

A DEEPER LOOK 9 **“AT GIVING”**

For God so loved the world that He gave... John 3:16

*All must give as they are able, according to the
blessings given to them by the Lord our God.
Deuteronomy 16:17*

Why do we give, how shall we give, when shall we give, what shall we give, how much shall we give, to whom shall we give, where shall we give, what happens to what we give...all these are important questions about the important subject of giving. I may not answer them all, but I want to visit with you today about our giving.

We give...because God gave! First and foremost we must underlie all we are going to consider today with this foundational principle. We give...because God gave. In the most famous verse in the Bible we gain our inspiration, our reason, our why...God loved and God gave. So, we who love God; must also be givers. Reminds me of a cute story. A clerk in a shoe store in Nova Scotia witnessed this event one day. He states:

“One day I noticed a little barefoot boy standing next to the hot air register outside the bakery shop next door to my shoe store. He was obviously enjoying the emerging smells, but he was there also to try to keep warm. I wasn't sure if I should invite the boy into the store or just what to do with him, when a middle-aged woman came by and began talking with him. About five minutes later, she brought him into the store and bought him new shoes and a pair of heavy woolen socks. As they were departing the store I overheard the boy ask the lady a question. "Are you God's wife?" he asked. Her reply was, "No son, I'm just one of his children." to which the little boy said "Well, I knew you must be some kin to Him.". He quickly thanked her and ran out the door.”

We who love God, must be givers, we who are 'kin' to God, must act like God, must respond like God, must give like God....gives!

In Paul's second letter to the Church in Corinth he spends 2 full chapters expounding on the subject of giving. (8 & 9) To this rather wealthy large church in Corinth, he uses as an example, the small band of believers living in the province of Macedonia. Not only were they small in number, they were suffering severe persecution, and they were very poor. Check it out for yourself. II Corinthians 8: 2 *They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor.* Seems a bit odd doesn't it, that these Christians would be held up as the example? Not when you consider how their "kinship" to God was playing out in their response to the offering Paul was raising for the Christian mother church in Jerusalem. In these 2 chapters I have found and want to share with you 15 different examples of how we are to give, and 3 examples of how we are not to give. ...an 18 point sermon...better hang on! We are to give:

1. Generously

...they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. 8:2
...the one who plants generously, will get a generous crop. 9:6
...for your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. 9:13

Our text from last week contained the verse:

Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage—to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. I Timothy 6:17

The opposite of generous is stingy. Let me ask you this; has God been generous with His giving to us, or stingy? We are to be generous, liberal, even extravagant. Especially when it comes to giving to God our first question ought to be; is this the most I can afford to; instead of is this the least I have to give.

2. Sacrificially

...they gave not only what they could afford, but far more...8:3

Another story from the experiences of Jesus might supplement our chapters for today.

The story of the widow giving her last two pennies at the temple is being contrasted with the rich Pharisees who were giving a pittance of their abundance. Jesus pointed out her giving was sacrificial, and I believe Paul is doing the same with the Macedonians.

I'm not sure what sacrificial giving means to you, not even sure what it means to me; but I don't think many of us are really giving sacrificially most of the time. What do you think sacrificial giving might look like?

3. Willingly

...and they did it of their own free will...8:3

...but I want a willing gift, not one given grudgingly...9:5

It's hard to describe willing without using it's opposites, but I think it has to do with our will, our desire, our choice to give. We are to give because God gave, and we are to do so willingly.

4. Passionately or Persistently

...they begged us 'again and again' for the privilege of sharing in the gift...8:4

Last week I mentioned that many churches are criticized for always begging for money...this passage puts the begging in a different light huh? These simple suffering, poor Christians are so impassioned with what the Jerusalem Christian Church is going through, and has done for them; that they insist they be allowed to give. Maybe their own suffering makes them more attune to the Jerusalem Christians suffering that they can't help but do something. Maybe that's one purpose of our suffering??? We sometimes experience that compassion, but probably not regularly enough.

I hope that you have something in your life that you are so passionate about that you insist you be given the opportunity to support it. Their giving was...

5. Exceeding the Expectation

...they even did more than we had hoped...8:5

Beware of the dual curses called Materialism and Minimalism.

Instead of seeking to always discover the minimum required...why not explore ways to exceed the expectation. I wish that might become a watchword, maybe even a value here at First Church, and not just as it relates to our giving. I would like our ushers and greeters to exceed the expectation. I challenge our staff to exceed the expectation; I want our leadership to exceed the expectation. I want our church to exceed the expectations of all who enter our doors. It might start with our giving? Their giving was:

6. Priority (personal) giving

...they first gave themselves to the Lord, and to us, just as God wanted them to...8:5

This is probably the most profound of the 15 examples. We would all do well to consider it together. These Macedonians first sought to give themselves to God, and then to the apostles, in fulfillment of what God wanted them to do. As I said last week, I think money, and I believe our giving (or not giving) is an indicator of some deeper spiritual issues. If we would all give ourselves completely to God, and as the first priority of our lives; then giving our money, time, talent, etc, will become quite natural. The more we are conformed to the image of Christ, the more we give, and the more we want to give. With all the great things they are doing, Paul goes on to encourage them to:

7. Complete it

...encourage you to finish this ministry of giving...8:5

...now you should finish what you started...8:11

I want to offer the same encouragement. Many of you are doing very well with your commitment to give, even to tithe. Some of you began a process some time ago to move toward the tithe, or to give more. I want to encourage you to finish what you started, just as Paul did with the faithful Macedonians.

8. Proportionately

...give in proportion to what you have...8:11

...you should each put aside a portion of the money you have earned...I Cor. 16:2

Here is another very important principle learned from the widow's mite and other places.

God honoring giving has little to do with the amount we give, but much to do with the amount we keep! We are to give a percentage of what we earn and have, and that percentage may be higher for those who make/have more than those who make or have less. I believe we are all to give at least 10% of our earnings to God, First; but some of us have been blessed by God to give even more!

9. Eagerly

...whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly...8:12

...for I know how eager you are to help...9:2

Not unlike cheerfully, and pretty self explanatory. How many of you entered here this morning with an... "I can't wait for the offering attitude"? What does eagerly mean?

10. Responsibly

...I don't mean that your giving should make life easy for others and hard for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality...8:13

Another very interesting point. Paul had to warn the Macedonians not to give so much that they impoverished themselves even further. In the OT there was an occasion when the priests had to forbid the people from bringing any more offerings for the temple because they were giving so much. Not much of a problem around here, but the principle should not be ignored; we must be careful and responsible alongside our eagerly and generous giving.

11. Enthusiastically

...it was your enthusiasm that stirred up many of the Macedonian believers...9:2

These are different points but from the same verse and I'll consider them together. Their giving was enthusiastic and it became...

12. Exemplary (as an example)

...it was your enthusiasm that stirred up many of the Macedonian believers to begin giving.. 9:2

I don't think we should underestimate the power that enthusiastic giving implants in others. When we see young couples giving large amounts while growing families, and paying school loans, we all ought to be encouraged to do better, to give more.

When we see people on fixed incomes increasing their giving commitments because of the priorities in their lives, and the lessening of fiscal needs in their lives; we all out to be encouraged to follow their example! That's the way it's supposed to work.

13. Willfully

...you must each decide in your heart how much to give...9:7

Not only was their giving willing...it was willful. It was full of their will! As we have and will continue to see, giving is given meaning primarily by the attitude that accompanies our giving. But you all know that attitudes grow out of commitments made at the center of our lives...our WILLS! Each of us must decide in our heart (will) how much to give, then give it...

14. Cheerfully

...For God loves a person who gives cheerfully. 9:7

This is one of the most famous biblical quotes regarding money in the Bible. I'm just not sure it's true! For how many of us is giving a joyful, cheerful event? How many of us can testify to the unadulterated joy, the overwhelming outpouring that accompanies giving? Probably not enough. You have heard, when talking about sacrificial giving, that we ought to give till it hurts...I'm hearing from Paul and the Macedonians that we ought to give till it feels good...real good...till it makes us cheerful, joyful, happy, giddy even. How would your giving and mine have to change to get to that point? Well, remember, God LOVES a cheerful giver! Lastly, these Macedonians gave...

15. Obediently

...your generosity will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. 9:13

What is our generosity proving? What does our giving reveal about the condition of our heart, the level of our trust in God, the depth of our discipleship journey? Along with all the other encouragements to give, let us also not forget or ignore that giving (at least at some level) is also a matter of obedience. Let's find that balance of giving obediently, giving generously, and giving willfully.

I know I have not gone into much depth with any of these, but I wanted and hoped there might be a cumulative effect of seeing them all together. You'll be the judge! In conclusion, Paul also gives these Macedonian Christians 3 warnings about how not to give. (an example of how not to handle money; throwing the offering into the sky) 1-circle, 2-line, 3-up, what stays belongs to God...) How not to give:

1. Don't Give **Grudgingly**
...but I want a willing gift, not one given grudgingly. 9:5
2. Don't Give **Reluctantly**
...don't give reluctantly...9:7
3. Don't give in Response to **Pressure**
...don't give in response to pressure...9:7

They all three mean kind of the same thing, I just wanted to be fair and point them out to you as Paul presents them.

It might be silly, but let me try to summarize all we have tried to digest today:

A) Commit Yourself to God **FIRST**
...they first gave themselves to the Lord, and to us, just as God wanted them to...8:5

Any new effort to give more faithfully must begin with a first commitment to Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of your life. Any giving done thereafter will be easier.

B) Trust God to provide what you **NEED** and what you need to **GIVE!**
...And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others...9:8

Another of the great texts from this passage about God generously giving to provide all we need, and everything we need, and even plenty more so we can share with others. Do you think it actually means that if we faithfully live and faithfully give; God will provide what we need, and what we need to give? Looks like it.

C) Do the Absolute **BEST** you can
Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce.
Proverbs 3:9

D) Do it with **JOY!**
...their abundant joy, overflowed in rich generosity...8:2

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