

2 Corinthians 9 Commentary-Wayne Barber

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2 Corinthians 9:1-5 The Effectiveness of Grace Giving

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 9. We are entering a brand new chapter. Paul stays on the same subject he's been on. But it's 2 Corinthians 9:1-5 today. We've been talking about the grace of giving and this is part 4 of that series, and probably a couple more before we get out of that and move into chapter 10. Today we want to talk about the effectiveness of grace giving. What effect does grace giving have on other people? "The Effectiveness of Grace Giving."

You know, the word "give" is a word that most of us don't want to hear if we're not walking in the Spirit. It is used 267 times in the New Testament, out of which 143 of them are in the gospels. Giving is one of the most important words in the believer's life. Why is that important? Because it is rooted in the love that the Holy Spirit produces in our life. Grace giving—I want to make sure we get this—grace giving is Christ living His life in and through us. It is the demonstration of what we call around here "living grace." "Jesus, be Jesus in me, no long me but thee; resurrection power, fill me this hour, Jesus, be Jesus in me."

How do you know He's doing that? When you see a giving heart you know Jesus is operating in that person's life. It's God's heart to give. Now say it with me, you know the verse very well, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." At great cost, but that was the heart of God and now it's reflected in you and in me.

Last week we finished chapter 8 and we saw how sound and solid grace giving is even in the 21st century. We saw the provision of grace giving. We learned that grace giving is the only way that you can absolutely mark it down that your needs will be met later on. When you're willing to cooperate with God, give yourself to Him, hear from Him, and you're willing to give, you can count on your needs to be met, not your wants, but your needs to be met whenever they come up.

I heard the story of a farmer who learned to give and then learned to give even more. His friends came to him and said, "How do you do it? You give so much yet you always have so much." And he said, "The only thing I can figure is I shovel into God's bin and He turns around and shovels back into my bin, but His shovel's bigger than mine." That's the way it works. In verse 13 of chapter 8 Paul shows us that giving is not so that other people's life might be made easier. That's not what it's all about; while at the same time we give so much we can't even pay our bills, that's not it.

He says in verse 13, "For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality." The word "equality" there is the key, and it means "that which is fair, that which is equitable to all." You see, those who receive from those who have are not free from giving to others when they get back on their feet. What goes around comes around and this is the way the body responds to each other. In verse 14 he explains it out, "at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality." That we might learn that giving is reciprocal. The poor saints in Jerusalem were in dire straits, but there would come a time when the saints in Corinth might be too. And if the Corinthians were willing to give in their time of abundance, then they could count on the fact that God would prompt other believers, maybe even the saints in Jerusalem, to give of their time of need.

Again, grace giving is the only way to ensure that our needs would be met. I got an email this past week from a dear one in this church and in his quiet time he said he had already come across that. He said, "That's a biblical principle. It runs all the way through Scripture." Yes, it does. He said, "Proverbs 11:24-25, 'There is one who scatters and yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous and he who waters will himself be watered.'" It's all through Scripture.

We looked at Luke 6:38 last time; we looked at many other verses. It's everywhere in Scripture. So the provision in grace giving is sound, it's rock solid because it's based upon what God says. The precaution in grace giving is that we never hoard what God has

given. Now, that's a tendency we have. You see, there's a fine line between saving up—you know Proverbs talks about the ant in the summer saves up for what it might have to endure during the winter; there's nothing wrong with that—but there's a fine line between saving up and then putting your trust in your savings rather than putting your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's a fine line and I can't make that line drawn; you're going to have to let the Holy Spirit do that in your life.

Verse 15, "as it is written, 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.'" And Paul quotes from a story that took place in the book of Exodus and he tells the story of how the children of Israel in the wilderness could not find food and so God so beautifully gave them what is called manna. The word for manna, it was a little thin, white, flakey stuff that came down in the morning. It was just enough for what they needed for each day. They had to trust God every day, not just one day and store it up. They didn't have too much, they didn't have too little. And some people needed more than others, some people needed less than others. They were told not to leave any of it lying on the ground to store it up. You always have those "in case God just forgot because He's old anyway and He's got a lot on His mind. Maybe He'll just forget so we better store some up and at least have a snack between meals."

Well, you know the story. It's human nature all over again. They didn't listen; what's new? And they ended up with rotten, maggot-infested manna. And what God was teaching them was that we are to never store up what God has given with no intent of sharing with others in the body of Christ. But we're to totally give of ourselves to the Lord and understand that we're trusting Him; we're not trusting our money, we're not trusting our jobs, He is our Provider and whatever He's given to us, we ask Him what He wants us to do with His money that he's entrusted to us.

From what Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 8, it seems that God is not so concerned with how much we give because you've got the widow who gives her mite and you've got the rich man's gift. Here's what He's concerned with: He's concerned with how much is left over. Whatever God chooses to allow us to live in abundance, you can write it down, there is somebody that you need to bless. There is somebody that you need to help out. Always it's that way in the body of Christ because you're going to go through season of abundance and you're going to go through seasons of lack.

But we also saw the protection in grace giving. Verses 16-24, Paul outlines the character of three men that were going to go down and pick up this offering in Corinth. Titus was one of them; we don't know who the other two are, and it's good to review this because it's going to come up again in chapter 9. It was like Paul's little finance committee and these three teach us a lot about the character of those who are going to handle God's money. They were people who, first of all, had a God-given burden to serve God's leaders. They wanted to come alongside Paul and help him and assist him in carrying out the burden God had put on his heart. Secondly, they had a burden for the whole message of the gospel, not just that people get saved. That's certainly very, very important but also the fact that people learn living grace, not just saving grace but living grace. Thirdly, they had a desire to see God not man glorified in the giving of His people. Fourthly they had a reputation for honesty, and fifthly they had a cooperative spirit and I thought this was so beautiful. It came out so clearly, to work with Paul, not lord over Paul.

Well today we come into chapter 9 and I want to tell you it just keeps getting exciting. I love it, in this matter of grace giving. And like I said, we're going to talk about the effectiveness of grace giving. And some effects that the giving has and some effects that refusing to give has on the body of Christ.

The act of grace giving is contagious

First of all, the act of grace giving is contagious. I want you to see this. If you look at verse 1 of chapter 9, "For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints." Now the word "superfluous" is the Greek word *perissos*, and it means "over and above." It's more than enough. One Greek scholar said it could be translated "it is not necessary or there is no purpose." And so Paul says it is not necessary, there is no purpose to write to you about this ministry to the saints. The phrase "to write to you" is in the present tense which better translated means "to keep on writing to you."

It is not necessary; it serves no purpose for me to keep on writing to you about this ministry to the saints. Now the ministry to the saints he refers to is that offering we've been talking about. It wasn't just Corinth that was going to be giving to it. Other churches at other places were giving to it; but it was an offering to the poor saints in Jerusalem and it was a very special time of offering. He doesn't have to keep on telling them what the offering was about. Why is that? Because only a year before it was the wealthy Corinthians that not only knew about the offering, but they set the pace in their giving. They said, "We're going to give to this offering. We're going to give generously to this offering."

The problem is, they haven't come through yet. Possibly the reason he had to even bring it up, they knew about it, was because he knew something about the flesh; he knew something about human nature. All of us are great starters, boy, we'll start in a minute. Most of us, sadly enough, are poor finishers. Paul possibly sensed that all the enthusiasm they had to give, even though they hadn't given yet to the poor saints in Jerusalem over the period of time, maybe because of the complaints that came towards Paul, the criticism that was false towards Paul. Somehow all that enthusiasm had ground to a halt.

Now we must remember that in chapter 8, how Paul had used the Macedonians. Now the Macedonians were poor people, and he used the impoverished Macedonians to encourage the Corinthians to give. That was what he was talking about in chapter 8. You don't know it until chapter 9, but this is interesting; oddly enough, it was the enthusiasm of the wealthy Corinthians that caused the Macedonians to want to give in the first place. We didn't know that. He says in verse 2, "for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them."

The word "readiness" is the Greek word *prothumia*, which means "eagerness, willingness of mind to do something." Paul said, "I know your willingness. I know your eagerness and willingness to give." And it appears from this that it wasn't the heart to give as much as he's dealing with here as somebody needed to go and help them take up the funds. I thought about this when I was studying this. I'm always willing to take out the trash but I sometimes need a little prompting from my wife, who is the Holy Spirit's helper; between her and the Holy Spirit I haven't got a chance, to take it out. It's not that I'm not willing to do it; I just haven't gotten around to it. And that's kind of what I get out of this.

By mentioning Achaia, Paul evidently includes them in the sphere of influence that the church of Corinth has had, not just on the Macedonians. The Achaeans, they're ready to give; they've already got their offering ready. The point is that Paul says that the zeal of those Corinthians a year ago to give generously had stirred up most of them. I like what he says, "most of them," not all of them. Why wouldn't it be all of them? Because giving is never the most popular subject to people that are fleshly minded.

The word "stirred up" is the Greek word *erethizo*, which means "to provoke, to excite, to stimulate." The intention to give that was expressed by the Corinthians had become contagious to those in Macedonia and to those in Achaia. It excited others to give. Now, let me ask you a question today. How many of you have been around somebody that really has learned the lesson of giving and has gotten in on that divine cycle of God of how you give and it comes back and you give back and it has so excited you that you wanted to give? You see, that's part of how the body responds to each other.

In 1981 my Mama went to be with the Lord. I was in Mississippi, and I had my little 73 Buick that would overheat 30 miles from home. Air condition never worked on that thing. I didn't know how I was going to get home. My Mama had asked me to do her funeral and I didn't know how I was going to get the whole family there. We didn't have the money and my car wouldn't make it there. We'd looked into rental cars.

I got a phone call one night from one of our deacons He said, "Doris and I have been praying and we want you to take our car. I know what kind of car you have. I want you to take our car." You have to understand what I'm saying here. It was brand new. I told him on the phone, "I can't do that. It's brand new. Nobody let's anybody borrow their brand new car." He said, "It's not my car, it's God's car. God gave it to me and I guarantee you part of the reason is for you to use it on this particular trip. Now you just receive what God's put on our heart to give to you." We cried. I went over to his house and left my car with him. That was a real trade.

I got in that car driving back home and I'm thinking it's like riding on air. It's wonderful. The air conditioning worked; the radio had big nice speakers and all that stuff. But right before we left his driveway he said, "Here's something else. You're going to need gas, you're going to need a place to stay, you're going to need food. Here's my credit card and don't you worry how much you put on it because I'm going to take care of it. God has told me to do that." And I want you to know that, to this day, that continues to excite within us. I remember the first time I ever had a brand new car and somebody asked me to borrow it. Without a question I let them borrow it. Why? Because it's not my car and you know who taught me that? Calvin and Doris in Mississippi.

You see, when you give you don't understand how many people are being blessed by it. This is part of what the body of Christ is supposed to be doing. It says in Hebrews 10:24, it uses the same word, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds." The apostle Paul is trying to tell the church of Corinth, "Man, you don't understand. When you got so excited to give to those poor saints over in Jerusalem God so stirred within your heart, you were the ones that excited the Macedonians and they have given even beyond what they were able to give." But you see, he's trying to tell them something. That was a year ago and Paul doesn't want the Corinthian believers now to be so embarrassed in front of the other churches when they were the ones who incited the others to give in the first place.

So the bottom line is that grace giving in its desire and in its follow through is contagious. When God speaks to your heart and you express the desire to give, you have to know others are going to be blessed by that. You don't do it so that they can be blessed by it. You do it because God told you to do it; but it's going to get contagious. When people start giving it gets contagious and other people are watching. The effect of grace giving is that it's contagious to others in the body of Christ.

The refusal of grace giving is confusing

Well, the second thing that I want you to see is that the refusal of grace giving is confusing. I hope you can see from what we're going to look here in the text how confusing and humiliating it is when God's people refuse to give. You've heard that little commercial; I can't remember who sponsors it, about people doing the stupidest thing. You know what I'm talking about? And they

cut the tree down and it falls on his car. He tries to stop it and the little kid trying to swing a baseball bat and he throws it and it goes through the back glass doors. People do the stupidest things.

You talk about stupidity in the body of Christ. You can't get any worse than that when a person refuses to give. We don't know the damage we do to our testimony through the body of Christ when we refuse to give. And especially when we don't follow through with what we told other people we would give.

When one doesn't give as God intends it's humiliating, it's shameful to the whole body of Christ. Look at verse 3, "But I have sent the brethren, that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, that, as I was saying, you may be prepared." Now the brethren he speaks of again are those three men, including Titus but two obviously we don't know who they are. Now he's sending them to make sure the Corinthians are not put to shame when they come for the offering. Paul is coming with a little group, a little entourage and he sends these three to make sure that offering is ready when he gets there.

Verse 4, "lest if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to speak of you) should be put to shame by this confidence." You see, what they had said they wanted to do they didn't do, and hadn't done until that point. Paul said, "It's going to be embarrassing, especially if some of those Macedonians come with me." Now Paul doesn't tell exactly who travels with him in 2 Corinthians; we really don't know. But we do know Acts 20:4 names the people that travel with Paul most of the time and probably they were with him when they went to get that offering.

Acts 4:20 says, "And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea," Berea was in Macedonia, "the son of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians," that was also in Macedonia, "Gaius of Derbe," that was Galatia, "Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia." So that was at least three Macedonians that accompanied him most of the time when he made his travels.

Now can you imagine, if that's true, and evidently he suggested it will be, if these Macedonians were with Paul and they're walking down the road going to Corinth to see what that offering is going to be. And they're so pumped, they're so fired up and they're thinking, "We gave beyond our ability but these are wealthy people. What are they going to give? We can't wait to get there and to see what their offering is going to be. Man, this is going to be some kind of offering." And they get there and there's no money in the plate. Oops. And you see how that reflects back on the Corinthians?

Paul knows how much discouragement this would cause if the Corinthians had not done what they had said. So he sends the three men already mentioned to make certain that they're ready. He doesn't want himself and the Corinthian church to be put to shame. Otherwise "if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to speak of you) should be put to shame by this confidence." The word "shame" is the word *kataischuno*; *kata* intensifies it. It's a real heavy word; it's the word that means to "be confounded first of all, dishonored, and disgraced." The root idea is to be so humiliated that one shrinks back and tries to find a place to hide from shame.

Let's put it where we live. Ever wonder who is watching you and your giving? Your Grandmom, your Granddad? What are we teaching our children? Are the little ones who are following our example, are they seeing the giving spirit in our heart because Christ lives in us? Are you sending a contagious message by the way you give or are you causing them to be confused with what you say versus what you do? This is always for all of us. You see, we talk big, all of us talk big. Talk is cheap; we've got to back up what we say. And I want to tell you this from my heart. The giving here is wonderful; I'm just trying to say something. When a church budget for instance, has to suffer because people won't give, that is a humiliation to the body of Christ. And I want us all to accept that responsibility. It's a shame; it's a sham upon Jesus being Jesus in us. It makes us nothing more than a cold, mechanical religion that does things to impress others before we try even to impress God. That's all it is.

But when it's a relationship, when we're walking with God, I guarantee you those things that God wants to do through His church, the needs will be met and we will never be ashamed when we let Jesus be Jesus in us. It's terrible. The act of grace giving is contagious; it stirs the hearts of other believers to do what is right. The refusal in grace giving is confusing; it brings shame and disgrace when the church refuses to give for whatever reason. Especially what they have said they would give.

The heart of grace giving is clear

And then finally, the heart of grace giving is clear. Now when I say clear, I mean it's clear of any ulterior motive. It's clear of any fleshly greed. What Jesus does in our hearts is pure and when He does it there's no strings attached. That's the word *haplotes* when it talks about the gift of giving. It says it means liberality but it doesn't mean that. It means to give it without any strings attached because God told you to do it.

Verse 5, "So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift, and not affected by covetousness." Now once again, the term "the brethren" again is those three guys. And you remember there's another group. I just want to make sure you have it in your mind. Three are going to go ahead, make sure they're prepared, and then there's another group coming, of which will be some

Macedonians, with Paul.

But you can see how much Paul cares for these people because he's not going to be a benefit out of this. This is all going to some people in need. But Paul doesn't want to see them embarrassed and humiliated when people around them know how much they have but how little they choose to give. That's him loving those people. "So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift." Now, that little word "bountiful gift" is one word in Greek. It's the word *eulogia*, and it means "the act of blessing someone." It's used for praise; when you praise God it's *eulogia*. It's to speak well of something. But it has the idea of blessing somebody, of bestowing upon somebody a blessing. The word occurs twice in two successive phrases. The one I just read and then if you continue in the verse, "that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift." He uses it twice.

Now using this word is special, and the translation really doesn't pick up on it, because it involves a beautiful promise. No believer can participate in grace giving—which is bestowing a blessing on somebody and most of the time they don't deserve it—and not be blessed themselves. You can't participate in grace giving and not be blessed yourself. Grace giving blesses both the giver and the one who receives the gift.

Paul points to the fact that the Corinthians would now experience God's blessing for having given. Again it's abundant, it's a bountiful gift. In Acts 20:35 it says, "In every thing I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" You say, "You've already talked about that. Our needs will be met." No. Yes, that will take place, but what he's talking about here is richer than that. It's when you participate; this is Christ in you, it's not you doing it for Him, it's Christ in you, you get to experience Him for yourself. There's something amazing that takes place when a person gives under the lordship of Christ when God tells him to give and he does what God tells him to do, then immediately he gets to experience the fullness and the richness of the presence of God in his life.

That is far richer than to have your needs met; that's wonderful, but to walk in the power of God. Paul said that in Philippians. He said, "I want to know Him." I thought you knew Him, Paul. "I want to know Him experientially." And the only way you can know Him experientially is to obey Him. And when you obey Him He manifests His presence in your life. That's the essence of what living grace is all about and I want to tell you something: when you start living that way it is so contagious. Your flesh would say, "Oh no, I can't do that." But you put the flesh down and you did what God said and now you can experience Him.

Yes, your needs will be met, but this is far greater. You see, the reason I bring that out is because Paul continues and makes a very important point. Grace giving is never affected by the fact that you will receive a blessing back. That's not why you do it. It's only motivated by Christ living in you. You want to see Him glorified; you want to see Him living in it through your life. Now the reward of that is going to be experiencing Him. But you don't do it for that reason; you do it so that He might be glorified. There's no agenda. There are no strings. "God, now You have to do this because I did that." No, no. He puts a phrase at the end of that verse to qualify it. He says, "and not affected by covetousness."

Now the word "covetousness" is a word pleonexia, which basically means "greed." That's what it means. Greed, the very essence of greed, is selfish, stingy; something, an agenda, that you want for yourself. Whatever it is, whether it's money back or whatever it is, there's a string attached and "not affected by greed." What he shows here is there are going to be two kinds of giving. What he's doing here is bringing up the trap that many fall into who give because of a selfish motive, of a greedy motive. They want something in return; they want something back.

I served a church once and got a letter from an individual and he said, "Listen, if you don't do this and this, you don't know who you're talking to, buddy. We have the money in this church and we'll just withdraw our money and we'll show you who we are. We'll show you real quickly who we are." That's what he's talking about. Greed, I want something back from it. I'm going to give but I have a purpose behind it; I have a string attached to it.

Ask Dr. Charles Stanley about that. When he went to First Baptist Church of Atlanta and a guy walked up and hit him in the face and knocked him down on television and 400 people, the richest people in the church, came to him and said, "You don't know who we are, but in this envelope we've got enough money to take care of you and your family for the next several years, but you must resign and leave tomorrow." And Charles Stanley said, "I can't do that. You can fire me and ask me to leave. That's between you and God, but God has not told me to leave yet." And on a given Sunday morning 400 and some people got up at the First Baptist Church of Atlanta and walked out the back door in defiance of who He is. And that was when the church began to grow like it had never grown. Because God is not honored, it's a shame for anybody to ever give with a string attached.

And Paul's trying to show that there are two kinds of giving. It'll be in a church. There are people who give their money as power. There are people who give their money for an agenda. And he says, "Oh no, no, no. Grace giving is not that. Grace giving is the pure clear motive of just wanting to see Jesus glorified because you have honored Him and then the fullness of His presence and His blessing begin to exude out of your life and people know you don't have an agenda. You just want to see God honored.

You see, that's the contrast Paul draws here. No matter how much a person gives, if his motive is wrong, it's never, ever recognized by God. Because you see, greed is idolatry. Colossians 3:5 says, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry." This is the contrast. And we need to see that today and those of us that want to walk with God and see Him glorified have to remember that when we give with a purity of motive of our heart, no credit we want back, just Him to be glorified, that's contagious.

And we need to understand that we're going to be sitting beside people and walking with people in the church that won't give, they have agendas when they do give, and yet we want to be contagious to them. So we keep on doing what God tells us to do, but don't get beat up when you find out people don't have that kind of motive behind their giving. It was going on in Corinth and Paul wanted to make sure they were clear of any kind of thing of fleshly, selfish greed.

Well, when we first give of ourselves to the Lord which the Macedonians taught us in chapter 8, when we understand that God owns it all, and we just want to live under His Lordship and God tells us to do with what He's loaned to us and we do it in His name and in His power, the rest is history. The rest is history. And the testimony of the church begins to rise. These people love God. These people trust God.

So the act of grace giving is contagious. The refusal of grace giving, for whatever reason, is confusing. And the heart of grace giving is clear. It's clear and clean of anything of the flesh.

In conclusion, over the centuries there are a lot of people who have discovered this and they've written some things to help us in our day and I thought I'd just read a few of them to you and bless your heart today. A merchant of St. Petersburg at his own cost supported several native missionaries in India and gave liberally to the cause of Christ at home. On being asked how he could afford to do it he replied, "Before my conversion when I served the world and self I did it on a grand scale and at a most lavish expense. And when God, by His grace, called me out of darkness, I resolved that Christ and His cause should have more than I ever spent for the world. And as to giving so much, it is God who enables me to do it. For at my conversion I solemnly promised that I would give to His cause a fixed proportion of all that my business brought in to me. And every year since I made that promise it has brought me in about double what I did the year before, so that I can easily give as I do and I double my gifts for His service." That's one testimony over the years.

John Bunyan tells us, "A man there was, some called him mad. The more he gave the more he had." And then there was an inscription on a tombstone that says, "What I gave away, I saved. What I spent, I used. What I kept, I lost." I heard somebody say one time, "I've never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul." And then one dear saint wrote and over the centuries it's been recorded, "Giving to the Lord says another is but transporting our goods to a higher floor." And says a noted pastor, "In defiance of all the torture and malice and might of the world, the generous man will ever be rich for God's providence is his estate, God's wisdom and power his defense, God's love and favor his reward, and God's Word his security."

Let me just ask you that question today as we bring our service to a close. How's your giving? You say, "I'm not going to give." Well, I'm sad because you're going to have to deal with God about what He gave to you, about what He wants to do with it. You know, living grace is giving grace. Living is giving. If Jesus cannot be Jesus in me, then I'm not being a giving person. A person who says he's walking with God and loves Him and spends what he makes at the same time, that's an oxymoron. It will not fit Scripture. So let God speak to your heart.

I don't know what to do except just preach God's Word and let God's people respond out of a heart that loves Him. That's all I know. But whether it be here or someplace else, you be giving. You be giving and I'll guarantee you one thing: if you give as God tells you to give, you can expect to walk in the fullness of His presence in your life like you have never known.

2 Corinthians 9:6-10

The Attributes of Grace Giving

I've always loved new beginnings, particularly when I was in school. I was in school long enough to really appreciate that every new semester you had brand new notebooks, nothing had been written in them. Wasn't it fun to start fresh? Brand new pens, brand new pencils, and no zeros, no class cuts, and even the teachers at the first of every semester were always nice. It changed as time went on. But new beginnings automatically denote change and a fresh start. That's what I love about them. With that in mind, what a time, now this is God's timing, what a time for us as a church to be in 2 Corinthians 9, starting a fresh new year. I can't think of a better time for us and especially those of you that have never experienced the journey of just participating in grace giving, of what that offers, the adventure that it offers.

Well, the apostle Paul was concerned about the church of Corinth, to step up to the plate and to be a testimony to the other churches that they themselves had influenced. Only a year before Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, the Corinthians had expressed such excitement. Now these were wealthy people and the poor people around saw these wealthy people get excited about giving to the poor people over in Jerusalem and it was so wonderful. Even the Macedonian believers got excited about the Corinthians being excited and they gave beyond their ability. The Macedonians, it was amazing what God did with them.

You see, the intent of the Corinthian church to give had not only affected the Macedonians, they had affected the believers in Achaia. And in fact, the offering in Achaia was already ready for Paul to come by with his group and take it up. Now it was time for the Corinthian church, for this wealthy church at Corinth, to follow through with what they said they were going to do. The last time we studied this in verses 1-5 we looked at how effective grace giving is.

Grace giving, remember now, is the result of Christ living His life in and through us and it has a powerful effect on the testimony of others. It's contagious. Paul said in verses 1-2 of chapter 9, "For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them." So after inspiring all of the churches to give because of their own personal willingness to give, for whatever reason, the Corinthians had become negligent. They had not done anything about what they said they were going to do and they haven't followed through with their pledge to give.

Now Paul knows something. He knows how this would confuse the other churches if they didn't follow through. It was because of them that the other churches gave. So he felt like the believers needed some prompting. He believed they were willing. He says, "I know the readiness in your mind." He believed they were willing. They just needed some prompting, like most of us do. And so in verses 3-4 he sends three men, one of them Titus, to go over and make sure that this offering is going to be ready when Paul and his entourage come to pick it up.

Now Paul had a suspicion and I think he's right that there would be those from Macedonia that would be with him when they came to pick up that offering and he didn't want the Corinthian believers to be ashamed. Can you imagine? Here are the Macedonians and they gave beyond their ability. And they said, "Wow, when we get over to Corinth it's going to be incredible what they've given." And Paul didn't want the Corinthians to be ashamed when they came to take that offering.

I think there's a principle here that emerges that we must all remember. And that is that it mars and confuses the testimony of any believer when he refuses to give, no matter what his excuse is. It's a cloudy, fuzzy testimony that appears from that. Do you mean you don't trust God? I thought you said you trusted God. I thought you said that's how you became a believer.

Well, finally Paul showed us that the real heart of grace giving is clear. It cannot be faked. If a person truly is participating in that which God is doing in his life, it can't be faked. The true heart, verse 5 tells us, cannot have any covetousness in it at all. There can be no greed in the giving of one who loves Jesus and is giving in obedience to Him. It says in verse 5, "So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift, and not affected by covetousness."

And so today we're going to just push on a little further and we're going to talk about the attributes of grace giving. Now an attribute is an inherent characteristic of something. You don't add it to it to make it happen. It's just part of it; it's inherent within grace giving. What are the inherent characteristics of grace giving? How do you know that you're participating in that which God has orchestrated in your life? And as we look at these inherent characteristics of grace giving, these attributes, we will discover, and if you've never begun the journey, the adventure of grace giving, it will show you where to start in your life. Paul will tell you exactly where to start in your life. It will sort of emerge right as we're talking about these attributes. So let's look at them.

The attribute of unhindered trust in God

First of all, the first attribute that I want to show you here is the attribute of unhindered trust in God. Now grace giving, as you'll see, is not something man does; it's something that God originates in man. But there has to be that unhindered trust in God. Look at verse 6, "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully."

Now the apostle Paul is referring to a proverb but we don't know what verse he's pulling it from in the Old Testament, he doesn't tell us. It's a proverb though. Proverbs 11:24 could be one of them when it says, "There is one who scatters," and it means abundantly and freely and generously, "yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, but it results only in want." Whatever Scripture Paul had in mind, notice the first three words, "he who sows." The verb "sowing" there is in the present tense. He who keeps on sowing. So he's talking about a lifestyle. He's talking about a predictable characteristic of somebody; not a one time thing but what is his lifestyle like.

Sowing, in our context, you have to remember, is the act of giving money. In another one of the gospels, sowing is taking the Word of God and planting it in people's hearts. In Galatians it's making choices whether to choose the flesh or to choose the spirit. "Be

not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." But in this sowing it's the giving of one's money, that's the context. The seed that is sown is the money that is given. And Paul compares a believer giving his money to a farmer sowing seed.

You have to look carefully at this. An implicit principle begins to service in this verse. You know the difference between implicit and explicit. If something is clear as a bell, that is explicit. But if something is there but is a little hidden and you have to look at it for awhile, that is implicit. And there is an implicit principle if you meditate on this that begins to surface. The principle is that sowing seed involves unhindered trust in God. Now let me explain.

When a farmer goes out to sow seed he has to totally release the seed to the soil; let go of it. It's interesting to me; I've got my keys here in my pocket. We give this way. Do you know why we give this way? Because we can take it back when we choose not to do it. "I'm going to give." But I can take it back. But when you sow seed, it's not this way, it's this way. It's gone. It's got to be released, totally released. And that's got to be the first thought in your mind: when you give it, you release it. You don't follow its trail to make sure it does it. You release it. Once the seed has fallen to the ground it's out of the farmer's hands. The farmer has nothing he can do with it from that point on. It will now be hidden beneath the soil where it will decay in order to germinate to bring forth life. So what happens next involves many risks that the farmer cannot control once he's released the seed.

If he's a worrier he has a lot to be worried about. There's the weather factor, there's the disease factor, there's the insect factor, all of which can destroy that seed. But a farmer knows that once the seed is released it's in God's hands regardless of the risk. He now trusts God. He can do nothing else but trust God to bring the rain and all the other things necessary to bring it up to do with the seed what the farmer could not do in a million years if he even tried. He has sown abundantly. Why? Because he trusts the fact that once that seed is sown, that the Maker will take care of it and do with it only what only he can do. In spite of all the risks, all of the doubts, all of the dangers, he releases the seed.

If you think about it just for a second, that is the basic truth in every aspect of the Christian life. It all begins when we come to salvation. We don't just receive Him, we give ourselves to Him. We release ourselves to Him. We cannot save ourselves and so we completely embrace that which only He can do and we release our life to Him and daily we live that way. In every situation, "Oh, Lord, I can't, You never said I could, You can, You always said You would." And just doing what only He tells us. Totally trusting Him. We release ourselves into His hands to do with only what He can do.

Remember the Macedonians in chapter 8; this is a principle you've got to understand. In chapter 8 it says "they first gave themselves to the Lord." We preached on it and talked about it and hopefully it hasn't left your mind. That's the first step. Once we have released ourselves fully to Christ, if you're living that way every day, whether you're sick or whatever is going on in your life, you're just trusting Him. If you have released yourself to Him and you have a total trust in Him, you will never have any trouble releasing your money because you know in Whose hands it has been placed.

As Paul said, it's just like a farmer who totally trusts God and who goes out freely releasing the seed to the soil and despite all the dangers, trusting that God now will take it and do with it what only He can do. Giving is never a money matter. Never. Giving is a heart matter. It's a trust matter. If you're ever going to begin the adventure of grace giving, you've got to learn first of all to trust God with your life, with everything. With your family, with everything, lock, stock, and barrel; nothing left out.

The great missionary James Elliot, many of you know his story, put it very succinctly, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Of course you know the story of James Elliot. He was the one who gave his life in an effort to evangelist the Auca Indians of Ecuador. It was in the releasing of his life. He knew the dangers when he went down there. He knew what could happen. But he said, "Lord, I only want what you want and if it's going to cost me my life, I'm going to release my life to You. It's freely given, it's freely released. It's a seed that I'm willing to sow and if it falls in the ground and dies, then thank You. You will bring forth life from this." He was willing to release it all and trust God to do what only God could do and bring about the eternal results.

The attitude of trusting God with our whole heart must be first understood. You've got to see this. It was because of his willingness to give his life that the Auca Indians came to know Christ. It's the same way with us. And if we're not living that way, forget about giving your money. It doesn't start with giving your money. It doesn't involve giving your money. It involves giving of yourself, totally trusting God. Giving is sowing; it's sowing. And the seed is that which God said to give. It's the beginning of what this is all about. Whatever God says to give, we give it. That's the beginning; that's where we start. For the seed to be sown it must be freely released in the midst of all the questions and all the doubts and all the dangers that are involved; right in the midst of it. It's got to be totally released. And the powerful motive behind it is totally trusting that God will do with it what only God can do.

So by saying "he who sows," Paul points to a real implicit principle that sowing involves trusting. Sowing is giving; sowing is surrendering, yielding, releasing, and it involves trusting. Unhindered trust in God is an attribute of grace giving. It's reflected in it.

It will be seen in unparalleled generosity

But then secondly, that's going to be seen in unparalleled generosity. Incredible. Once a person has given his life he has no trouble being generous in giving his money. The action of grace giving which trusts God is always seen in the generosity of one's gift. Verse 6, "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully."

Now those first words there, when he says, "Now this I say," basically what Paul is saying is, "Time out, remember this, you don't want to forget this, here's the principle that governs the whole thing." It's the heart behind the giving. It's so critical to show that the gift is given out of faith. You see, if you really are trusting God it's going to reflect in that giving. Not just in the act of giving but in how you give. A believer can easily tell whether or not he's trusting God by how, first of all, and then secondly by how much he gives when God tells him to give.

Paul is showing a contrast in the way believers give. He begins by saying, "he who sows sparingly." Now remember the word "sow" is present tense: he who continues to sow sparingly. The word sparingly is the word *phaidomenos*. It's the word that means "to give or to sow with doubtful restraint." Now this continuous action of sowing sparingly reflects a fleshly, selfish attitude in an individual's life. The one who continues to sow sparingly gives only a token. He gives with regret; he gives with distrust. He gives with a fleshly attitude of selfishness that he wants to hold on to something. The one who continues to sow sparingly he says.

Now, no faith is involved in this at all. Paul wants them to know if his lifestyle is continually sowing sparingly then in the future, future tense, at some time in the future he will reap sparingly. We will see in the next message that it is referring to the judgment seat of Christ. The way we give right now is a reflection of the way we live, and one day we're going to stand before God and those true works of righteousness are going to be judged. And in the meantime, spiritually, his life is going to be devoid of all the joy and fullness that he could have had in Christ. Why? Because he's stingy, greedy, he's only thinking about himself. A stingy, selfish believer is a critical, miserable, judgmental person who is not willing to trust God. He just doesn't trust God.

He's unwilling to release what God has entrusted to him. Well, that statement is pretty clear. I don't think we need to go any further with that. I believe we understand that. But the opposite is also true. Paul goes on to say in verse 6, "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully." Now that word, yes, it has the idea of generosity, but it's much more than that. It's in the present tense again: "He who sows and continues to sow bountifully," he who keeps on sowing bountifully.

That word "bountifully," if you'll look at it in the Greek, is an exceptional word in that language. It's the plural word for blessings, *eulogia*. It's the plural word for blessings. It can be translated "praise." In fact, the literal Greek reads it this way: "He who sows upon blessings will also reap upon blessings." The word "bountifully" implies the blessed heart of the benevolent giver. The fact that it's in the plural implies the abundance of blessings, which also implies the abundance of giving. The generosity of giving. Because of the abundance of God's blessings in this believer's life he gives generously. He is so overwhelmed every day by what God is doing in his life, when it comes to giving he gives just as if it was God giving because it's God in him doing that through him.

This blessed believer whose lifestyle is one of generous giving will reap a harvest of blessing that is proportionate with number 1, the spirit of how he gave, and number 2, the generosity of the gifts that he's given. He's going to reap that back. Not necessarily in the material wealth of this world. That's not what he's trying to say. He is trying to say that he's going to be so overwhelmingly, spiritually blessed because of his willingness to give in a generous way. One who walks with God, trusting Him with his life, releasing himself to whatever it is the will of God is in his life, will never be stingy in his giving. That's an impossibility; that's an oxymoron if you ever see that happen.

Instead, he will give out of the overflow of thanksgiving and blessing in his heart and he will be eternally, not just here, but eternally rewarded for it. So before giving is ever to begin we've got to understand what the inherent characteristics of this are. We must be made sure first of all that we totally trust God with our lives. When we trust Him with our lives, this will be reflected not only in the spirit of how we give, but in the generosity of our gifts.

So unhindered trust is involved. When you release it, you release it. And you say, "God, You told me to do it and I'm going to trust You. I'm not going to worry about it. I know the dangers. I know the doubts. I know the risk, but God, I'm just going to do what You tell me to do." Unhindered trust which will be seen in unparalleled generosity. And the context that is narrow here is in the giving of our money, but it will be seen in other ways, too. It'll be seen in giving of your love or your time, or yourself; unparalleled generosity.

You will see unyielding resolve

Thirdly, you'll see unyielding resolve. It's a part, it's an inherent characteristic, of what we're talking about. God is a God of purpose. When He works in our lives He has a plan to accomplish His work. In verse 7 he says, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart." Now, Paul refers to each one which makes this intensely personal and I love this. "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart." That implies that God has led him since he has surrendered to Him. So God is leading him in this but it's a

decision he has to come to.

Now back in 1 Corinthians Paul had given these believers a starting plan, where to start. As I told you, it starts emerging here. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, "On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." On that first day, he said giving was to be weekly. The first day of the week would be Sunday which would have been the day of resurrection. They were to put aside and to save in order to have an offering that would be ready to give.

Now each believer had to come up with his own plan depending on what he had. Paul had made that very clear earlier. Now Paul seems to refer back to that and he says in 9:7, "each one do just as he has purposed in his heart," thinking that they had heard what he said and that they were going to do what they said they would do. The word "purpose" there is the word *proaireomai*, which means to have resolved to do something."

Now this is where giving starts; it starts with making up our minds that it is important that we sit down and decide how we're going to go about giving. This will involve certainly what we make and what we have; that's part of the process, and making the choice to set aside to give. It's so basic it's funny. The church does not set this amount. And it's left up to the individual believer: between him and his God.

Now my personal opinion is this. Now understand when I say my personal opinion, that's my personal opinion. It's my two cents worth and you just take it or leave it. If you don't agree, that's fine. I'm just going to tell you. My personal opinion is that the best starting place for any person who is not participating in ongoing, continuous sowing and grace giving is to start with the adventure of giving the tithe. I really believe that. There are so many people who say no, that's legalistic. Now, excuse me. Hebrews tells us that Abraham had been out in battle and was bringing the spoils back when he met Melchizedek and paid a tenth to him. Now who is Melchizedek and what are you talking about? Let me read it to you.

Hebrews 7:1-3, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually." Now, who do you think that was? That's the Lord Jesus. Earlier on, a pre-incarnate revelation of Him in the Old Testament.

You say that's still Old Testament. Wait a minute; you're thinking of the law. The Law did not come about for 430 years from that time. You see, the reflex of Abraham meeting the Lord Jesus way back, he immediately gave Him a tenth of everything that he had. A good way then is to set aside a tenth and give that to the church for the maintenance and the ministry that takes place there. To me this makes so much sense.

Do you realize that if you wanted to go back and really study what is legalistic, look at the first six tithes that God put upon Israel. They were not tithes, they were taxes. And if you want to get down to the percentages, it's not 10%. That's what Abraham gave to Melchizedek. But if you get up under the law it was like way in the high twenties or 30%. And you know why God told them to do this? He said, "I want you to take care of the priest and take care of the temple." This is God's plan to put upon them. If you're going to enjoy the privileges of this then you're going to have to help pay for it. You're going to bear a responsibility in this.

You know, in my understanding, true giving is over and above all of that. That's my understanding. That's why my wife and I take our tithe out, we don't even see it. It comes right out before I ever get anything from the church. And then our giving is way over and above that. And so a good place to start however is by giving the tithe. But give it to the church. I have so many people tell me, "But I'm going to give it to this mission group over here." If it's a mission group with integrity, they'll send it back and they say, "Take care of your church first before you do this."

Do we understand today of what it takes to run a church? We have so many quality people and God's trying to raise up so many things with missions and all the different ministries. But if we don't take care of the church budget, folks, we have missed the whole point of what we're doing. And so when we set aside every week, I want to encourage you: think about the church. It's the budget that takes care of running and maintaining the church. Just like those tithes took care of the priest in the temple back in the days of the Old Testament.

Do we understand today that if we would just get involved with what God is doing and trust Him, and if every one of us would set aside even a tenth of what we have to take care of the ministry and the missions of this church, that we would never be asking for money, there would never be a time that we could wrap our arms around this world, if people could understand this. If we just all tithed we'd never suffer a lack.

Well, that's my two cents worth. Are you okay? Whatever you do; whatever you do, start with a resolve which Paul says should include a plan to set aside every week to give because it's important, not to the church, it's important to you. God doesn't need our money. Oh, do we need to learn to give; it's part of the Christian walk. It's not a program, it's life.

Well, unhindered trust in God starts it all. That's when you give your life. Unparalleled generosity will be its reflection, and an unyielding resolve to do it. I love that Nike commercial, just do it. I like that. So many of us talk about it but we never follow through.

You will see unmistakable cheerfulness

Well, fourthly, unmistakable cheerfulness. And I love this. Verse 7 again, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver." Now our giving is strictly individual and it's planned, not by the church but by the individual, but it is never to be done under any external pressure. If I ever get up here and start beating you over the head to give, you walk up here and take me by the arm and have me committed because I've completely lost my mind.

I'm not here to do that, and won't do that until the day I die, as long as I'm your pastor. I'm not going to beat up anybody. I'm going to tell you what the Word of God says, I'm going to put you back into His hand and it's between you and Him because I'm not going to stand before Him one day for you. I'm going to stand before Him for me. So that's all I can do.

The word "grudgingly" is the word *lupes*, which means "sorrow." Don't ever, ever give and be sorry you gave. Don't you do it. God evidently didn't tell you to do it. You did it out of emotion or something else. Paul adds, "or under compulsion." The word "compulsion" is the word *anagke*, which refers to one who gives because he feels guilty or because he feels forced to. Don't do it. Don't do it. If that's where you are right now, don't do it. You get in front of God and give yourself to Him first and then let Him direct you at that point.

Well, he shows the contrast of those who give with a cheerful heart and those who give with sorrow and grudgingly. He says in verse 7, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver." Now the first thing we do is put the emphasis on cheerful. The word "cheerful" is the word *hilaros*, which is not a frivolous word. I know we get the word "hilarity" from it, but the word doesn't denote that. It denotes somebody that has a cheerful mind. And because of his cheerful mind and his cheerful heart, that's the way he goes about everything he does. So when he gives, that's the way he goes about giving.

I've met some stoic people in my life. You ought to see what I see when I'm standing up here. I know, you've got to look at me, but I've got to look at you. And I'm telling you, some of you look like you'd be the best poker players that ever lived. It's like "is he happy, is he sad? Is he mad, is he glad?" I don't know. One man told me one day, "My wife told me to smile. I thought I was." That's bad.

Well, I want to tell you, the person that walks with God has a cheerful mind and a cheerful heart. I don't care what personality he has. And he gives just like he lives. A cheerful giver. He'll give generously no matter the situation, trusting that God will use his gift for the money. But that's not the emphasis of the verse. The emphasis of the verse is not the cheerful giver; you missed it. God loves a cheerful giver. Did you see it? It's in the present tense. God is loving; He's loving. It's active and it's *agapao*, and *agapao* means He is so committed to that cheerful believer that He's doing everything necessary for the spiritual benefit of his life.

Now, how do you want to live? I tell you what, folks, that blesses my socks off. You know, whether I give or whether I don't give is a matter of my heart. But, buddy, when I get in touch with giving myself to God and doing what He tells me to do, trusting Him totally, then when I give my money I give it the same way: a cheerful heart. But I know something, I know something. That God is loving me in the process and He's doing everything necessary to keep this process going. Everything that is needed in my life He provides; we saw that in chapter 8. Everything that I need to give to somebody else, I already have and God just continues. I shoveled into His bin but He's got a bigger shovel and He just keeps shoveling back into mine and it's a beautiful divine cycle that you get into. And one day when we stand before God, do we understand that giving will be some of those righteous works that Christ has done through us that we will be rewarded for in that day. That comes up in our next passage.

It's incredible folks. Giving is not a need that a church has to pay its budget. Giving is a matter of a person's heart towards God. And if we're living then we're going to be giving, because He is the greatest giver of all. I've tried my best to think of an illustration to end this. Unhindered trust in God, unparalleled generosity, unyielding resolve, unmistakable cheerfulness. How could I end that with an illustration? But nothing would come to my mind except a passage of Scripture. I love what Jesus said. Don't you love to hear Him talk in the Gospels? Don't you love it?

Well, did He ever say anything about money? Huh? He said more about money and treasure than He did hell. Now that ought to get our attention real quick. And He says in Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal." You know what? I have never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul. Verse 20, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal." That's that eternal quality of what we do: it's going to last forever. Verse 21, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Do you know there's a nerve that runs from right here to right here? Now on you it may be over here; I don't know on which side you carry your billfold. But that's the way it works and if that nerve hasn't been severed by the love of Christ to where you understand

that I don't own anything, never have owned anything. He's loaned me a lot to take care of and when He tells me He wants some of His money over here, I do exactly what He says. That's the whole point. It's not my money. And when we come to that understanding, the adventure begins. And, folks, I want to tell you, I want to see you in the cycle of God's giving plan because it's incredible. You've got to see the whole picture of what this is all about.

And remember, when you do it God's way it lasts eternally. You'll see that in our next passage as we study together.

2 Corinthians 9:8-15

The Gift of Giving

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 9, and today we're going to finish the chapter, verses 8-15. We've been in chapter 8 and chapter 9 talking about the grace of giving. And today our title is going to be "God is Able." You know we've saying God is good, all the time, all the time God is good. Let's change it: God is able all the time, all the time God is able. Don't ever forget that: God is able. Now, man's inability has always showcased God's ability. It's like a pitch black backdrop that you take a beautiful diamond and put it up against that black backdrop and you put a light on it to enhance the beauty of that diamond.

It was David's inability when he went up against the giant Goliath in 1 Samuel that highlighted that it enhanced God's ability. It was the inability of Gideon in the book of Judges when he was outnumbered by the Midianites that highlighted God's ability. It was the inability of the disciples in the Gospels to feed the 5,000 that highlighted God's ability. It was the inability of the believers' minds on the road to Emmaus first of all to understand the resurrection and secondly to even accept it that highlighted God's ability. And on and on and on.

And in our text, 2 Corinthians 9, it is the inability of man, first of all to even want to give, and then secondly to give generously that simply highlights the ability of God in every believer. The most common excuse that you hear when it comes to giving is this: "I just can't do it. I'm not able to give." But as you'll see in our text today, God is able and that excuse really won't hold up.

Paul has instructed the Corinthian church first of all in how to start giving, but also the heart that has to be behind the giving. In doing so he gives us all a way to start. He starts talking about the attributes of grace giving and we saw that in 9:6. He says, "Now this I say, he who sows." Now there's an implicit picture that begins to emerge here. Paul draws the picture of a farmer who is going out to sow seed. In our context the sowing of the seed is the money that we give and when it's given it must be like the seed, totally released; totally released. It is out of our hands the moment that money is sown, the moment that seed is sown.

The farmer who sows generously is the farmer who trusts God. He trusts God to do only what God can do. He knows what he can't do himself. Even in the midst of the dangers of disease and weather and insects, he knows what can happen to that seed, but he sows it generously and abundantly knowing that God can do something here that nobody else can do. To a farmer, trusting God is always the key to releasing the seed and in expecting a harvest. So unhindered trust in God is an attribute, an inherent characteristic of grace giving.

Now this is going to be reflected. When a person is unhindered in his trust for God, this is going to be reflected in unparalleled generosity when he gives. He's going to give abundantly just like the farmer sows abundantly. It says in verse 6, "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully." Now Paul contrasts two kinds of giving. One sows sparingly which means, we'll just simplify it, we're not going to go back and rephrase it, but to simplify it, it means he sows with doubt. He sows with hesitation, with restraint. He's unwilling to trust God with the seed; he's unwilling to release it and let God do with it what only God can do. And the downside is he's going to reap sparingly. Not only in this life here but one day when he stands before God as you'll see later in the message.

Well, the opposite is also true. It says "he who sows bountifully," and all of this sowing is in the present tense which means a lifestyle, "will also reap bountifully." We saw how the word "bountifully" is the word eulogia. It's interesting how it is translated. It does mean generously, but it's much more than that. It's the word which means blessing or praise. It's in the plural which refers to the overflowing blessing one has when he's walking with God. He's just overwhelmed with who God is.

The one who sows on the basis of abundant blessings in his life will reap abundant blessings in his life. And that doesn't necessarily mean material things. That's not even on Paul's mind. It's the spiritual enrichment that comes when a person is being about the things of God.

The third attitude of grace giving that we looked at last time is unyielding resolve. In verse 7, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart." Now Paul shows that grace giving involves planning, like he said in 1 Corinthians 16; weekly, setting aside that which you're going to give. And as I threw in my two cents worth, I think the best place to start is the tithe, weekly given to the

church. You see, the giving gets far beyond that. It's over and above that. Like in Malachi, he says, "Bring your tithes and your offerings." That's over and above that.

I want to urge you never to forget the church. Any missionary organization that would take any kind of money with integrity as we said last time would always encourage you first of all to take care of your church. Why? Because they know something. They know if the church in any way fails to continue on, then they're not going to continue on. That's what sustains missions. That's what sustains ministry; that's where it's birthed and that's where it's sustained. The word "purpose" there means to resolve to do something: make it a priority. Determine to do it. That's what Paul told the Corinthians. That's a great place to start.

The fourth attribute that we saw of grace giving is unmistakable cheerfulness. I love that. Cheerfulness is simply the reflection of how one lives. Listen; and I'm telling you I don't ever say much that's profound, but I believe this is profound so you might want to write this day down. We will give, and I promise you this, the way we live. The way a person lives is the way a person gives. Paul says God loves the cheerful giver. And we put the emphasis on cheerful. No, the emphasis is on the verb: He loves. Present tense, He is loving, *agapao*, which means He's committed. He is working in his behalf. He's working in the believer's behalf to make sure his life is overflowing with spiritual blessings out of which he will give. If we live in the fullness of what is offered to us in Christ, if we live dead to self and alive to Him, yielded to Him, we will be so overwhelmed with spiritual blessings that we will simply give out of the overflow and that's what he's talking about. God loves; He is loving the cheerful giver.

Well, today we come to the last message about this topic. See, I'm not preaching on the topic of giving, I'm just preaching 2 Corinthians, and we've been in chapter 8 and 9 and that's been Paul's topic. Next time we come together and I'm with you we'll be in chapter 10 and it'll change gears altogether. But today we're going to talk about God's ability. God is able all the time, all the time God is able. And we need to see this today in Scripture in verses 8-15.

So let's start off with the principle: God is able, verses 8-9. He says in verse 8, "And God is able," always able, continuously able. The phrase or similar phrases is used all through Scripture to point to the ability of God to do what a man could never in a million years do. For instance, He's able to save and He's able to destroy. James 4:12, "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?" And then in Romans 16:25, "Now to Him who is able to establish," that word means to strengthen us as believers, "you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past."

He is able to keep us from stumbling. Jude 24 says, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy." Wow, and if you wanted to just sum them all up because there are so many, I didn't put them all down, but to sum them all up, Ephesians 3:20 I think sums them all up. It covers every base. It says, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." So God is able. Paul is recalling their attention to this. In our context He is able in the matter of our giving. He is able; we're not. He is.

Paul answers the question that most believers struggle with from time to time. All of us have said, I've said it, you've said it, at some time in our life when it comes to giving, "I want to give and I see the need to give, but I just can't afford to give. I just can't do it." And Paul seems to be anticipating that type of statement when he said "God is able." You're not able, but God is. How many times have I said "I can't, but God never said I could; He can and He always said He would." And that's exactly what's being worked out right here in our text.

Grace is God's enabling us to do what He demands of us. Paul says in Galatians 2:20-21, "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith," which means trusting God. And then he says this kind of lifestyle doesn't frustrate the grace of God, which is His enabling power. The word "frustrate" means to set aside. He says, "I don't set aside the grace of God. I don't for one second think I can do it in my own power. I walk by faith. I trust God to do what I know I cannot do."

Verse 8 says "And God is able." But what does he says He's able to do? Well, let's keep reading: "And God is able to make all grace abound to you." Now the grace he speaks of covers every aspect of giving. He's speaking of grace giving here. And God is able to cause us to want to give. God is able to meet our needs in the midst of our giving and God is able to so supply us abundantly that we have left over to give to others. We give to get to give to get, it's continuous. The moment a person starts giving to get, at that very moment the process shuts down.

"I'm not so sure that's what the Bible says." Well, let's just see what it says. Let's just let it explain itself. He says, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything." You're never going to lack in your needs in life if you're giving. The word "sufficiency" is the word *autarkeia*, which means self-sufficiency but in a good way. What it means is I don't have to go outside of the One who lives within me to take care of myself. I don't have to be sufficient the world's way. I'm sufficient in Him. He is able to take care of that.

God's grace enables the necessities of life to be met in our personal lives. We've already seen that in chapter 8. He just rehearses it again for us. But God's grace goes even further than that he says in verse 8. "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that

always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." God gives us an abundance, over and above what we need. He gives us more than we need so that we can meet the needs of others; "an abundance for every good deed."

Now understand good deeds, because a lot of people think that the flesh can manufacture good deeds. No. The word "good" is the word *agathos*, and it means benevolent good, that which comes out of a heart that loves and wants to give and help somebody in their need. It's the character of God in us to be benevolent to want to meet the needs of others. How do you know that? Galatians 5:22 starts talking about the fruit of God's Spirit working in a believer's life. It takes the root word "good" and makes the word "goodness" out of it. It says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love," now how do you qualify God's love? "joy, peace, patience," you know God's loving through you when these things are present, "kindness," and then he mentions "goodness." You see, that's the well that all good deeds come out of. The fruit of the Spirit has to initiate it. So when a good deed in biblical terms is not something a man can come up with and ask God to bless. It has to be first of all originated in the heart of God that works within him. And not only inspired and initiated but also enabled by the Holy Spirit and qualifies by the way when it happens, it qualifies as a true work of righteousness. When God speaks and we obey with a yielded heart then good deeds and the synonym is righteousness, righteousness takes place. That's the result.

In this case the act of righteousness is grace giving which begins and ends with God. He starts it, we don't start it. Now Paul calls on the Old Testament, a passage in the Psalms to show that this is what he's talking about: that giving is an act of righteousness and it will endure forever. It says in verse 9, "as it is written, 'He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness abides forever.'" Now some people believe that's a picture of the Lord Jesus. Whether it is or not, it's a good man. This is a quote from Psalm 112:9 and speaks of the character of a good man in the text who fears the Lord.

Let me read from Psalm 112:9 what he's quoting from. It says, "He has given freely to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted in honor." The word "poor" in the Greek, which is in our text in 2 Corinthians 9:8, is the word *penes*, which is the word that means somebody is so poor they have to ask for help. They have to actually beg for money. It was used that way. The man who fears the Lord, who walks with God, is the one who has a heart for somebody in need and who freely gives to those people. That's God working in his heart. This act of giving is an act of righteousness and the psalmist says that the righteousness will last and endure forever.

Do you see what he's saying? One day when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, what a great day. We're not going to be judged. We were judged at the cross. This is a day for rewards. This is the day the works will be tested by fire. That which was of the flesh that we call good and that which is of the Spirit that only God can call good, and he said that these acts of giving as we walk with God, as we give out of the overflow, are going to end up being acts of righteousness that will remain, they will be the precious stone, they will endure forever, they will have everything to do with our eternal reward when we stand before the Lord Jesus Christ. Wow.

That ought to excite everybody in here. You mean to tell me God gives me the money to start with and He just tells me to do with His money what He wants done with it and after I have done it that qualifies as an act of righteousness and then I'm going to be rewarded for it someday? Absolutely. How great a salvation. Now, if that doesn't light your fire your wood is wet. This is what he's trying to get across. You see, I've been saying it since chapter 8: giving is never a money problem; ask the widow who gave her mite. That's not a problem. Giving is a heart problem; it's a problem of whether or not we believe that God is able. Whether or not we trust Him when He tells us to do what He tells us to do.

A believer that fears God, that lives in awe of Him, will want to give and he's going to experience God's grace in having what is needed to even give more. He's going to discover for himself God is able. It's not about finances. It's about the stewardship of one's life. Money just fits way down here somewhere.

Last week one of the teachers of a class on finances came to me, tears flowing down his cheeks, and he said, "You won't believe it." He was really coming out of the message and he was trying to say "I've got an illustration for you." I said, "What is it?" He said a lady in his class, they'd been giving but they upped their giving. They just believed they weren't giving what God was telling them to give. They were giving with restraint. And so they gave their gift, their tithe or whatever it was. And he told me on the middle of the week her boss came to her and said, "Have you looked at your check?" And she said, "No, why?" Kind of fearful. And he said their fiscal year is like ours as a church: July to July. And he said "We normally don't give raises in the middle of the year, but we've had such a good year, look at your check." And she looked at her check and it was more than what she normally got. But listen, this is the thing: in her check was the exact, to the penny, raise that she had just given three days before. Now you ask that little lady if God's able.

That's what Paul is saying. God is able. I had a youth pastor that worked with me; I was in youth work for 17 years so I understand youth workers. Sometimes they're a little slow and so he was talking to me one day and he was really griping because he didn't make what I made. And of course everybody wants it when they're young and it took me forever to get to the point that we make what we make today, and he said, "I can't give. You can give because you have this and you have that" and I said, "That's not right,

it's your heart. Do you believe God? Do you trust Him?" And we went back and forth and back and forth. We walked out in the parking lot and he had not yet come out of the building and I'm standing there pondering the answers I had given to him. Hopefully I had helped him. And about that time I saw something blowing across the parking lot. It was wadded up and I'm standing before God today so this is not something I'm making up. It blew up on my shoe. I reached down, picked it up off my shoe and it was a twenty dollar bill. Where did it come from? I don't know. I looked around and quickly put it in my pocket. I didn't know where it came from.

I stood there for a second and here comes another bill rolling across. Three times standing there in the parking lot a bill rolled up, the wind blew it, on my shoe. And about that time the youth pastor walked out of the door and I said, "Come here. Man, if you need it, if necessary, God will blow it up on your shoe in the middle of a parking lot." God is able. Man, we don't believe that, do we?

Well, He doesn't know my situation. Right; God is able: that's the principle. Now he's going to give an illustration here. He wants to make sure we get this down real good. Verse 10, "Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food." What an illustration Paul gives here about God's ability, what God can do. And it shows you that God is the ultimate provider and creator of all things. First of all He supplies seed to the sower. Now, some people, their education exceeds their intelligence. They think man can come up with a seed. This always baffles me. Have you ever made a seed? Said, "I'm going to make a seed." Reminds me of other people I know. You're going to make a seed.

What farmer is proficient enough and has the ability to come up with the seed itself? God came up with that. Now God makes the seed and what does the farmer do? Where is his importance in this? Well, all he does is take what God already came up with and just releases it. Well, that's real hard, isn't it? He just releases it and when he releases it then God steps in again. Farmer can't do a thing. And God is the One who causes the seed to die and to germinate and to bring forth life to come up with wheat or barley or whatever it is which provides bread for the farmer to eat.

"Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food." Now listen, not only will the sown seed that God provided provide bread for the farmer, but the farmer will have more than he needed so that he can give to others. There's your illustration right there. "Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food," watch carefully, "will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." God promises to do the same thing with our giving that He does with the seed that the farmer sows. And it all starts with God providing the money that we have. It's His money; it's not ours. He's the One who owns it.

Now make sure you understand this: God is the provider. It took me years to realize this. When I was in youth work we got paid less than the janitors and I can understand that. And I couldn't even take my kids to McDonalds. Didn't have enough to do anything. And I really struggled with this. How come the church pays this guy this much and pays this guy this much? Our pastor, they gave him a brand new car every year and paid his gasoline. And I couldn't even take my kids to McDonalds. He'd drive that brand new car, five years younger than I was and I played ball with him in college and he got all the technical fouls, and drive up in my drive-way and you know what I wanted to do? I was real spiritual. I wanted to spit all over his car. That's the way I felt about it. The church didn't provide that for me.

And God broke me of that one day. He said, "Son, what in the world are you doing? Your church is not your provider. I'm your Provider." Listen, your employer, whoever it is, I don't care who it is, they're just a vehicle God uses and it's not the only source. He'll provide for you in ways that you haven't even thought about before if you believe that he is able and if you're willing to trust Him in your giving. It is the money that God provides that allows us to buy food that takes care of our families.

I think I've told you this about the elderly lady that one day came into her apartment, she loved Jesus, she was praying out loud and she said, "Oh, Lord, I don't have any groceries, don't have any food, but You're my provider. If you want me to eat You'll provide it." Her landlord was evil. He overheard her prayer somehow and he said, "I'll show her who's her provider." He went to the grocery store, brought all kinds of groceries. Set them on the table while she was gone and then he hid in the closet. She came back and had a praise fit. She was just praising God, shouting, and he jumped out of the closet and said, "You Christians. You think God provided this. He didn't provide that. I did it." She said, "Now listen to me, you have to understand something. I bowed my head before the Lord and I prayed and I asked for Him to provide for me. Now, I had no idea He'd use the devil to bring it, but He provided those groceries for me."

When are we going to understand that God is our provider? Stop worrying about the government and Social Security. Start understanding God is your provider. God is your provider. When we trust God like the farmer we're going to have more than enough for our needs. So much more that we can give to others. "Now 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." That giving act which is a righteous act. He will multiply your seed.

And again, why will He multiply your seed? So that we can give to others. Well, you take a seed of corn and you drop it in the ground. And after a while it germinates and begins to come up and a stalk comes up. And here's the beautiful illustration: on that stalk are how many ears of corn? And on every ear of corn how many grains of corn are on that ear? That's the law of the harvest.

You get later than you've sown, you get exactly what you've sown, but you get a whole lot more than you ever sowed. And that's the law of the harvest. And that's the way God works on our giving. Do you see the illustration?

You know, we're preaching this and I'm enjoying this because I've understood it for awhile and I'm still understanding it, but I'm just praying that you're understanding it. Giving is not because the budget is low at the church. Giving is something far beyond that. Giving is God's way of reflecting His love out of and through your heart. It's an expression of that. When you sow God's seed God's way, hearing Him and trusting Him, willing to release that which He tells you for the needs of others, write it down. The adventure is about to begin.

I still like Stephen Curtis Chapman's song, "Saddle Up Your Horses." How many of you remember that song? You ought to listen to it sometime. I know the beat will challenge some of you. But it says, "Get up on your horse." It's like starting the day off and I just get that in my mind. Just get up in the morning, a man plans his way, God directs his steps. Oh God, what an adventure walking with You today. What are You up to today? That's the adventure and when you start understanding giving from God's perspective, look out and strap your seatbelt on.

He further explains in verse 11 in case you're doubting that this is what he's talking about. He says, "you will be enriched in everything," why, "for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God." The word "enriched" is the word *ploutizo*, which means to be supplied abundantly. The verb is present middle passive. Present tense means it'll be a continuous thing that is going on in your experience. The middle passive means that as we're giving actively, God is active in enriching us for the purpose of giving to others. He's busily working in our life. You will be enriched in everything, he says, for all liberality.

'Everything' is the word *pas*, which means "in each and every act" of giving, whether it's money, time, love, whatever. We will be supplied abundantly for every act of giving for all liberality. Now the word "liberality" can be translated generosity but that's really not the meaning of the word. The word is *haplotēs*, and it means "to give with a single minded focus, to give with no strings attached," no fleshly agenda. Oh, I know, I'll just withdraw my tithe and I'll show it is around here. I'll keep my money to myself. That's an oxymoron: your money. Isn't it interesting that when we choose to think it's ours and we choose to withhold it for whatever reason, God says, "I'll get it some other way." How many of you have discovered that in your life so far?

God knows how to do that. God knows exactly what to do with that. The bottom line is that when we give and our motive in giving is pure without any fleshly agenda, the provision will always be there to give more. I came across an illustration that might bless you this morning. Lyle Eggleston served as a missionary; he was from the States, for many years in a little town on the rocky coast of northern Chile. In time the congregation grew to be about 80 adults and Eggleston was concerned that the Christians in that area didn't seem to be able to support their own national pastor. Now he was there to assist that national pastor, to help that church get on its feet, then he moves on. He's taken care of by missions giving in the states.

The people were very poor; the church's offerings amounted to no more than \$6.00 a month in our currency. One day Eggleston brought the problem to the Lord during a definite time of prayer. "Lord, You just need to take care of this." A few weeks later he stopped to visit a middle-aged couple, new converts, and they had just begun the habit of getting into God's Word every day, reading through the Scriptures. They came to that little word "tithe" and so they asked him, "What does the word "tithing" mean?" It was a little fellow by the name of Manuel. "We ran into it in our reading and we don't really understand it." Eggleston didn't really want to answer the question, for he knew that Manuel and his wife were unemployed and on the verge of destitution. They were somehow managing to feed themselves and their 25 Rhode Island hens on the income from the eggs laid each day. Nevertheless, they insisted he explain and so instead of going to Malachi and the Old Testament, he just took them to 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8-9 where Paul urged believers to lay aside each week a portion of their income and give it to the Lord.

The following Sunday Manuel handed Lyle an envelope and smiling said, "That's our tithe." Inside were a few bills amounting in their currency to our currency about 19 cents. Next Sunday afternoon the couple flagged down Lyle as he rode his bicycle past their house. They had some exciting news. The Tuesday morning after they had given their tithe there wasn't a bite for breakfast nor any money. Their first impulse was to take a few of the pesos they had accumulated, a little box they called their tithe box, but on second thought they said "No, that's God's money. We will go without breakfast this morning." There was nothing to do but to tend to the hens.

Much to their surprise there were eggs in the nest at that time of the morning that at that hour was usually empty. Later in the day a little man came along with a pushcart wanting fertilizer. They cleaned out their henhouse and the manure from those hens brought a good price. After buying groceries there was enough left over for the wife to purchase a pair of shoes, so she rode the bus 12 kilometers around the bay into a larger town. Then she bumped into a nephew in town she had not seen in five years and who, to her utter surprise, owned a shoe store. She went in, found the pair of shoes she wanted, he wrapped them up for her, she tried to pay him and he said, "Absolutely not. We're kin, this is a present. I can't take your money. This is a gift from me."

The following week Manuel got a job on a project that would last for two years and soon the little couple was tithing on a much larger

salary. Word got around the church and others began experimenting with giving. Soon the church's income began to rise dramatically and they were able to pay their own rent and utility bills, support a national pastor who was working with Indians and in short time they were able to call and finance a pastor of their own. And Lyle Eggleston and his wife were able to move on to a new location and start a new work as the little church grew in numbers, size, property, and faith.

And here was his testimony. He said, "You know, we offered up a little bit of prayer and 19 cents and God took care of the rest." Isn't it incredible? That's what happens. I love it in Malachi when he says, "You want to test Me, come on. Open the windows, give your offerings, give your tithes and you just see what I will do. I'll pour out a blessing you haven't even thought about yet." Isn't it incredible that God says, "I'm waiting on you." But so many people say no, Social Security isn't good, we're all going to go bankrupt, I've got a store. Remember back at Y2K? I had a good friend who said he went out and bought gold and did all this other stuff because it was going to get bad. He had generators and everything else because Y2K was going to be a disaster.

Where's the trust in God? And he came to me and said, "Why aren't you doing that?" I said, "Well, you've got a big house. If it happens, I'm coming over to your house. You've got all the stuff." There were some people on the day after Y2K that went, "oops." Where's trusting God anymore? "We've got to help Him out. He's old; He's been busy." Oh, wow.

The result is thanksgiving unto God

Well, the result. The principle, the illustration, the illustration is the farmer sowing the seed. God provided the seed, the whole thing. But now the result. What's the result of all of it? It's thanksgiving unto God. Verse 11, "you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God." As Paul witnessed God enriching the Corinthians so that they could give generously as they had determined to do to the needs of the poor in Judea, this produced a thanksgiving unto God.

The word "thanksgiving" is the word eucharisteo, which is the expression of one's gratitude to God for what only He is able to do. This word "thanksgiving" is a grateful response to God for His grace and for His mercy that a person has just experienced for himself. It's hard to give thanksgiving for what you're not experiencing. Verse 12, "For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God." The offering that was being taken for the poor in Jerusalem wasn't just so that their needs could be met but so that God would be praised. All people giving thanksgiving to God. That's what thanksgiving is all about; overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. The people of Achaia, the people of Macedonia, the people of Corinth rejoicing to see what God did because they were obedient to what God had told them to do.

Not only would the Christians in Jerusalem rejoice, but the believers who gave would rejoice. The whole thing, overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. The One who provides the seed to the sower and the One who provides the bread for the farmer, and the One who gives so abundantly that the sower will have plenty to give to others to continue to sow is always to be praised: that's what giving is all about. It comes back to Him, not to us. But also he says one other thing will happen. Not only will He be praised, but your testimony as to being a believer will be confirmed in the hearts of others.

Verse 13, "Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all." You see, giving confirms our testimony. We've seen that over and over in chapters 8-9. You find a Christian that will not give and you've got an oxymoron. You've got one confusing message. Nothing confirms the fact that he has trusted God for his salvation but he's not willing to trust God with his money. You see, something is messed up there. It frustrates the testimony.

And verse 14 says, "while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you." They wanted to be with them, just wanted to be around them because of their willingness to do what God said. The principle, God is able all the time; all the time God is able. If you want to give, God will see to it not only that your needs will be met, but you'll have to give more. The illustration: God provides the seed for the sower, the bread for the farmer to put on the table. But not only that, He gives in such abundance, just look at an ear of corn, He gives in such abundance that you have more to sow. And the result is that all thanksgiving and praise go back to Him and that our testimony that we really are what we say we are will be confirmed.

Grace giving always has to point back to God or it's not grace giving. If there's somebody who gives a token because he's wealthy and thinks he gets the credit for it, he's missed the whole point. It's to go back to God. God gets the glory, whether it's the rich man's gift or the widow's mite. He's the One who is to be praised.

Verse 15 tells us that; "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" "God so loved the world that He gave"—what did He give? Did He give a token? —"His only begotten Son" —Why? —"so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And that same heart is in us, resident in the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ Jesus and when we say yes to Him, that's where the giving begins right there. It's Him initiating, sustaining and being glorified for what takes place. God is able.

Well, you want to start giving, I think we've learned, start tithing. I think that's the greatest place to start. To the church first. We have all of our missionary salaries are in our budget, so whenever the budget is low, the salaries are suffering in that area; so give there

first. You'll find that giving is far and above that. Give to it, start there, and your journey is just going to begin.

I love W.A. Criswell; he's in heaven now, but don't you love W.A. Criswell. They said when he finished his sermon, for years he would quote this at the end of his sermon:

John Rascus put \$300 in the collection plate when it passed and he said softly, "I'll see you in heaven." Those around him said, "Oh, John is getting senile. He says he's going to see the \$300 in heaven. He may meet his Maker over there, but he'll never meet his money." Now the church treasurer used some of that \$300 to pay the electric bill so the lights could be on. He gave some of it to the preacher to buy gasoline so he could get around. Some went to ministerial students and some went to the mission field.

Early one morning John Rascus died in his sleep. On that first Lord's Day in glory he walked down the golden streets and a young fellow came up to him and said, "Thank you, Brother John. I was cold and lonely, it was a dark night. I saw the lights on in the church. Just to get out of the dark I went in. While there, the darkness left my soul and I found Jesus." Another came to him and said the preacher came to the filling station to get gas. "As I filled his tank he told me about Jesus and I gave my heart to the Lord." Next John met a throng of people who said, "I want to thank you for those students you helped. They preached the gospel to my family and we found the Lord." He next met some people of different languages and said, "Thank you, Brother, for sending us the gospel across the seas." Finally, John came to Hallelujah Square and turning to an angel he said, "I feel sorry for you angels. You have never known what it is to be saved by the blood of Jesus my Lord." John Rascus mused a moment and then added, "And you do not know what it is to transform the possessions of earth into the treasures of heaven." "Sir," replied the angel, "you're right. All we get to do is just watch it from the streets of glory."

Let me ask you a question today about grace giving. Have you learned to transform the possessions of this earth into the treasures of heaven? Do we have a clue that if we learn grace giving, that God would use us to reach our arms around the world for the sake of evangelism and missions and what He wants to do? But it all starts, "Do I really trust God?" Is God able? Times are hard. Listen, a man told me one day, "Wayne, you start wringing your hands when you see God wringing His." I like that.