

We started our journey toward a generous life by thinking about how we are born to be generous --- we are created in the very image of our loving and generous God to be the same. We talked about how living a generous life must be grounded in gratitude -- we strive to give thanks for all the amazing gifts that God pours out on us --- and we strive to be thankful in every circumstance we may face. Last week, we thought about the idea that the details of living this generous life will be revealed to us in prayer. It is in the wrestling with God in prayer that we are able to learn who God wants us to be, and God reveals how we are called to live generously. Today, I ask you to consider how faith seals the deal.

Before I read to you the scripture from 2 Corinthians, I want to set the stage for you and ask you to imagine yourself as a member of the church in Corinth—you are among a group of Jesus followers in the ancient Greek city of Corinth. My New Testament text book says that some Corinthian Jesus-followers seem to have enjoyed a comfortable level of economic security. Unlike many other early Jesus-followers, some of the Corinthians had achieved a certain degree of wealth and status. And the Apostle Paul is writing to these believers asking for an offering to support a group of impoverished Jesus-followers who lived in Jerusalem. Listen if you will for the arguments Paul makes for living generously.

## 2 Corinthians 9 Common English Bible (CEB)

<sup>9</sup> It's unnecessary for me to write to you about this service for God's people. (he's talking about giving to the believers in Jerusalem). <sup>2</sup> I know about your willingness to help. I brag about you to the Macedonians, saying, "Greece has been ready since last year," and your enthusiasm has motivated most of them.

<sup>3</sup> But I'm sending the brothers so that our bragging about you in this case won't be empty words, and so that you can be prepared, just as I keep telling them you will be. <sup>4</sup> If some Macedonians should come with me and find out that you aren't ready, we (not to mention you) would be embarrassed as far as this project goes.

<sup>5</sup> This is why I thought it was necessary to encourage the brothers to go to you ahead of time and arrange in advance the generous gift you have already promised. I want it to be a real gift from you. I don't want you to feel like you are being forced to give anything. <sup>6</sup> What I mean is this: the one who **sows** a small number of seeds will also **reap** a small crop, and the one who sows a generous amount of seeds will also reap a generous crop.

<sup>7</sup> Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written, *He scattered everywhere; he gave to the needy; his righteousness remains forever.*<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us. <sup>12</sup> Your ministry of this service to God's people isn't only fully meeting their needs but it is also

multiplying in many expressions of thanksgiving to God. <sup>13</sup> They will give honor to God for your obedience to your confession of Christ's gospel. They will do this because this service provides evidence of your obedience, and because of your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone. <sup>14</sup> They will also pray for you, and they will care deeply for you because of the outstanding grace that God has given to you. <sup>15</sup> Thank God for his gift that words can't describe!

**This is the word of God for us, the people of God. Thanks be to God!**

### **A Generous Life: Sealed By Faith**

In today's scripture, Paul hopes to build up the faith of the Corinthians - he's encouraging them to trust in God -- to know that God will provide richly for them so that they might be rich toward others. Paul is writing to the church in Corinth for a very particular missionary purpose, and he makes several excellent points about the benefits of generosity that I want to point out to you. First, Paul tells the Corinthians that this is one way that they can be of **service** to God and others – he calls this offering “service for God's people” in verse 1--- and again in verse 12.

<sup>1</sup> It's unnecessary for me to write to you about this service for God's people

<sup>12</sup> Your ministry of this service to God's people.

Paul also insists that God looks with favor upon those who give from what they have. He says that God will reward those who give so that they can live generously. Check out verses 8, 10 and 11.

<sup>8</sup> God has the power to **provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace**. That way, **you will have everything you need always** and in everything to **provide more than enough** for every kind of good work.

<sup>10</sup> The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating **will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop**, which is righteousness.

<sup>11</sup> You will **be made rich in every way** so that you can be generous in every way.

Paul says that God gives to us richly – God will provide more than enough-- so that we can be generous. Paul says that God will even multiply the seeds that we plant with our giving.

Another thing Paul argues is that participating in Paul's collection is a tangible way that the Corinthian Christians can express their **thankfulness to** God who has been exceedingly generous to them. Verse 12 says:

<sup>12</sup> Your ministry of this service to God's people isn't only fully meeting their needs but it is also multiplying in many expressions of thanksgiving to God.

Their giving is an expression of thanks to God.

And last but not least -- Paul writes that if the church is generous it will be a **tremendous witness** for God. It would be a huge statement that the Corinthians had been transformed by the power of Jesus. Right? Christians and non-Christians alike would be thinking – wow, what's

going on here. The Corinthians are giving generously for other believers in Jerusalem who are in desperate need! They have really changed! Imagine what a witness this might be to living out Jesus's call to care for others who are in need. Verse 13 says it this way:

<sup>13</sup> They [the believers in Jerusalem] will give honor to God for your obedience to your confession of Christ's gospel. They will do this because this service provides **evidence of your obedience**, and because of your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone.

The Corinthian church's obedience to God will ultimately draw attention to Jesus because of the way they have been transformed – everyone is going to notice and pay attention to the radical way the love of Christ is expressed for those in need. And the more generous they are, the stronger the witness for Christ will be! The more sacrificially they give, the more others notice the powerful way the Spirit moves among the community of faith.

The Apostle Paul provides some strong arguments that seem to be very applicable to us today. In addition, I am utterly convinced that living a lifestyle of service, tithing and generosity is necessary for our spiritual development. I am certain that giving our money and our time are areas of our lives that we must learn to submit to God – and to offer ourselves for God's good purposes. But, I have to be honest, becoming generous is an ongoing process. It is not immediate and it is not easy. It really is a journey that starts with the first step and then the next and the next -- we just keep on going, getting closer and closer to the goal of living with such generosity that we are not just generous, but we are living sacrificially. Many of us are ready to start the journey – we are ready to take that first step. But a few of you all are so generous that you would rather not buy that new thing for yourself, but you would rather give to others. We each give according to what prayer has revealed and with joy as the scripture says!

For me, the reason I am motivated to keep progressing along the path is because of the joy that comes in giving. Yes, we give because we are thankful and because we are a witness to God. Yes, we give because it is pleasing to God. But ultimately, I think we do it because of the joy of it! You see the way I've witnessed this path toward generous living working is that our love for God just overflows out of us, and the Holy Spirit brings us joy when we begin to live in obedience to God. It's kind of a weird idea to think that obedience might bring joy. But it is when we start living on the edge of extreme generosity of our time and treasure that we start to see God work in miraculous and crazy ways.

A few years ago when I was the pastor at Dover United Methodist Church, a family joined the church – a single mom and three kids. Their lives were tough, and their housing situation was not good. The floor of their trailer was failing, and the kids would often step completely through the floor in their bedrooms. Their washer and dryer had broken down, and they were spending so much money at the laundry mat – you can imagine how expensive it was to wash clothes for three kids. And so, the church wanted to help. A collection was taken to buy materials for the floor and a washer and dryer. Some awesome men with tools and skills volunteered to fix the sub-floor and put in new flooring in the home. We almost had all the funds in place to help the family when another thing happened.

After church one Sunday in the middle of this process the family pulled me into my office, and the mom said: "You know that money you've got to buy the washer and dryer? I'm wondering if we could get a tv instead because our tv broke. We don't have cable or internet and watching dvd's is our only entertainment." Now, I can totally understand how the tv might be the very most important thing to have in that situation. However, my rational mind knew that the

washer and dryer were our priority. So, here's what we did. I said, let's pray that God will send a tv, so that we can still use the money for a washer and dryer. So, we literally formed a circle and prayed right there that God would send a tv. Now, it may sound kind of goofy to pray for a tv. But here's what happened.

The family left. I gathered up my things. I got into the car. And I took my phone out of my purse to look at it. And you are not going to believe this, but I had a text from my friend Jill. She had sent me a picture of a tv, and she told me that she was cleaning out her son's room and wanted to know if I knew someone who wanted a tv.

It was almost laughable. It was like God was saying – all you have to do is ask me for what you need! God was providing more than enough for us to be generous in some amazing ways if we would just have faith.

Generosity was multiplying all around us!

But we were still short \$100 for these projects.

Have you ever noticed that God provides in most amazing ways?

That Friday a weight loss group was meeting in the church. This was actually one of the only days that people were in the church during the week. And two of the people in the group just happened to be two of those trustworthy people assigned to count the offerings at the church and to take the collection to the bank. And a random stranger who saw the group's cars walked into the church and handed the ladies an envelope. It was close to Christmas, and he told them that he had heard the church was doing great things to help people in need. And he wanted to give a gift so that we could use it to help someone in need. The ladies opened the envelope and counted some 20's..... 20, 40, 60, 80, 100! One hundred dollars was in the envelope. And the ladies who were tasked with taking care of the church's money took it right to the bank, and it was the last \$100 needed to fix the floor and get the washer and dryer.

Can you imagine the joy this whole thing created? Not just in the family who received the gifts – but actually even more so in the whole congregation who gave – and even in the random stranger from the community! Being generous for God brings us joy! And being generous for God brings miracles.

Do you see how the church's witness of generosity even reached the community? Do you see how being generous is a witness to the power of God? All the **many** ways the church had been generous with its time and money was drawing the attention of non-Christians and fellow-Christians! Our giving was spurring others to be generous alongside us – to help those in need.

But more than anything...more than anything .... when we become generous, we grow closer to Christ, our faith sky-rockets, and unspeakable joy is our reward!

Let us pray. Lord, Jesus Christ, it is indeed an amazing life to be your followers. Build up our faith to know that you **will** richly provide all that we need. We are ever so thankful this day and pray that we might become more grateful and more loving and more generous as we walk with you step by step. Lord, we commit our time and our treasure to you --- that we might be a part of your work in the world. Amen.

