

How To Give

2 Corinthians 9:6–11 (NIV)

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. **7** Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. **8** And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. **9** As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” **10** Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. **11** You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Introduction. Every time I watch this video, I am deeply touched because of my relationship with Jessie's mother, Lisa and her sister, Melanie. I am moved by how Jessie was by nature a giver and how appropriate it seems for her parents to saying yes to organ donation which blessed seven other people. Wow? There is something special about giving. (By the way, Lisa will be at a table in the gathering area following the service to share more about organ donation.

All of us realize this is a season of giving. Those of us who are people of faith understand the spirit of giving we find present in this season began with God. God gave us the gift of His Son who brings salvation to our world. Christmas is about that Gift. So it seems right for us to engage in a season of giving. So, how are we to give?

Giving is in our DNA

When our youngest son was 4-5 years old, I took him shopping for his mother's Christmas present. He found a delicate glass designed windmill that he felt was the perfect gift. We paid for the gift and had it wrapped. He was so excited when it came time to open gifts. He was more excited about her gift that year than his own. When Patty opened the gift, it was broken. Tim's heart was broken. My heart broke. But Patty cherished that gift and kept it.

That experience taught me as much about giving as did all the scripture I had read. I learned how emotion-filled is this act of giving from the excitement of giving to the heart break of a broken gift. I witnessed how giving is a part of our nature. There is something in us that motivates us to give, that wants to give to those and that which we love. Giving is a part of who we are.

On a personal level, I am not one who is very patient and intent on shopping and finding the "perfect" gift for everyone. I always hope there is a moment of inspiration and I can pick it up in a 5 minute trip to the mall or order on Amazon. But there is in me a deep desire to give. For me it is expressed when I am crafting in my woodshop a gift for someone or an organization I love. I will spend hours on end building a cabinet and shelves for a daughter-in-law or for the church. I will spend what it takes for the lumber, hardware and specialized tools. I pour my heart into those projects to give.

There is something in us, most of us, maybe all of us – we are made to be givers. Perhaps it comes from being made in God's image???

Cheerful Giver.

There is no section of scripture that gives a better theological and practical overview of giving than 2 Corinthians 8-9. I would encourage you to read, pray and think about what is said there. I think it can impact your spiritual and daily life immensely.

Paul gives us the proper theological posture for giving – *God loves a cheerful giver.* God delights when we give cheerfully and live as cheerful givers. The Greek word translated as "cheerful" is the word where we get in our word, "hilarious." Think of this way, "God loves a hilarious giver."

One of the great symbols of our culture for Christmas and giving is "jolly O Saint Nic." He represents a cheerful giver with his signature laugh. Can you we do it together? "Ho, Ho, Ho, Merry Christmas."

Santa Claus as we know him today has gone through a long evolution of some 1700 years. The image we know began with a person named Nicolas born to a wealthy family in what is now Southern Turkey. His parents died of an epidemic when he was young. Nicolas became a devout follower of Christ and gave his life to serve Him. He took seriously the words Jesus spoke to the young rich ruler to "sell all he had and give to the poor." Nicolas, who became the Bishop of Myra, gave away all his inheritance to help people in need. He gained the reputation

of being a defender of children and providing for people in need. He was a staunch defender of the faith. After his death, he was proclaimed to be saint – Saint Nicolas. He lived out his life loving and giving to God and to others.

Many legendary tales have circulated about him so it's hard to separate fact from fiction. One of which shows his heart. The port city where he served as bishop was experiencing a severe famine. When he learned some ships in the harbor were filled with wheat bound for another port, he went to the owners asking for them to spare some wheat for the starving people. The owners were resistant because their products had been weighed and promised under contract. He told them if they would provide for the city, they would find on arrival at their destination none of the weight of grain missing. They gave grain and found when reaching their port nothing was missing. St. Nicolas then was able to distribute the wheat over the next two years to provide for the people until the famine ended.

Whether Saint Nicolas was a portly fellow dressed in red may be in question but he was a cheerful giver.

It seems to me the offering during worship should be the most cheerful time during our worship. What if we practiced cheerful, hilarious giving? Unfortunately for some, the offering is a time of guilt, resistance and suspicion by some or a necessary intrusion into worship.

On what turned out to be Paul's final journey before his freedom was stripped from him, he passed through Ephesus where he had planted a church. He had the sense this would be the last time he would see them on earth. So he shared with them a farewell address. He ended the address with talk of giving. He reminded them of Jesus' words: "*It is more blessed to . . . than to . . .*" In many ways that seemed like a strange way to end a farewell message. But for Paul, this matter was important and appropriate.

The word translated as "blessed" means "happy." So we could say it his way, "*Happier are we when we give than when we receive.*" It would seem Paul knew something of this happiness and cheerfulness in giving.

How did he capture this level of happiness? He shared with the folks at Ephesus he had practices that served as an example.

- He reminded them he had worked hard while among them and did not look for a handout from others.
- He had refused to allow covetous to take root in his heart. He was not a greedy man.
- He was able to do this because he had practiced generous giving. These practices led to a blessed and happy life.

God takes delight in cheerful givers. Are you willing and can you join the ranks of cheerful givers?

The Thoughtful Decision.

If you travel over Hamilton Place following your lunch, you are likely to encounter two types of shoppers – those who are looking particular gift they have thought through for each person on their list. These may go into every store to see if they can find exactly the right one. These shoppers are very intentional. Then there are others who wonder in every store hoping they will see something that will strike their fancy that they can buy for each person on their list. Thinking of these persons, you probably will not see them today but will see them there on Christmas Eve or the day before. They buy gifts impulsively.

Sometimes those impulsive gifts can be fun and mean much to those who receive them. Giving impulsively is not a bad thing. But the thought-filled gifts really exist on a different level, don't they?

Often when we give to God through meeting needs of others or to Christ's church, we do so because we have been moved by a particular appeal. Perhaps the Holy Spirit seemed to nudge

us to give to this offering or do something to care for a person in need. We just feel it is the right thing to do at that moment. There is certainly nothing wrong with that and each of us need to be sensitive to the Spirit and what is stirring within us.

As wonderful as this type of giving is, Paul advocated a richer kind of giving -one that takes us to a deeper level. It is by nature very intentional. He wrote to the Corinthians that *“each should decide in the heart what to give.”* This requires *forethought and planning.*

For all who desire to give regularly to their church, to move toward tithing (giving 1/10 of their income) and practice tithing, intentionality is critical. If you do not give thought to your giving, you will not be or become a sustained and regular giver. From the perspective of the church, every gift is important regardless of size or regularity. *But it is the regularly giving of those thoughtful givers which sustains the church.* If the regular givers here did not give as they did, things would look very different here this morning. Our ministry would be radically changed.

The thoughtful giving to which Paul refers, though is not a mere cold, calculated giving. “I make \$4,000 a month so I will give \$400.” Or “In disposal cash each month I have \$200 left so I will give \$100.” It is much deeper than this.

Paul advocated *“deciding in your heart.”* I don’t know about you but my heart is more generous than my mind. My heart gives out of love and seeks to give the best. My mind thinks about the cost and how can I find a good deal. Paul knew that engaging our feelings and emotions were critical to intentional giving. When we do so, we are more likely to give out of love.

I love this season when giving is so much on our minds. I love the fact that most people will express generosity at some level during this season. But my greater desire is for all of us who follow Christ to develop and live a life of extravagant generosity. I believe when we do, our lives will be happier.

Postscript.

If you were listening to the scripture lesson earlier, I hope you heard Paul spoke more about how God gives and blesses us than how we are to give. Giving is a great channel for the amazing blessings of God to flow into our lives. I know this because I have experienced it directly. – the Offering to follow