

“Stewardship of Generosity” | Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

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(Discussion questions on page 8)

I have a question for the kids who are with us today. I want to see if you can guess a word. Here are some clues.

It describes something important God wants our hearts to do. It is something that a spiritually healthy heart does a lot of. It has four letters. The last two are ve. The first letter is a consonant, and the second a vowel. Do you know what it is?

It's the word “give.” God wants this to be true of our hearts and our lives, that we give. A healthy heart is not a heart that hoards, builds bigger barns for its own stuff, lays up treasures here on earth. It is a heart that gives—shares what it has, sows its resources thoughtfully—as a farmer sows seed—into the work of God in the world around us.

Love is not the only four-letter word written across the Christian life. Give is as well. In fact, Christians love by giving.

The word “grace,” so important for understanding what God has done for us in Christ, also means “gift.” Gift is a great way to understand what grace means. The very heart of the Gospel is this fact: Jesus is God's divine gift to us. When we look into God's heart, we see a heart that lavishly, sacrificially, and generously gives.

God wants us to be givers, too. After all, we do bear his image. He made us not to be stagnant pools, where water just sits and gets dank. He made us to be bubbling springs, where the good things in our lives are constantly flowing out to others.

We are in a mini-series on stewardship. Last week John Frederick considered how we **steward the gifts** and talents God has given us. Next week, I'll ask how we **steward our hearts**—looking at Proverbs 4:23, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” Today we turn to this matter of being **givers**, and consider what it means to **steward our wealth** and resources.

The biblical teaching about stewardship of wealth is only about money in a secondary sense. Primarily it's about our hearts: are we hoarders, or are we givers; at the deepest places of our being, are we stagnant pools or flowing streams?

Giving Across the Bible:

The passage we will focus on is 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. Here Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to generously support an offering he is collecting that will go to support poor Christians in

Jerusalem. He assures them, verse 11, that they “will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way” (2 Cor 9:11). Before we look closely at what Paul says here, let’s step back and briefly note how stewardship of money is a part of being a follower of God across the Bible.

Old Testament: Give 10%

Tithe: The word “tithe” is often used to describe how Christians steward money. The word “tithe” literally means “tenth,”¹ and comes from the Old Testament:

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

Even before this was commanded in the law, we see the patriarch Jacob practicing it. In the Old Testament God’s people were to give a tenth of their wealth to the Lord, and did so by tithing to the Temple.²

Does this practice continue in the New Testament for Christians?

New Testament: Give Generously and Sacrificially

Jesus fulfills the Old Testament law making some 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 (= heart)” (Matt 15:11).

But the essence of the law in terms of guiding us toward loving God and others remains—things like the ten commandments. Jesus deepens aspects of the moral law, showing how it applies not merely to outer actions but inner attitudes: “Do not murder” becomes “do not hate” (Matt 5:21); “do not commit adultery” becomes “do not lust” (Matt 5:27).

This is the case for how Jesus calls us to handle our money. Jesus reaches into the heart of the command to tithe and sets before us the radical call to give our very lives back to God: We are to give our very lives to Christ—not 10%, but 100%.

¹ This is true of the English, Greek, and Hebrew terms: English Term, “**Tithe**” literally means, “tenth.” “a tenth, a tenth part” (originally of goods or produce) due as support of the clergy, c. 1200, from Old English *teogoba* (Anglian), *teopa* (West Saxon); In early Middle English *tithe* also was a numeral, “tenth.”¹ Greek Term is “ἀποδεκατόω,” (δέκα = ten) [LXX: ἐπιδέκατον]; 1. to give one tenth, *tithe* τὶ (of) *some*th. (Gen 28:22) Mt 23:23; Lk 11:42; 18:12; 2. to collect one tenth, *collect a tithe* (1 Km 8:15, 16, 17) τινά *fr. someone* τὸν λαόν Hb 7:5.—DELG s.v. δέκα. Hebrew Term מַעֲשֵׂר *ma’aser, mah-as-ayr’*; or מַעֲסַר *maasar, mah-as-ar’*; and (in plural) feminine מַעֲסָרָה *maasrah, mah-as-row’*; a tenth; especially a tithe:—tenth (part), tithe(-ing)

² 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).

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
³⁵ 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).

Fifteen percent of Jesus' teachings involve our possessions.³ How we steward our money reveals things about our heart, treasure, values, even our lord:

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21).

You cannot serve God and money (Matt 6:24).⁴

Tithing ten percent is a great starting place for developing generosity. But Jesus wants our entire lives to be liberated from the love of possessions and freed to run toward the eternal purposes and rewards of His Kingdom.

This attitude toward money doesn't come natural to us—neither did it to Jesus' early followers. Let's turn to examine Paul's words to the Corinthians about generous living. What do they teach us about cultivating a generous heart. Five things: we are to give *expectantly, joyfully, dependently, deliberately*, and finally, *for the Glory of God*.

1. Expectantly

In verse 6, Paul sets before us a promise:

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Cor 9:6).

If you are generous with your resources, you will reap generously the blessings of God.

This of course does not mean that giving away your money is a strategy for getting rich. If in your heart getting rich is what you are after, then God will not honor your gift at all.⁵

³ "Fifteen percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic—more than his teachings on heaven and hell combined" (Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle* [Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 200]), 8.

⁴ More examples: "You cannot serve God and money (Matt 6:24). "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25); "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field (Matt 13:44).

⁵ For example, God says the following to Israel when their offerings are masking other motives: "Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them" (Amos 5:22). On the other hand, "The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite heart"—a humble and holy heart must lie behind our giving. (Ps 51:17).

Paul is offering basic biblical wisdom. It is observable when we watch the farmer. If we sow bountifully, we reap bountifully. If we hoard our resources for ourselves, we enjoy no real reaping.

Do you expect God to do things with the money you sow into his kingdom? He promises to do so. Among the many school projects I did growing up, I remember as a young boy when in class we each planted a seed in a small cup of soil. Our teacher had us sit it in the window to get light, and we'd water it. It was such a thrill to walk in one day and see a sprout coming up—then to watch it grow.

It's just a sure in the Kingdom of God. When you sow your money into the work of God, you can do so expectantly; for as you sow, so you reap.

2. Joyfully

In the next verse, Paul says we are to give joyfully:

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).

In the month of April, I found myself giving money to two different people in a short span. First was Uncle Sam—I had to pay my taxes. Second was to a nephew, who I was able to help support so he could go to a camp this summer. My heart was in two very different places with these gifts: for Uncle Sam, I gave reluctantly and under compulsion. To my nephew Danny, I gave with joy.

God is not taxing us. He is inviting us to an expression of love. We give joyfully to what we love.

When you are budgeting for what you'll give, remember you are giving to Jesus—your Friend, Savior, the lover of your soul—not a mundane cause.

3. Dependently

From verses 8-11, Paul stresses that generous giving issues from a dependence on God's resources, not our own. He stress that "God is able," and is the one who "supplies":

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.... (2 Cor 9:8).

A paradox of the Christian life surfaces now. Sufficiency speaks to a person having the resources they need to live their lives and complete their plans. We assess our sufficiency by considering our bank accounts, abilities, and options. But Paul is saying that it is *God* who makes us sufficient, note, "in all things at all times, so we may about in every good work" (v.8).

This doesn't mean God gives us what we need to fulfill our man-made plans; it means that he gives us what we need to fulfill his plans. If our lives are ordered around sowing into his kingdom, and we begin to do so in dependence on his resources, we can trust in his supply.

In Baltimore's inner harbor sits a glorious old ship, the USS Constitution. It's been refurbished and all cleaned up. But it can't move. Why? Because it's moored—it's supported below to keep it in place and upright; it's not really floating free in the water. In order for a boat to move, and turn, and really go, the boat must leave all supports behind, and trust completely in the water to keep it afloat.

The Christian life is like this. If faith and dependence on God is the water, sometimes we look like where a boat in the water, but below we are really supported by all types of man-made systems and supports. We can't really move about in his kingdom.

The Christian life must push out into the deep; it cannot be lived when moored. And giving sacrificially is one of the main ways we push out into the waters of living faith.

George Muller was a Christian who lived on the high seas—he gave sacrificially, and sailed in total dependence upon the resources of God.

A pastor, in 1836, at the age of 31, he and his wife began Ashley Down Orphanage, seeing the great need for care for orphans in Britain. Over the years, his organization cared for over 10,000 orphans. He never raised funds, but was continually in prayer for the needs of his homes.

Müller never made requests for financial support and he never found himself in debt. In an interview at the age of 91 in answer to a question if God was always faithful to provide, he answered, "Always! He has never failed me! For nearly seventy years every need in connection with this work has been supplied.... Hundreds of times we have commenced the day without a penny, but our Heavenly Father has sent supplies the moment they were actually required. There never was a time when we had no wholesome meal. During all these years I have been enabled to trust in the living God alone."

On one well-documented occasion, thanks was given for breakfast when all the children were sitting at the table even though there was nothing to eat in the house. As they finished praying, a baker knocked on the door with sufficient fresh bread to feed everyone. Shortly, thereafter, a milkman knocked on the door. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil, so could the orphanage use the milk? He gave all the milk to the orphanage, and it was just sufficient for all the children to have plenty for breakfast with the bread.

Muller is a radical example, but makes the point. God wants us to move toward sacrificial generosity so that we learn what it means to live life depending upon him. Are there small ways you can leave the dock, and push out into the deep?

4. Deliberately

Fourth, we are to give deliberately. There is an orderliness and decisiveness to the giving Paul calls the Corinthians to.

First, they are clear that their gift is going toward *God's work in his church*. Paul has explained this to them previously.⁶

Second, they are to set aside their money in an *orderly fashion*, on the first day of the week. In First Corinthians, Paul told them:

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

There may be many things we give toward today. But the Christian must prioritize first giving to their church.⁷ Because we believe the church is at the very center of what God is doing in the world, each Christian should be part of a local church and—according to their means (“as he may prosper”)—financially support the work of that church.

We sometimes think that things are more spiritual when they are spontaneous. This is the case. Christians should be deliberate and orderly in how they go about stewarding their money. One way to do this at TFCA is by using a pledge card. There are some in the pews and some in the back on Sundays. Thinking about giving 10% to your local church is a great way to start leaning into a life of generosity to God.

5. For the Glory of God

Finally, notice that their giving aims not only to meet the practical needs of the saints, but brings glory to God.

¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others (2 Cor 9:12-13)

⁶ Paul speaks of his collection for the saints in Jerusalem often, e.g., “At present, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.... When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected” (Rom 15:25, 28); “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, so that there will be no collecting when I come” (1 Cor 16:1-2).

⁷ Elsewhere Paul calls Christians to support the pastors and elders that serve them: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

Paul sees this gift as setting off a chain of glory: not only with the saints in Jerusalem praising God for this gift. But praising God because the gift is a window onto the living faith of the Corinthians. They are praising God, because they realize he has brought more people into his kingdom.

What is unique to Christian giving, is that it aims not merely at temporal needs, but eternal realities and eternal rewards. It sows so that more people will be baptized, disciplined, and brought into loving obedience to Jesus Christ.

Two weeks ago, I interviewed some people this church has financially supported through the Langham scholars program. One was Lilian Li. Lilian is a professor of the Bible working in Hong Kong. She trains people to better read and understand the Bible. We helped pay for her to do a type of post-doctoral work where she was able to work on her first book that will be published in English. This is all part of a vision of raising up great teachers around the world who can help build up the church.

I had lunch with Lilian and her fellow students after the service. She was over-joyed by the generosity of our church, and wanted to get a picture with her classmates and me. And it struck me: a woman growing up in Hong Kong, on the other side of the world, is glorifying God because people in a little church in Falls Church, VA, sowed into the kingdom of God. And Lilian will teach other students, who will teach other students, to not know and love the God of the Bible.

Here the divine invitation:

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work....You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Cor 9:8, 11).

Love isn't the only four-letter word marking our hearts. We are to be those who *give*. We express our love when we give.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. The topic of money often makes us feel uncomfortable. It is a very personal matter, it seems. Why do you think it makes us uncomfortable? What might this say about our hearts?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. What are some ways that Paul speaks about giving and offers motivation for giving? Sam lists five in this sermon: we are to give *expectantly, joyfully, dependently, deliberately*, and *for the glory of God*. Which of these five stands out to you? Which of these challenges you the most?
3. The Corinthians gave by setting things aside on “the first day of the week”—“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). This speaks to a deliberateness to giving, an orderliness and a plan in terms who when and toward what we are to give. Do you have a plan for how you will give this year? Perhaps you should prayerfully start to work on this.