

## Growing in Giving

Series: Generosity: Maturity of Faith

2 Corinthians 8:7

November 19, 2017

Once again, welcome to worship. It is so great to be here with you in the house of the Lord. Two Sundays ago, our Holy Land group was in Bethlehem and we visited the Church of the Nativity and the Shepherd's Field where the angels appeared to the shepherds. We had devotions in a cave the shepherds would often stay when it was cold, and in that cave, we sang "Silent Night." Last Sunday, Myra and I were in Egypt visiting Memphis and Giza and the pyramids. And while those were wonderful places, there truly is no place like home and seeing the beauty of the faces of those we love here in this place of worship.

Now, someone asked me if I was going to show pictures of our Holy Land trip. Wasn't planning on it. But since you want to see pictures, I'll give you the best one.

PICTURE OF MYRA ON A CAMEL.

Now, I heard that our guest speaker for our series "Generosity: Maturity of Faith" went a little long the last 2 weeks. Well, that's good... for me. Nobody will ever complain if I go a little long from now on.

I appreciate George coming and trying to do the impossible: fill in as a guest preacher and talk about stewardship. It doesn't get any harder than that.

I want to continue this series, talking about stewardship. Now, I apologize that there is only a blank space on the sermon notes page. After coming back from the Holy Land, I really struggled with jet lag. I'm still waking up every night between 2:30 and 4:00 in the morning, and can't go back to sleep. So I didn't get my outline into the bulletin on Thursday. But I hope you have enough room to take some notes as we consider the topic "Growing in Giving" and look at 2 Corinthians 8:1-7.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-7

Verse 7 is the key verse today.

*Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.<sup>1</sup>*

The Corinthian believers excelled in everything – they had faith, gifted speakers, knowledge, enthusiasm, and love. Paul encouraged them to also excel in the grace of giving.

Too often, stewardship of money is given a different status than other aspects of discipleship. Most believers would not their growth in faith, knowledge, or love to stop at a certain level. Yet many decide a fixed amount of their money to give and stay there for life, and they don't want me to talk about it.

- Imagine if I stopped talking about prayer or love for God and neighbor or growing in faith.
- Imagine if I stopped talking about the life of Jesus and the principles for Christian living.
- Imagine if I stopped talking about all that.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:7 (NLT)

I don't think you would tolerate me for very long, for we want to learn more about our faith and how we get closer to God. Well, talking about giving is just as important as talking about those others, and growing in our giving is just as important as growing in our understanding of Who Jesus is and how we become His disciples. True discipleship includes growing in the mature use of all resources, so giving should expand as well.

In today's passage, Paul talks about the example of the churches of Macedonia, or what we call Greece. And he quite deftly deals with many of the excuses that people attempt to use when they do not give.

- "I can't afford to give." He says in verse 2, "They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity."<sup>2</sup>
- Another excuse people have is "I just can't do it." Look at verse 3. "For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will."<sup>3</sup>
- Some think, "My gift won't make any difference." He writes in verse 4, "They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem."<sup>4</sup>
- Some think that when we talk about stewardship, it is all about money. Look at verse 5. "They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do."<sup>5</sup>

Paul is telling the Corinthians the importance of our abounding or going beyond the norm. He gives equal importance of giving with faith, preaching, knowledge (studying the Word of God), diligence (working for God) and love. And he says, "Abound in giving as well."

For the remainder of our time, I want to answer a question that dominates people's thoughts when we talk about giving. And that question is this: Why Give? Why do we ask you to give to our church? I'm going to share 6 reasons.

Well, first, **Giving makes me more like God.**

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that He..." what? "...gave His only Son..." Can we deny this fundamental truth about God? God gives. Do you believe that? If you do, then as Christians, we are to emulate God and what God does to those around us. To be a Christian is to be like Christ. And growing more like Christ means growing in His grace.

2 Peter 3:18 reads:

*... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*<sup>6</sup>

We are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus; that is, be more like Jesus. Giving makes me more like God because God gives.

Second, **Giving draws me closer to God.**

Matthew 6:21 has always been one of my all-time favorite verses:

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:2 (NLT)

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:3 (NLT)

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:4 (NLT)

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:5 (NLT)

<sup>6</sup> 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 6:21 (NIV)

Jesus made it clear that having the wrong treasures leads to our hearts being in the wrong place. What we treasure the most controls us, whether we admit it or not. If possessions or money become too important to us, we must reestablish control or get rid of items. Jesus calls for a decision that allows us to live contentedly with whatever we have because we have chosen eternal values over temporary, earthly treasures.<sup>8</sup>

Our attitude about giving reveals much about our spiritual growth and life.

We come into this world as selfish and narcissistic little human beings. Babies cry; they don't care about mom or dad and whether they haven't had any sleep. They grow a little out of this until the terrible twos. As we mature, we learn that life isn't about us.

The same is true of Christians. We are born again by receiving. God loves me. Jesus died for me. God wants to bless me. As we mature, we discover that the Christian life isn't all about us either. We begin to look around us and see the need of others. As we grow in grace, we learn to give because we become closer to God's heart. A person who is reluctant to give, to be generous, is hanging on to the wrong treasure and not becoming closer to God.

Third, **Giving is the antidote to materialism.**

Materialism is rampant in our society. It focuses on things instead of people. Materialism is destroying families. Children and teens who expect the newest and hottest games and devices. Young families who want the same house their parents have after decades of work. The need for the newest TV or cell phone or car.

So what happens? One of two things. Either both parents have to work, sometimes more than 40 hours a week, and the bonds of the family are strained. Or second, keep putting it on the plastic. And what happens when you do that? US credit card debt continues to rise, and money problems are a leading cause of divorce in America today.

Folks, money is not the root of all evil; but the love of money is!

Paul encourages Timothy:

*Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment.*<sup>9</sup>

Paul advised Timothy to deal with any potential problems by teaching that having riches carries great responsibility. If you have been blessed with wealth, then thank the Lord. Don't be proud and don't trust in your money. Use your money to do good. Be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share. No matter how much money you have, your life should demonstrate that God controls the wealth that he has placed under your care.<sup>10</sup>

Fourth, **Giving strengthens my faith.**

Faith is taking God at His Word and believing the promises He gives us. And what promise does God give us concerning giving? Malachi 3:10:

*Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of*

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<sup>8</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Timothy 6:17 (NLT)

<sup>10</sup> Life Application Study Bible, 1 Timothy 6:17-19

heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!<sup>11</sup>

Giving strengthens my faith.

This is one I sometimes falter with, but usually it's Myra who reminds me to trust God.

JUST BEFORE HOLY LAND TRIP: RENTER'S CHECK FOR THE FAIRFIELD HOUSE THAT WE CAN'T SELL BOUNCED AFTER I HAD PAID THE MORTGAGE. MY CAR NEEDED A \$400 BRAKE JOB, AND MYRA'S CAR NEEDED A \$200 BRAKE JOB... ALL AT THE SAME TIME.

I didn't hesitate to give our offering to the church, but I got so obsessed by the negative numbers in our family cash flow that I forgot that God promised to pour out a blessing so great I wouldn't have enough room to take it in. And He certainly did that. The second rent check cleared. We had enough money, and we were truly blessed on the trip.

Giving strengthens my faith.

#### **Fifth, Giving is an investment for eternity.**

Things do not last, do they? They aren't meant to. Every 'thing' is meant to be replaced. More and more we are living in a throwaway society. What have you thrown away recently? A printer? A cell phone, that one you just had to have? A TV? I've got 3 flat screen TV's in our basement that no one is using. A computer? What have you thrown away recently? Did it surprise you?

Only the souls of men, women, boys, and girls will last for all eternity. Again it's Paul who says to Timothy:

*Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.*<sup>12</sup>

So let me ask you? Are you making eternal investments? When you look at what you spend on a daily, weekly, monthly basis, what lasts for eternity? That cable bill? Certainly not. That car payment? Nope. That dinner out? Believe me, as someone who has Crohn's disease, I understand this all too well. One hour after eating, it's gone.

Are you making eternal investments? And I'm not talking about your portfolio. I'm talking about the eternal investment of transferring and transmitting the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the lives of children, youth and adults, so that one day, because of yours and my investment today, we will all meet once again in heaven.

#### **Finally, Giving brings personal blessings.**

As Paul was leaving his beloved Ephesus congregation, he said this:

*And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*<sup>13</sup>

Interesting that this is the only place this is recorded – not in the Gospels, but in Acts – but it is still true! It is more blessed to give than to receive.

There are benefits to a life characterized by giving.

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<sup>11</sup> Malachi 3:10 (NLT)

<sup>12</sup> 1 Timothy 6:18-19 (NLT)

<sup>13</sup> Acts 20:35 (NLT)

Proverbs 11:25 says:

*The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.*<sup>14</sup>

Then Jesus said:

*Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.*<sup>15</sup>

We certainly should never give in order to get, but there are blessings that God promises if we will give. Our lives will be blessed beyond measure, and we will bless others when we give.

CAIRO. THE LACK OF STEWARDSHIP.

That's what the church becomes when we are not good stewards, when we fail to be generous, when we hoard.

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<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 11:25 (NLT)

<sup>15</sup> Luke 6:38 (NLT)