

Giving For God

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Good morning, everyone. As Lisa just said, and I actually said earlier, my name is Alan, and I'm one of the pastors here. If you're here or listening, just thank you again for being here. It's just awesome. For those of you that don't know, we are one church that meets in multiple sites. So right now, there's services going on in Moorhead, in Beaufort, and in Swansboro.

And because we are multiple sites, many people don't know that. But so on occasion, one of us will go to another site. And that's where Jesse and Haley and their kids are this morning there at the Swansboro site. And he's bringing the word there this morning. So be praying for them. And in a couple of weeks, we'll have one of the guys from Moorhead up here. So just a great thing that we are able to do and honored to do. So we are continuing our series through 2 Corinthians, which we've titled Strength and Weakness. And we're at part 12. And once again, this is on giving. So I want to hear a bunch of cheers and hoorah. Yeah, that's right. Yeah. So yeah, like I said, last week and this week, the sermons are on money. So it seems like I always get the short end of the stick when Jesse's gone. You know, the first time I spoke, the subject matter was the Antichrist. And I was like, fantastic. And then like the next time, it was on divorce. And I was like, wow, Jesse, you're playing that just right, buddy. So yeah, right. So Paul, in this kind of, it's kind of like a weird, weird letter to this church, talks about money and back to back chapters, calling on the Corinthians to basically fulfill what they said they would do to help the church back in Jerusalem, who was really struggling and under a lot of condemnation. And that took place about a year back from when this year, when this letter was written, all of the churches in the area have been, have been called to help. And Paul in this letter is sending out a reminder, as well as letting them know the time to give is, is coming, is coming soon. So I just want to say that if you were here last week and heard the sermon about giving, and you actually came back to hear another sermon about giving, I think you deserve some kind of reward or a gold star, those kinds of things. So I recognize that you may be here today and actually be in a desperate place financially. I certainly recognize that. And I certainly can relate to life happening at times.

And money seems really thin. Shelly and I have walked through some very tough financial seasons and had to make some really hard decisions. So I just want you to know, I get that. I understand that.

That's where you are today. And I also know that some of you may be here for the very first time and think, well, here we go again. I knew this church to talk about money. No, the fact is that we're never going to waste an opportunity about holding out the hope of Jesus. It's in our DNA. It's who we are.

And we also will not shy away from the whole of the Bible. Even the parts that talk about money. Even the parts that talk about divorce and the Antichrist, like I mentioned earlier. We're not going to shy away from those. And we're even going to take those parts that shout about how amazing this God really is. Because he really is. Yes, it's hard for me to get up here and talk about a subject that has been used and abused by many leaders in the church. I can't deny that or try to hide from it.

[3 : 2 4] But I've been in services where I was literally sitting in the seat cringing, thinking, please, Lord, let this end. That's not today. Maybe in Swansboro with Jesse, but not here. No, just kidding.

Oh, gosh. And I've even heard some really bad horror stories about pastors locking the doors and passing the plate several times until the dollar figure was reached. That's wrong. That's just terrible. And we're not going to do that. Some of you have been with us for a while, and I bet you love One Harbor Church because we really, we never talk about money. You've been hurt and manipulated, and maybe you think money shouldn't be discussed in a sermon. I get that too. But if we say we believe in the whole of the Bible, then we should be compelled to talk about it in this setting.

Because finances are discussed throughout the Bible, and we as pastors would be doing all of us a disservice if this subject was never taught. And then there's the other side of the pendulum that say we don't talk about money enough. We should teach more often. Honestly, it's a fair critique that we don't talk about it enough. I was just asked recently about the giving and how we don't ever mention it or pass the giving bucket. That was just a couple of weeks ago. Folks have been burned by churches talking too much about money. But how much is too much? Is any time ever too much? Some people just say, well, just preach the Bible, pastor. Well, what if the text is about money? So here's the context. Paul, in this awkward letter, has to delicately ask the Corinthian church to give money towards suffering Jerusalem church. Last week, we learned that good stewardship matters. Christians believe that giving is better than receiving. It reveals what's in your heart. It puts grace into action. It displays the gospel. It helps us trust in God more. This week, Paul gives them instructions about the offering. In doing so, he makes more bold claims about what giving does. [5 : 50] So I'm just going to jump right in and read chapter 9, verses 1 through 14. The verses should be up on the screen behind me. Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints.

For I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready as I said you would be. Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated to say nothing of you for being so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction. The point is this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, he has distributed freely, he has given to the poor, his righteousness endures forever. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. That's the word of God. Paul is making some pretty strong claims here in this passage about sowing and reaping. There's no doubt about that. But he's also talking about a subject that even way back then was as delicate a subject as it is today. He uses terms such as a willing gift, not as an exaction or demand. Give as you have decided in your heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion.

He was wanting them to give as an act of worship to God, led by God, not being manipulated by a man. The Bible makes it clear that there are bad reasons to give. Paul in 2 Corinthians 8 shows he desires to act honorably before God and man. Here we see this again. We're writing to you. We're sending brothers ahead of time. We don't want this to feel demanding. Then give what's in your heart. Paul's expectation of them is that they will give not based on him, but based on what they feel honors God. I've seen, however, that this kind of language can be taken to mean nothing at all or giving very little. I've even said this before. I've checked with my heart and it said to keep all the money. That's terrible. Thanks for the talk, but I'm good. That's the risk Paul was willing to take. And the same is true of us. We don't get to try and manipulate you like other organizations that want you to donate to their cause. I don't get to do that. You know what I'm talking about. You see the skinny, shivering dog and cat locked in a cage with Sarah

McLaughlin playing in the background. At the end of the day, we have to do what is right and trust God to provide. That is how you as an individual and family should operate. And that is how we as a church have operated and will continue to do so. Remember that the Bible uses heart, the word heart, to talk about the center of all of our motivations. In this way, the heart is revealing what we love.

[10:32] Matthew 6, 21. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Jesus says, your treasure shows where your heart really is. He's not trying to let them off easy or trying to manipulate them.

Paul lists a couple of reasons to give that would not be good. In verse 7, he says, each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly, not under compulsion. As much as Paul wants them to give, he's not wanting this. Christians should not give under human compulsion. Compulsion, necessity, force, even violence. I mentioned earlier about passing the offering plate multiple times or locking the doors. That would probably fall under compulsion or force. That's not how we should give.

That's human compulsion. You may say, why do I say human compulsion? Well, because there is a good kind of compulsion. Paul's not wanting them to give because of him, but because of God. He wants them to give because of the impact of God on their lives. He wants them to give because they understand the mission of the church. He wants them to give out of an act of worship because their heart has been motivated in the right way by God, which leads to the second bad reason to give. Christians should not be reluctant or resentful in their giving. Reluctantly speaks about being slow or begrudging about the gift. Deuteronomy 15 10 says, you shall give to him freely and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him. Because for this, the Lord, your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. See the tension here again, freely and not be grudging. Grudging is another term for resentful. I'll give it, but don't expect me to be happy about it. God doesn't want you to feel nagged in the giving or give with a heart of, well, let's just get it over with. It's my Christian duty.

No, he wants you to feel compelled by the love of Jesus, his church, and its mission to save lives. God doesn't want you to give like that, so don't do it. If that is where you find yourself this morning, I would say push pause and don't give. Something on the inside, your heart is missing the point.

You're missing the whole reason for giving, and I would say, let's talk. It matters to us. It matters to me. Let's talk. Two more key motives that need to get mentioned, but are not necessarily brought out in this text, but still need to be said. Christians shouldn't give in a way that brings them honor.

[13:29] Jesus tells this story in Matthew 6. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets. I mean, can you imagine walking down the street this morning with someone in front of you playing the trumpet on the way here?

You wave and you check. I mean, how insane would that look? He goes on to say that they, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

He is saying, I hope someone patted them on the back and said, good job, brother or sister, because that's all they're going to get. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret and your father who sees in secret will reward you. This is a motivator that some of us may struggle with. Praise and adoration from man. We all like to be told, good job, great job, great sermon, pastor. Well, Jesus is saying that is all you're going to get. And guess what happens when you stop giving? They stop giving praise and adoration and you are left with nothing. I don't know who gives what. Only a couple of staff do. I mean, we have to have a bookkeeper. We fight for ways as a church for you to keep that between you and Jesus. I just think that would be weird and fake for me to look at who gives and how much. It's not a numbers game. It's a hard thing. We also, as Christians, shouldn't give expecting a problem-free life. This mentality falls in line with the prosperity gospel. If you give to this ministry, then God will give you a new car or miraculously pay off all your credit card debt, et cetera, et cetera.

Sometimes we are led to believe that giving will make God do this or that or motivate him to do this than that. Actually, God promised to give us all that we need, not a perfect life. God promises to give us all that we need, not all that we want. We should give because God first gave it all. God gave out of love and we should give from a heart of thanksgiving. Like Paul, as much as we hope folks give, we aren't willing to cross lines that lead to encouraging you to give for the wrong reasons.

I'm not going to do that. If we don't give under compulsion and we don't give reluctantly or in a way that honors us or with any promise of our own prosperity, how on earth should we give?

[16:14] Well, it says right here in verse seven, for God loves a cheerful giver. Biblical giving is cheerful giving. Too often Christians fall into giving to get or giving without thinking. I better pay this

time.

Sorry. I better pay the tithe to be a good Christian. I mean, it is, it's my duty. It's what I'm called to do. It's in the Bible, but I'm given a 10th from the net. Don't you touch my gross. I have tax deductions.

I submit that you're missing the point too. Yes, you are giving, but where is your heart? Where is your faith? Paul appeals to cheerful or happy giving. The opportunities that we get to give should be happy occasions. If we give with a mentality of God already owns it all and he has entrusted you and I to be a good steward, that perspective causes us to become much more open-handed rather than our typical, I earned this. I earned this. It's mine. No, God gave it to you.

And then again, not just, okay, let's get this over with. There's nothing cheerful about that. There's nothing happy about that. You see this throughout the Bible. God loves it when we see that our giving is ultimately for him. And when we choose to give cheerfully, it really does bring a sense of joy. I love that we learn that God loves it when we give like this. You may wonder, what does God love? This is one thing. He loves a cheerful giver. But why on earth would anyone be cheerful about giving? Reasons I mean who thinks this is a good idea, who would think this is a good idea?

The world thinks it's crazy to give and give with a cheerful heart. Well, we're called to be counter-cultural. We're not called to be part of this earth.

[18:10] The point is this, verse 6 says, the point is this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Giving is like sowing and reaping.

The principle here is simple. Sow less, reap less. Sow more, reap more. This has been used in unhelpful ways, turning God into our own personal vending machine, where we feel justified. God, I've been a faithful sower, and I feel like I should be reaping a bountiful harvest of, you fill in the blank. I would not recommend that behavior. God is never, never in our debt.

Amen. However, however, this is a biblical principle that's found throughout, so we can't ignore this just because some have misused the truth. Proverbs 11, 24 and 25 says, one gives freely, yet grows all the richer. Another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered. I've sat with folks who have a gift of generosity, and all they say all the time is, oh, we can't out-give God. The more we give, the more we benefit. The ditch we want to avoid is putting God in our debt. It's a heart thing.

It's right here. There are plenty of stories where someone did the right thing and still suffered. Anybody ever heard of Job? God's ways are higher than ours, and there are some things about his motives that we're just incapable of understanding. However, this should produce cheerfulness about sowing. Paul is trying to appeal to this church about their generosity. He is trying to open up their greedy hands and hard heart and tell them they have a real opportunity. If you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully. How much would you sow if you knew this was a promise?

[20:13] How much would you sow if you knew this was a promise? Paul's saying to the Corinthians, don't hold back. So, with that, something else I feel we need to say.

Not about amount. It's not about the amount. The bountiful versus sparing isn't about the dollar figures. It's about faith. It's about your heart. Think about the widow, the story of the widow who came and gave two pennies. That meant more to Jesus because they were given with total faith. The others were giving, and it was just for show. It was just their duty. In the kingdom, what you give by faith is all that counts. Even seemingly small things can produce massive results. Look at the mustard seed.

Tiny, tiny mustard seed, and yet it produces a huge tree. So, give cheerfully because your giving produces like seed. It multiplies. And then Paul gives three things that are produced by cheerful giving in verse 11.

You will be enriched in every way. You'll be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. Giving, it blesses us personally. It blesses others, and it glorifies God.

[21:32] Paul's saying here that when we give cheerfully, we will abound in every way. Our whole lives will be blessed because of it. And he adds two other key things that will happen. This abounding will allow us to be generous in every way. And God will be glorified. People will be blessed by our generosity, and they will thank God. But when we are greedy and want to hoard our things, the opposite effect can take place. Jesus tells a parable to get at this. In Luke 12, verse 15, it says, And he said to them, Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. And he told them a parable saying, The land

of a rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, Well, what shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry. But God said to him, Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God. God wants us to understand that abounding in every way doesn't necessarily have to do with money. That blessing can be used in many different forms. But what we have to do is realize that by God's blessing, I can in turn bless others. And again, this is not just about money. We also have time. We also have talents. We don't just focus on enriched in every way and forget the rest of the verse 11. However, that is where so many of us struggle and miss the big picture.

This is the kind of person that God wants us to be. Blessed to bless. Paul is trying to pry open the tight-fisted hands of the Corinthians by reminding them of all the ways that giving will lead to blessing. He is trying to tell them in no uncertain terms that there are basically two different types of people when it comes to blessing. If you keep all your money, you get blessed, and you get glorified.

When you give cheerfully to God, you get blessed, others get blessed, and God gets all the glory. Paul is saying, live like this, the latter one. Strive to be like that. But what about my needs?

That's a valid point. But what we are not talking about here is you giving away the money you earn to pay your mortgage or keep the power turned on. What we are talking about is money. What we are talking about is money in general. Money seems to hold a really tight grip around our hearts, and we feel like we've got to have it. And we do. We do need it, but with the right heart motive. Scripture is always trying to help us see this heart motive and push back against the temptations of this world. Verse 10 says, He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. Giving reminds us that God is the supplier of everything we need.

Money has the power to reveal who we really think is in charge. Look at where you spend it.

Matthew 6, 24 says, No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. According to Jesus, it reveals who our master is. Here Paul says, just think about it. God's doing all the real work. We can sow, we can water, but only God makes things grow. And the seed, water, weather, soil, God provides that too.

[25 : 36] Giving is a powerful way to teach your heart who's really in charge. The tie of money is, you need me to be happy and you can't get enough. Jesus exposes this lie. God is your supplier.

He gave you the seed. He made the weather right. He caused it to grow. And he's over your soul. When you give, think about a prayer to remind you of this.

I said that every passage in the Bible points to how good God is. This passage is no exception. He provides everything we need.

And that's not just food and water. It's something we need more. The Corinthians had already received something from God. Verse 14 says, Because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Verse 8 says, And God is able to make all grace abound to you. Verse 9, As it is written, He has distributed freely. He has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever.

[26 : 41] God is a cheerful giver of grace. As much as the Corinthians were being challenged to give, it was against the backdrop of what they had been given already.

Grace. Amen. Amen. It can be lost on you if you don't really know what grace is.

It feels weird that grace is even in this chapter, because this seems like a chapter full of formulas. If I do A, B, and C, then I should get D, E, and F. But Paul loves grace in there.

Grace is unmerited favor. It's what you don't deserve. That's so key. In a chapter so often used to create a formula for our material wants and wishes, Paul says, You know how God gave you what you didn't deserve?

You didn't sow anything to reap grace. In fact, your actions were leading you to the opposite of grace. You were heading towards wrath and judgment. I love how this chapter doesn't end with what they do, but what he did, what God did.

[27 : 49] Verse 15 says, Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. God has given us his only son, an inexpressible gift. God was generous.

God didn't give under compulsion or reluctantly. John 3, 16, For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Ephesians 2, For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. We don't ever end thinking about us. We end amazed by God.

We should be cheerful givers because our God is a cheerful giver. As the band comes up, if you're here or listening and not yet a follower of Jesus, I would challenge you to receive from a God who gives.

Receive that. Matthew 5, 45 says, Your Father who is in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

[28 : 58] You're receiving common grace from the moment you were conceived. You're still receiving grace, and you don't even know it. You've been blessed with rain and sun and all kinds of blessings.

The very breath you have without thinking about it is called common grace. Come today and receive his inexpressible gift, grace from Jesus Christ.

If you're here listening and you're already a follower of Jesus, we're going to take communion now, and we need to be reminded by this meal that we give after we receive.

We did nothing and can do nothing to earn what we received. Grace. No better example exists of generosity, perfect, yet suffered for us.

Before we give a penny, we are reminded of the grace we've received. 2 Corinthians 8, 9 says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

[30 : 12] Take a moment to consider what your life would be like without this free gift of grace.

God, we are just thankful that you are not a God that gives reluctantly, that you freely give, that you give from a motive of love.

You give from a motive of restoration and healing and grace, God, and for that we are thankful.

God, I pray that if there are people here today with us who are listening and don't know what this grace is all about, God, that they would listen to their heart, listen to their mind, listen to their soul, and submit their lives to you as Lord and Savior.

And for those of us that have called you Lord and Savior, God, I pray that you would change our heart, Lord, that you would soften our hearts when it comes to this subject. Money and giving have a powerful grip on our lives, and it can just destroy us.

So, God, I just pray that you would help us change us, help us be a cheerful giver, not only with our money, but with our talents and our time, God. Help us to be a great example of what grace truly looks like.

Help us to be a light in a dark world. Help us to bring hope to those who have none. We're thankful that you have chosen to use us to be your hands and your feet and your mouthpiece, and I pray that we would do that well.

[31 : 38] Thank you, God. Amen. Jesus said that we should eat this meal to remind ourselves that Jesus' body was broken, and his blood was shed to pay our debt.

So let's take the bread and the juice, reminding ourselves of the incredible generosity we received freely from God Almighty. Amen.