapters (8, 9) stirring their hearts to give generously into the work God is doing in the broader church. The specific situation involves Paul taking up a collection for poor Christians living in Jerusalem. I'll walk through the passage and note five principles about Christian giving that we can observe:

1. Be Givers (More so than Takers)

First, Christians are undergoing a transformation from being takers to givers. Fundamental to their new identity in Christ, is that they give. Notice the language: “Each one must *give*” (v 7); “God loves a cheerful *giver*” (v. 8).

² I am not sure the exact source, but this quote comes from something I read or heard Tim Keller say (maybe in his book, *Counterfeit Gods*).

The Gospel transforms us in many ways. One is by slowly changing us from *takers* to *givers*. Someone who has been loved deeply by God—Who gave His son for us—starts to learn a whole new way of life. Their posture is of a servant, a helper, an encourager, a *giver*.

This is no small transformation. Martin Luther described the sinful soul as “curved in on itself.” The modern mottos of self-expression, self-realization, and self-esteem all keep people curved in on themselves. To become a giver, is to become “uncurved.” It is not only to imitate our Lord—who gave himself for us—but in doing so, to experience the healing of seeing others before we see ourselves.

2. Give Generously

Second, Paul says Christians give *generously*: he says to “sow bountifully” (v 6) and “you will be enriched in every way to be *generous* in every way” (v 11).

This raises the question as to *how much* Christians should give?

Old Testament: Give 10%

In the Old Testament law, God’s people gave 10%, from which comes the word “tithe,” which means “tenth.”

Set apart a tithe (=tenth) of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field. (Deut 14:22).³

Does this practice continue in the New Testament for Christians?

New Testament: Give Generously and Sacrificially

Jesus fulfills law, making some parts of it obsolete: The laws requiring sacrifices to atone for sins are obsolete because Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. The Laws about diet are obsolete because Jesus tells us, “it is not what goes into the body that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth: (Matt 15:11).

But Jesus deepens other aspects of the law: “Do not murder” becomes “do not hate” (Matt 5:21); “do not commit adultery” becomes “do not lust” (Matt 5:27).

In the same way, Jesus deepens the call to give—not merely 10%, but our very lives.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it (Mark 8:34-35).

³ When Jacob sets up a stone to mark the house of the Lord, he pledges to give a tenth: “and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you.” (Gen. 28:22). Giving in the Old Testament was orderly in terms of when, and toward what, people gave, centering around the system of worship: “To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting...”²⁶ “Moreover, you shall speak and say to the Levites, ‘When you take from the people of Israel the tithe that I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present a contribution from it to the LORD, a tithe of the tithe’” (Num 18:21, 26).

Personally, I believe 10% is a good goal to work toward, a good baseline to keep. But the best way to think about how Christians gives, is to use words like **generously** or **sacrificially**. That's how Paul talks.

Is our giving *generous*? Is it *sacrificial*?

Near the end of King David's life, he buys a threshing floor from a Jebusite in order to raise an altar there to the Lord. The Jebusite offers to give David oxen for free to sacrifice. But David responds:

No, I insist on paying for it. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing. (2 Sam 24:24).⁴

David would not give an offering to God that cost him nothing. It has to be sacrificial, generous.

Generosity brings us to our third principle, *gladly*.

3. Give gladly

Paul is clear in verse 7 that he does not want to coerce or guilt Christians into giving:

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7).

God doesn't want guilt-motivated giving. He wants joyful giving—hearts eager to honor Him and excited about what our money might accomplish in his hands.

How might we get our hearts involved in giving?

By seeing giving as an opportunity to **honor** Jesus: This is the keyword in Proverbs 3:9,

Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce (Prov 3:9)

By seeing giving as an opportunity to see **fruitfulness**:

whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (v 6).

It is hard to understand, but there is a promise here that when we sow generously into God's work, there is a bountiful harvest—this should *excite us* to give.

By recognizing that giving is an **opportunity to be a good steward**—and God rewards good stewards with more opportunities for stewardship:

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God (v 11).

⁴ Hebrews refers to giving as a "sacrifice," "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb 13:16).

Generous giving flows out of a happy heart—glad to honor God with our wealth, excited to see what God does with each dollar, amazed how God supplies his givers with opportunities to be generous.

4. Give Missionally

Philanthropy—love for humankind—is not unique to Christianity. Cicero, before Paul's time, wrote:

Nothing is more in harmony with nature than kindness and generosity; for we are born for mutual aid, and in this we find the bond of human society.⁵

Paul's call goes beyond a general philanthropy. He calls believers to give *missionally*—to sow into the work God is doing through **Christ and the Church**.

For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God (2 Cor 9:12)

The “saints” refers to Christians in Jerusalem. God is creating a new network of aide and support—the church. Gentile Christians giving to Jewish Christians was radical—a new kind of family, a new kind of unity, formed through the gospel.

The only thing that explains this is a new family bond that was created through the Gospel:

They will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ... while they long for you and pray for you (2 Cor 9:13-14).

Christian giving aims not only at *temporal* needs, but *eternal* ones—it fuels discipleship, baptism, and obedience to Jesus Christ. As Paul states:

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal 6:10).

5. Give Intentionally

By this I mean, give in an organized, orderly way: In First Corinthians, Paul told these same Christians:

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper... (1 Cor 16:1-2).

The first day of the week is our Sunday. They gave on the Lord's Day.

Here in 2 Corinthians, Paul is explaining how he is sending friends before him to arrange the offering:

⁵ Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.52–54, 2.63. Loeb Classical Library Trans.

So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction (2 Cor 9:5).

We sometimes think that things are more spiritual when they are spontaneous. This is not always the case. Christians should be deliberate and orderly in how they go about stewarding their money.

Setting up some time once a quarter to think about your budget, can be a very spiritual thing. I don't know how we can be giving our lives to Christ, if we are not spending some time thinking about how we are setting our possessions before him. And this takes intentionality.

Closing Story:

Let me close with a personal story, if I may.

Giving can be a sensitive subject. Many of you may not have grown up hearing anything about tithing or giving to God.

I was taught from a very young age to tithe ten percent. I knew that was what my parents did, and that was what I should do. I didn't always succeed.

In college I worked a few internships that paid pretty well (considering). But I didn't give a penny of what I earned to God. Then towards the end of college I had a spiritual awakening, and I felt uneasy about this. God kept bringing it to mind. So, I figured out what ten percent of all I made during college might be, and—after a long time of wrestling—decided to tithe it.

But to whom?

I had been evangelized and was being discipled by two Korean Missionaries who were part of a church community and mission out of that church. I decided to very quietly give it to that church and their work.

I can remember the day I did this—putting the envelope with the check in it in their mailbox, then walking back to my apartment. I felt *lighter, freer*. And I felt excited: each one of those dollars was now in God's army, sent to do his service.

At the time, that seemed like so much money. I look back now, and I cannot imagine a better way to have "sown" those possessions.

Some of you are wondering how to go deeper in your spiritual life—how to be more consecrated to God. The area of laying your possessions on his altar, and asking him how he might want you to steward them, may be the place to press in. Not out of compulsion, but out of gladness and joy.

Giving God Our Possessions | Small Group Questions

1. In Romans 12:1, Paul calls Christians to present their *whole lives* as a living sacrifice to God. Do you think about your possessions—your money, wealth, investments—when you think about giving God your life? Is the area of possessions an area where it is hard to fully trust God?
2. Jesus teaches about money more than any other topic, saying things like, “you cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:24), “only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:23). The sermon states that money has “godlike powers”—it promises security, comfort, and access to happiness. Where do you see money trying to take on a “godlike” role in your life, or in our culture?
3. Part of Paul’s ministry included teaching Christians how to give, especially in relation to a special offering for poor Christians in Jerusalem (see Galatians 2:9-10). In 2 Corinthians, Paul says “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7). Have you ever experienced *joy* in giving? Have you ever experienced *guilt* in giving? What made the difference?
4. Christians are not the only people who give, but they do give for unique reasons and toward unique purposes. What motivates Christians giving that is unique? In the sermon, it was noted that Christians give not just *philanthropically* (for basic love of others) but *missionally* (toward God’s work in His Church). What missional causes and church ministries most stir your heart currently?
5. The sermon ended by noting that giving is to be *intentional*—Paul told the Corinthians to set aside something to give “on the first day of every week (1 Cor 16:1-2)” and then Paul sent brothers ahead of him so they could “arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift” (2 Cor 9:5). This all speaks to *intentionality*. Do you take time to think about your finances and how God might desire for you to steward them? What might it look like to make generosity a consistent, planned rhythm of your life?