

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

“Our Vows: Gifts”

Sunday November 12, 2017

I want to start today by again welcoming our guests and visitors. This is the 5th in a series of 5 on our membership vows as part of our yearly Stewardship campaign.

When we join the church we promise to support it with **our prayers, our presence, our financial gifts, our service, and our witnessing.** As we fulfill these vows we practice our stewardship of the church.

Stewardship though has come to be most closely associated with money. So when we say “stewardship” we think about money, but as this series shows, we have stewardship over so much more. But Jesus knew the captivating nature of money and how it can draw us away from God, so he reminded us that, **“No servant can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money.”** He didn’t say, **“You should not”, but you “cannot.” It’s impossible!!!**

Money is an ever present idol that can take over our hearts, minds, soul and strength and prevent us from loving and serving our neighbor. “More people are sidetracked from serving by materialism than by anything else.” We see this in the church when people treat the church like a religious Circle K going to the church for the religious goods and services they can get and not as a place to serve. There is a reason it is called a “Worship Service”.

“The Bible is very clear: God uses money to test our faithfulness. That is why Jesus talked more about money than he did about heaven and hell.” He said, **“If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?”** which is eternal life. p264

Now what God seeks first and foremost is our hearts. If God has our hearts, and our heart’s treasure is truly in heaven with God, then our earthly treasure follows. The source of giving and serving is not people’s purses or wallets. The source of giving is our hearts!

The source, the underlying “why” of our giving is our response to “His indescribable Gift!” the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ; the gift of God’s love become a human being.

When you have received that gift, that words can’t describe, that gift that goes beyond the ability of our senses to experience; we can’t help but to give! As Rick Warren says, “We can give without loving, but we cannot love without giving.” When we know the gift of God’s love in Jesus our hearts follow.

Now our Scripture today is about what is called “*The offering for the saints in Jerusalem*”. This scripture that was read was part of Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians to participate in this offering. This is one of four places this offering is mentioned in Paul’s letters. It was collected and delivered between 53 & 56 AD. It was the first pledge campaign in the church.

This offering was collected to help poor Christians in Jerusalem and demonstrate the unity of the church—much like Methodism’s apportionments. Jerusalem had been wracked for decades by unrest and revolution. Hundreds had died. Persecution was building against Christians leaving many widows and orphans for the church to support. Famine increased the problem.

These were desperate economic times in Jerusalem. So, Paul got the churches outside Jerusalem to come up with an offering to help out, and when he and others delivered this offering to Jerusalem it led to his arrest, transport to Rome and execution.

Now that is the background for Paul’s call for generous giving in verse 6 “*Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will reap generously.*”

Paul here is lifting up not only an agricultural truth that if you sow a lot of seeds more plants will grow and you’ll get a greater harvest. He is also lifting up a spiritual moral truth. If you give generously you reap generously in many ways that transcend the physical into the spiritual.

You will indeed *'share abundantly in every good work'* that God has created us to do.

Paul then gives us 3 guidelines for giving in verse 7. Paul was really into groupings of 3 in his writing for today, and in fact I am going to give you 3 sets of 3 each, which you can follow under the sermon notes.

Verse 7 reads *"Each man/woman should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion (grudgingly) for God loves a cheerful giver"*.

The 1st guideline is *"give what you've decided in your heart to give!"* Give what you think you want to give that honors you, your circumstances, and God. In order to figure the amount out, I encourage proportional, or percentage giving moving up towards the Biblical standard of tithing. That is why we used the stair step chart last week. We all give at different levels, but it must come from the heart.

The 2nd guideline is *"Don't give reluctantly or under compulsion/grudgingly"*. Remember we are giving to God through the church. Do you think God wants a grudging or reluctant gift? Do you think God wants you to resent being here because of what you give?

Remember the source of our giving is our hearts, not our wallets or purses. Giving is a response to the **Indescribable Gift of God**. I wonder if someone gives reluctantly, if they have ever truly received this indescribable gift for it changes the core of our being. Or if you give grudgingly have you fallen from your first love?

The 3rd guideline is *"Give cheerfully"*. *God loves a cheerful giver*. And to do this it is best to concentrate on what your gift will do. It is best to see your gift sharing in every good work.

When we have received this indescribable gift of love and salvation we can't help but to respond by giving to the Body of Christ so that others can share in the riches of the gift. To receive this gift is to win the richest spiritual lottery. And to give away what you have won costs you

nothing and helps another to win!!! It's as if you won a million dollars and you can give that million dollars to a 1000 other people and still have the original million. It truly is an indescribable gift!!!!!!!

As we give we can imagine the great good our gifts will do, the lives that will be touched and blessed through the mission and ministries of Vista Church. Imagine the lives that will be blessed eternally as they receive the gift of Jesus. We give cheerfully then, to express the joy of receiving God's greatest gift and passing it on!

Concentrate on what you believe your gift will help do. Make that in the form of a prayer and it will bring cheer to your heart.

Paul does this for in verse 14 he writes about what the people in Jerusalem will do when they receive their gifts. He writes, *"And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you!"* Paul is imagining what their gifts will do to and for the receivers.

The 3 guidelines of giving again are:

1. *Give as your heart has decided*
2. *Don't give reluctantly or grudgingly*
3. *Give cheerfully by imagining what good your gift will do!*

Paul continues on in verse 8 with **3 truths of giving.**

The *1st truth from verse 8 is "and God is able to make all grace abound to you..."*

This means God's grace supplies all we need in order to give! Determine you are going to give to meet the needs of others, to share abundantly in every good work, and the means will be there to do it!!

Some will be able to give a lot, and some not so much. But if you decide to take a stretch of faith and step up towards, or to tithing, God will provide. My wife and I have tithed since we were married 36 years ago. When times were tight we tithed. When times were fat we tithed. When our expenses went up our income always seemed to match and

when our income went down our expenses also went down. And we have tithed through it all. We have experienced the truth of this scripture that *“God is able to make all grace abound.”*

The 2nd truth from verse 8, is essentially a restatement of the 1st, but in terms that make it explicit that **God will provide**,

“So that in all things, at all times you will have all that you need...”

Note the use of the word “all” 3 times. When we rely on God’s grace then in **all** things, **all** the time we will have **all** that we need. Not all we want—but all we need. Now I know there are members here of very limited means and because of changes in health, living arrangements etc., they can no longer give like they used to. They still want to give and do give, and because of that they share abundantly in every good work that Vista Church does.

The message here, though, is to give and give generously while we can; because in the twists and turns that life takes we can sometimes give more as we grow older... and sometimes less. I am reminded of Jesus’ words, *“Work while you can for the evil days are coming when no one can work.”*

And all we give has a purpose. Part of our needs as human beings made in the image of a giving God is to give. What we receive from God is not just for us it is for others also.

For the 3rd truth is that *“You will abound or (share abundantly) in every good work.”*

The grace that God gives us is not just for us, it’s for others, too. As Eph 2:10 states, *“You have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

We are created in Christ Jesus to do good works to serve and if we cut that off—quit doing good works--then unhappiness enters our lives. We lose our cheerfulness. Some of the most miserable, unhappy

people I have met are the stingiest. No matter how much they have they don't share, and so always feel what they have is inadequate.

Giving is a type of service. Giving money is a liquid form of you. Money goes where you can't go and does things that you don't know how to do. Your giving through our UMC apportionments goes around the world in missionary activities that you can hardly imagine.

Your financial gifts keep this church running to provide so many missions programs for the world. In the last three weeks they have been listed on the back of our bulletins. Your financial commitments provide electricity, insurance, maintenance, custodial, pastoral and program staff.

The 3 truths are:

1. God will supply all grace for you
2. God will supply all your needs all the time.
3. So that you may share abundantly in every good work.

Final, set of 3 is *the results of our giving,*

1. *blesses others,*
2. *blesses ourselves*
3. *and results in Thanksgiving to God.*

1st verse 9 reminds the Corinthians and us that *our giving blesses others.* Verse 9 reads, "*As it is written, 'He scatters abroad; he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.'*" It almost goes without saying that our giving here at Vista Church blesses others. There is meaning and purpose and blessing with every dollar given.

When our giving results in others coming to faith they have received from us the greatest gift on this earth. All other gifts we give can and will fade away and disappear. As Jesus said, "Rust and mold will destroy them."

I was so reminded of this as I looked at the stuff I'd given at one point to a rummage sale.



These were gifts from Christmas's and birthday's past.

Here is an expensive remote controlled airplane I bought for my son for his birthday one year.



It had a life in flight of about 3 seconds. It crashed and we never got it repaired.

The only eternal gift we can give that is worthy of all we are, all we have and all we ever will be is the gift, the indescribable gift of Jesus.



He is worth everything we have to receive. The gift of Jesus is worth everything we have to give away.

Here are pictures of some of our 8 Confirmands this year who received this inexpressible gift of salvation as they made their true public confession of faith here at this altar.



Your giving matters! It passes on a gift that no one and nothing can take away and in the process blesses you eternally. And so...

2nd, our giving blesses ourselves. Verse 11 reads, "You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion,"

This means God's grace supplies all we need in order to give! Determine you are going to give to meet the needs of others, to share abundantly in every good work, and the means will be there to do it!!

3rd, **our giving results in thanksgiving to God.** Verse 11 says, *"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."*

When we give, and we think about it, and give from the heart, it inspires us and others in thanksgiving and praise to God. We experienced this in the delightful and excited singing and dancing of the children in Agua Prieta last Saturday thanking God for your generosity.



So the 3 guidelines, 3 truths and 3 results of giving:

The 3 guidelines:

1. Give as your heart decides
2. Give not reluctantly or grudgingly
3. Give cheerfully knowing these 3 truths

The 3 truths are:

1. God will supply all grace for you
2. God will supply all your needs all the time.
3. So that you may share abundantly in every good work.

The 3 results of giving are:

1. You will bless others
2. You will bless yourself
3. Your giving will result in praise and thanksgiving to God.

With these in mind, I invite you to make a commitment to give to God through Vista Church, to say thanks for his Indescribable Gift. I challenge you to live out the teachings of this scripture to find for yourself the truth of these words.

In Jesus' name. Amen

Please as individuals or couples take out commitment card...

If you watching live stream want a Commitment Card sent to you email us at www.vistaumc.org.