

What Kind of Giver are You?

- This is the last sermon in our series on Church Foundations where we have explored what foundation we stand upon, what we believe as a church, and our responsibilities as members. The last section has been divided into three parts: we have responsibility with our Ministry, with our Morals, and with our Money (which is not ours but God's). Let's talk about this last responsibility today. You know, every now and then I hurt my back and I go to a chiropractor if the pain is really bad. I know some of you do the same. Whenever I go, he will push on different parts of my back, asking me "does this hurt?" "How about this?" When he hits the right spot, on occasion I almost come off the table, it hurts so badly. He said, "Yes, there's something wrong. It's not supposed to hurt there." So, let me say this. Often when a sermon is preached on financial responsibility, people cry out in discomfort, sometimes even get angry about the message or even angry at the messenger. If this message hurts you today, I would suggest you call the Great Physician for help. Because... it's not supposed to hurt there. It means there's something wrong.
- Malachi 3:6-12; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7
- There are many different kinds of givers, aren't there? I hear about people who are grace-givers. And truth-givers. And how you are usually one to the exclusion of the other! But what other kinds of givers are there? There are extravagant-givers. There are miserly-givers. There are cheerful-givers. There are grumpy-givers. But do you know what kind of givers there aren't? Well, I think I can say that, as far as the Bible is concerned, that among those who love God, there are no **non-givers**. In other words, when I read the Bible, I don't find anyone in the Old Testament who is a follower of God who doesn't go to the temple and who doesn't give a portion of his income to God. I don't find anyone in the New Testament who is a believer that doesn't go to church, and who doesn't give a portion of his income to God. The principle of the tithe was established in the Old Testament in the law of Moses but introduced to the Scripture record before that, in the life of Abraham. Then we find that bedrock principle of giving from your first fruits all the way through the Old Testament, culminating in the last book that was written before the 400-year inter-testamental period of silence.
- **Malachi 3:6-12** contains that familiar pattern of question and answer that God played with the Israelites, only it wasn't a game. God speaks to His people about their hypocrisy, infidelity, divorce, false worship...and about their giving. He reinforces the principle of the tithe, which could be summarized into five principles: 1- the full tithe (not divided); 2- is given to the storehouse (which God also calls My house, which we call the church); 3- that the house of God is provided for; 4- that you may be blessed by God; 5- and protected by God. Then we move into the New Testament, and we find that the tithe has been completely overturned, and now God just asks us to give if it is OK with us and quite convenient. Sorry. That's not true, is it? If Jesus was going to overturn the tithe, he had the perfect opportunity to do so with the Scribes and Pharisees. Remember? Matthew 23:23, "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." If anything is true about the tithe in the New Testament, it is this: the call to giving is raised to a higher level, not to a lower one. The Lord tends to have that effect

on people. That's what prompted Zaccheus to say to Jesus, I will sell half of my possessions and give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will repay them four-fold. The Spirit of God, working in the heart of a new believer, did that. I believe he was working in Barnabas' heart when he decided on his own to sell a piece of property and bring the money from the sale and lay it at the Apostles' feet. He brought 100% into the storehouse! I believe the Spirit of God was at work in the churches in Macedonia that prompted them to give, not out of their abundance, but as Paul said, "out of a great trial of affliction."

- Look again at 2 Cor. 8. Then look at the key in verse 5: **they gave themselves first to the Lord.** They had transferred ownership of everything they had, including their own lives, to the Lord. I love the story about the little girl who had heard this passage explained by the pastor, so when the offering plate came down her pew, she put it on the floor and stepped into it. "What are you doing?" the ushers asked. "I am giving myself to the Lord." They first gave themselves to the Lord, these Macedonians. And then, Paul says, "to us." When you and I give to Antioch, we are acting like Barnabas, who laid the money at the apostles' feet: we are placing our gifts, by faith, into the hands of the elders, who are representatives of Christ here in this fellowship, trusting God to use them to be good stewards of God's resources.
- I will say it again: there is no such thing in the Bible as a follower of God who did not give to God and to the house of God. Larry Burkett used to say, "Tithing is a material testimony of God's ownership." Tithing is not a step toward surrender, but it is evidence of surrender!"
- So, with that as our backdrop, from Abraham all the way down to the Apostle Paul, what are the principles of giving we can learn from 2 Cor. 8 and 9? And by the way, Paul did not shrink from declaring the whole Gospel, including instruction on giving. Here he writes two chapters on the subject alone. Though we are often afraid to discuss and debate giving, Paul had no problem with it. Here are five principles of giving I find in these chapters.
- **Giving is a selfless act of the will. (2 Cor. 8:7-8)**
- You might say there are three levels of giving: you have to (law); you ought to (obligation), or you want to (grace). Paul is clearly leaning on the Corinthian church about giving from a "want to," isn't he? Look at 2 Cor. 8:7-8. He is not commanding them but asking them to prove that their love is genuine. Then Paul uses the example of Jesus in verse 9, who gave up riches to become poor, giving up heaven to become a man, so that we could all be rich, having eternal life. Did Christ give up heaven to come to us because he had to, or because he *wanted* to? Paul closes the chapter with another push, in verse 24, "So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men." Paul is not manipulating the church; he is urging the church to obey the Lord. But he wants them to give from their hearts.
- **Giving results in abundant blessings. (2 Cor. 9:6)**
- We give because we want to, not expecting anything in return. But look at God's laws of nature in 2 Corinthians 9:6, "Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." This is simply a farming reality, a law of nature and of nature's God that is as true as gravity.

If you throw green bean seeds in the soil, you will reap green beans. If you sow a few, you will reap a lot. If you sow a lot, you will reap more than you could ever hope to pick on your own, much less use. If you sow into God's work by giving money to him, there will be a rich harvest of blessing. **First, there is a blessing where you give.** We see it in the end of this section, in verse 12 where Paul says this giving supplies the needs of the saints. **Second, there is a blessing for you as well.** "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way" (verse 11). This is the very opposite of prosperity theology. "Enriched in every way to be *generous* in every way." That's a small picture of what Alyssa was saying last week about sharing her work and love and even her ukulele with people in Uganda. She wasn't doing that so that God would give her ukuleles. She was giving to bless the people there, and did she ever receive a blessing from God! That's the joy of giving.

- **Giving is an act of faith in God's abundant provision. (2 Cor. 9:8)**
- This is why most give sparsely or not at all. If they were able to be honest about it, they would have to say, "I am afraid if I do this, I will not have enough." I remember the story of the pastor talking to one of his members who was a farmer. "Brother Bill," he said, "If you had \$1000, would you give the church \$500?" Bill said, "You know I would, pastor." The pastor said, "Bill, if you had \$2000, would you give the church \$1000?" Bill said, "Yes, I would." Then the pastor said, "If you had two pigs, would you give the church one of them?" Bill replied, "That's not fair, pastor! You know I have two pigs!" It's easy to sing "Take My Life and Let it Be," and even the verse that says, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold..." but it is MUCH harder to live that song. Because we are afraid. Remember, though, Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)
- Giving is an act of faith in God's provision. The key phrase in 2 Cor. 9:8: God is able. He is able to provide for you. All grace. All sufficiency. All things. All times. Always.
- **Giving is gospel partnership. (2 Cor. 8:4)**
- Paul wrote to the Philippian church, "No church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only." When we give our tithe, that is gospel partnership. In her book, *A Place to Belong*, Megan Hill writes, "Our monetary giving is a partnership in the most concrete terms...(through it) we participate in gospel proclamation. This is the responsibility of every member of Christ's church. Our money turns on the lights, opens the doors, feeds and clothes and sends gospel preachers, purchases Bibles, makes copies and coffee, and assists people in need. Paul says our financial resources are God-given 'seed for sowing.'" (2 Cor. 9:10)
- **God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 9:7)**
- A little girl was given a dollar and a quarter by her mom on the way to church. She was told she could put either one in the offering plate and keep the other. On the way home the mom asked what she gave. The little girl said, "I was going to give the dollar but right before the offering the preacher said God loves a cheerful giver, and I knew I would be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter." Not exactly what the Lord had in mind; God loves a cheerful giver. Wait. God loves everybody, right? So why did Paul feel

it necessary to say this? I was asking the Lord that very question this week, and my mind went to Jesus' words to the woman at the well in John 4: "true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." God seeks those who worship him in spirit and truth. God loves a cheerful giver. If God seeks worshippers, I want to be found by him doing just that. If God loves cheerful givers, I want to found by him giving just like that. I want to be a want-to-giver.

- What does our giving do? It bends our will towards selflessness. It brings abundant blessings. It builds our faith in God's provision. It makes us partners in the Gospel. It makes God smile. So, give, brothers and sisters, with a cheerful heart and a countenance that bears the image of our great and giving Father.
- Prayer
- Greet One Another