

**REMEMBER: WHOEVER SOWS SPARINGLY WILL REAP SPARINGLY,
AND WHOEVER SOWS GENEROUSLY WILL REAP GENEROUSLY**
Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
Autumn Ridge Church
December 1-2, 2018

No. 8: Remember
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

The passage from scripture we are going to look at today can revolutionize the way we think about giving. It can transform the manner that ministry and mission is supported. It can alleviate suffering and, if every Christian in the world took it to heart, it would eliminate need.

So "what are these supernatural words?" you're wondering. Here they are:
"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." (2 Corinthians 9:6)

This is our final "remember" in our series on the great truths God never wants us to forget. It is appropriate to remember as we begin the Christmas season with its emphasis on giving.

Now here is the background to this remember. The Christians in Judea and Jerusalem are facing a really tough time. There is persecution and famine. Jerusalem is the mother church so as Paul travels around Greece in his missionary journeys he encourages the believers there to take an offering to help their suffering brothers and sisters back in Jerusalem.

When they first heard about the need the Corinthians responded enthusiastically. They said, "Count on us. The economy of our city is booming. We are doing well so we want to help."

But as so often happens, it is one thing to respond emotionally to an appeal when we first learn of it. But it is quite another to follow through. The Corinthians had failed to back up their words with deeds with the result that the Christians in Jerusalem continued to have a very hard time.

So Paul writes a letter that we call Second Corinthians. In this eighth and ninth chapter Paul reminds the Corinthians of their pledge. But he doesn't want to motivate them with guilt but with grace. For true giving is always a response to God's grace.

So Paul takes this opportunity to give his friends at Corinth a spiritual and financial lesson. He puts this offering in the context of the gospel. He longs to see the Corinthians grow as disciples.

So choosing an illustration from agriculture Paul points out, **“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”**

Every farmer knows the truth of that statement. If you sow a few seeds you will get a small crop. If you sow a lot of seeds you will get a larger crop. But Paul wants us to know that this law of the garden is also a law of God.

Our Heavenly Father has given all of us resources that are like seeds. If we are miserly with them we will have a lousy spiritual harvest. But if we are generous we will be amazed at what God will do.

So Paul gives the Corinthians and us a description of the harvest that God will provide when we sow generously with the seeds he has entrusted to us. So let’s examine this spiritual harvest in detail.

The first fruit of this supernatural spiritual harvest that grows in response to our giving is **THE JOY OF GOD.**

Paul tells us, **“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.” (v.7)**

There are some great truths in that statement. First, we see that our giving should be planned. We plan other aspects of our life, so why not our giving.

Now how do we plan to be generous? Well, we look at our income for the year and then we decide what portion of it we will give to God. The Old Testament believers gave a tithe.

A tithe is a tenth, and I think that is an excellent guideline for our own giving. When we give ten percent away we are recognizing that we would have nothing had not God given it to us first. So a tithe is an acknowledgment of God’s ownership of all we possess. The average Christian today gives between two and three percent of their income, so suddenly jumping to ten percent may be too much in one go. So maybe we move from three percent to four percent and as we experience God’s blessing we increase from four percent to five percent until we reach our target.

In case we are nervous about this, God guarantees we won’t lose out. Anne Frank, that young Jewish girl who hid in Amsterdam from the Nazis, pointed out that “No one has ever become poor by giving.”

Proverbs proclaims the same truth saying, **“It is possible to give away and become richer! It is also possible to hold on too tightly and lose everything.” (Proverbs 11:24)**

Then Jesus assures us, **“Give and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full – pressed down, shaken together to make room for more and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back. (Luke 6:38)**

What does God think about this sort of giving? He loves it. The text tells us he loves a cheerful giver. That word “cheerful” means “hilarious.” God wants to see us laughing all the way to the offering.

There are three possible ways we can give. First, we can be a **mad giver**. We are angry that we have to give anything at all. We give with great reluctance. Maybe we even blame the recipients for being in need. We imagine the Corinthians complaining, “If only those folk in Jerusalem were like us they wouldn’t be in this mess. They are probably poor because they are lazy. Why should I help them?” That is the attitude of the mad giver.

Second, we can be a **sad giver**. We are sad to lose the money we have worked for. After all it is ours. We think what we could have bought for ourselves with it.

The third option is to be a **glad giver**. We smile at the thought that God has blessed us so we can bless others. We are happy that we can alleviate need. It is this glad giving that makes Jesus joyful. For our Heavenly Father loves to see his people with a happy heart.

But there is more, for glad giving not only gives us a happy heart but a healthy heart. Multiple studies show that generous people are healthier people. The benefits of giving are lower blood pressure, lower risk of dementia, less anxiety and depression, and overall greater happiness.

Stephen Post, the Director of the Center for Medical Humanities at Stony Brook School of Medicine, says, “One of the best ways to deal with the hardships in life is not to center on yourself, but to take the opportunity to engage in simple acts of kindness.”

So think of this. When we give generously there is joy on earth and joy in heaven.

Why does God love glad, generous giving? Because he sees all that our giving can accomplish. He sees how giving changes us. He sees the difference our giving makes to a needy child. He knows how poor families can be transformed by our giving. He witnesses how that missionary we support is able to share the good news with a person who is eternally lost so they come to know Christ, and as a result will live forever in his presence. So our giving results in the joy of God.

A second fruit of this harvest that grows from our giving is **THE BLESSING OF GOD**.

Listen to what happens when we are generous. **“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.... God will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” (v.8 & 10)**

When as spiritual farmers we give away our little supply of seed, God gives us more. Here we see the divine principle that we cannot out give God. As we bless others, he blesses us, but his shovel is bigger than ours.

Now what is the nature of God’s blessing? It covers all of life. For Paul goes on to say, **“You will be enriched in every way.” (v.11)**

There is a false doctrine called “prosperity theology” or the “health and wealth gospel.” Proponents of this heresy select a few verses from scripture and suggest that God wants all of us to be healthy and wealthy.

But clearly as we look around the church that is not the case. Many Christians do struggle financially and suffer poor health. Now God in his mercy does sometimes bless us financially, far more than we deserve. But his gifts are greater than just money.

What would we rather have, a son or daughter who loves God and is obedient to their parents and kind to others, or a million dollars? Most of us would pick the former. The blessings of God can include a happy home, a joyful marriage, a heart full of contentment, and a life full of joy.

Next we see that this harvest of generosity that springs up from our giving results in **THANKSGIVING TO GOD.**

Have you noticed how the results of our giving are all God-focused? For our giving is not separate from our lives as Christians but an integral part of it.

So Paul informs us of another spiritual truth. **“Your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.” (v.11-12)**

Cheerful giving results in an outburst of praise to God. It is not hard to imagine how this thanks comes about. The suffering Christians in Jerusalem were praying daily that God would provide for their needs. Then Paul arrives with this large offering from the Christians in Greece. Now they have enough to buy food and get clothing and purchase fuel.

Their life has been transformed and so they shout their hallelujahs and they quickly arrange to meet in someone’s home that night. There they praise God and thank him for the kindness of his people.

They have seen that prayer works. They have witnessed that God is faithful. They have evidence of the compassion of other believers they have never met. Their faith has grown. This is what can be accomplished through our giving. It is not just the money. It's the mirth it produces.

A fourth part of this harvest that arises from our generosity is **THE GRACE OF GOD.**

Referring again to the Christians in Jerusalem, Paul says, **"In their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you." (v.14)**

When God gives his grace he doesn't reluctantly open his little finger and sprinkle a little grace upon us while maintaining a clenched fistful of his choice gifts. No, Jesus' hands are nail pierced and they are wide open. He pours out his surpassing grace upon us with no limitation.

Glad giving is always the result of grace. That's why Paul urged the Corinthians, **"See that you also excel in this grace of giving." (2 Corinthians 8:7)**

Isn't it amazing that our giving results in an explosion of grace? The reason is that our giving enables God's grace to be seen in a practical way. The recipients of our giving experience the grace of God and they tell others about it. That's why we all love to hear stories of generosity because they are so uplifting.

Back in April a young lady called Yanise Ho set out from Miami to rollerblade across America to prove that kindness exists. She carried her backpack but no cash.

She relied completely on the benevolence of strangers for food and shelter during her seven months on the road. Last week she completed her 3850 mile journey from Miami to Portland. She raised \$33,000 for One Girl Can. This is a nonprofit that funds girls' education in Kenya and Uganda. She made more than a thousand friends along the way.

Now do you think the people who gave Yanise a meal or a bed for a night or contributed to One Girl Can feel bad about it? Not at all. They feel great. They are telling their story to others. That is why it has been picked up by the media. Every day the story of grace is growing.

So how did the Corinthians respond to Paul's plea to give? After writing his letter Paul went to Corinth. He stayed there for about three months. During that time he wrote Romans. In that letter he revealed that the Corinthians had responded positively concerning the collection for the needy people in Jerusalem.

Paul reported, **"Now I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia (Corinth was in Achaia) were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it." (Romans 15:25-27)**

So not only had the Corinthians contributed, they were pleased to do so. They were joyful, happy, cheerful givers. Giving is not something we do but something we are. Giving is a way of life for a Christian who understands the grace of God.

So the harvest of our generosity produces the joy of God and the blessing of God. It brings forth thanksgiving to God and it allows us to see the grace of God. Now let's put all we have learned into practice.

This is the time of the year when I tell you about the needs of our fellowship. To meet our goals for ministry and mission for this year we need to give **\$750,000** by the end of this month.

Now that is a colossal amount. It is easy to look at that figure and say it is impossible. But let's not look at the greatness of the need but at the greatness of our God, and remember that whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, but whoever sows generously will reap generously.

Now let me tell you what this amount will accomplish. First it will enable us to meet all our commitments to ministry and mission for 2018. God has given us an amazing year. 168 Middle and High School students took part in eight mission teams last summer. 77 people have been baptized so far this year. We have had people step forward as part of our 20 by 20 mission goal. We have opened a free medical clinic in southeast Rochester called the Autumn Ridge Health and Wellness Clinic.

But that was the past. We are also interested in the present and the future. As a church we are entering a period of transition but we don't want to just stand still during this time but to go forward for the kingdom of God.

We want to do this because this church doesn't belong to John but to Jesus. I may be leaving but he's not. That's why we want to be on the go for God throughout 2019.

This is the reason we are searching for a Children's Pastor and a Student Ministries Pastor. We are also looking for a part-time Outreach Pastor. We have launched a Marriage Mentoring initiative to help couples enjoy the best marriage possible. Pastor Jim Fleming has started a Shepherdology class helping men fulfill their role in their home, their church and their community.

In our focus groups earlier in the year many said that you want Autumn Ridge to reach Rochester for Christ. We heard you loud and clear. Here are some of the things we are doing in our community. Our gifts support these ministries financially. In many cases we back up our giving with volunteers.

Mission 21
 Salvation Army
 New Life Family Services
 Next Chapter
 Serenity House
 Teen Hope Ministries
 Together for Good
 In His Name food bank
 Transform Minnesota
 Jeremiah Program
 Our Kingdom Garden
 Prayer Walks
 Monthly services at The Waters

In addition to this we have our own nonprofit called Olmsted Outreach. Its mission is to reach out to Rochester, greater Olmsted County, and communities around the world with the love of Christ to meet people's physical, social, emotional, educational, and spiritual needs.

Olmsted Outreach sponsors these programs that you see on the screen:

Acts 4 Kids
 Autumn Ridge Health and Wellness Center
 Friendship Place
 Guinea Education Partners
 Haiti Orphanage Partners
 HOPE Outreach
 Mediation and Conflict Solution
 Minnesota Sudden Cardiac Arrest Survivor Network

Many of our ministries that take place here at church also seek to serve our community. Here are some of them:

Devoted Hearts
 Blessing of the Bikes
 Outreach to the Gables
 We are a shelter site for the American Red Cross
 Spring Formal
 Upward Soccer and Champion Basketball
 Minnesota Adult and Teen Challenge Basketball
 Autumn Ridge Arts Series
 Unity English
 The Rochester Chinese Church
 Cross Bridge Fellowship
 Bible Study Fellowship
 Philanthropic Education Organization
 Gobble Wobble Thanksgiving Run
 Fusion
 Side by Side

I am sure that I have missed some. Sadly, I don't have time to tell you what these 37 outreaches do if you want to get home today. If you would like to know more about them do talk to one of our Pastors or Elders. Now we think that these 37 are a good beginning, but we want to do more. That is why we have this target of \$750,000 to keep Autumn Ridge marching forward for Jesus.

Most of these valuable ventures started with a vision of one or two people. This is why I believe our future outreach ideas will come from you. If God lays a burden on your heart, step up and say "I would like to lead this." Then you gather a group of likeminded people. Before you know it you have an amazing work going like Next Chapter or our Kingdom Garden.

Now the temptation is to say "I'll let someone else do it." But Paul won't let us get away that easily. He concludes this section by tying our giving to Jesus as he exclaims, **"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (v.15)**

The apostle is talking about the incarnation when God gave the gift of Jesus who came to this earth to show us how to live and to die for our sin and then to rise to give us eternal life.

"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift" is an appropriate prayer for this first weekend of Advent. For Advent reminds us that God sent us the most magnanimous, glorious, wonderful gift that was ever given. It is the gift that inspires all other gifts.

This month the shops are filled with people buying presents. Why are they doing this? The amazing fact is that everyone buying a present is honoring the memory of Jesus, whether they realize it or not. For he was God's perfect gift and when we give gifts to others it is an acknowledgment of that truth.

I wonder have you received the gift of Jesus? He will change your life. We would have nothing without Christ. He gives us the very breath in our lungs. He gives us salvation and forgiveness. He gives our life purpose and meaning. It is in gratitude that we give back to God.

That's why together we Autumn Ridgers are going to raise that \$750,000 so we can reach Rochester for Christ and make an impact around the world through the 70 missionaries we support.

So with joy we say together our **Victory Verse** for the week.

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2 Corinthians 9:6**