

INTRODUCTION

This is the last message in the section of 2 Corinthians about receiving an offering for the suffering saints in Jerusalem. Now, some people think any message about giving or money is boring. So if you ever wondered what to do during a boring church service, I’ve come up with Pastor’s Dave’s Top 10 things to do during a boring service (borrowed from a little book *101 Things to do During a Boring Sermon*). Here they are:

10. Twiddle your thumbs.
9. Twiddle your neighbor’s thumbs.
8. See if a yawn really is contagious.
7. Write down the words your preacher uses beginning with “A” then “B” and so on through the alphabet—when you get 26 words stand up and shout, “Bingo!”
Using the worship folder, design, make, and test a paper airplane.
Start from the back of the church and try to crawl all the way to the front, under the pews, without being noticed.
4. During the prayer, turn around and count aloud how many people do not have their heads bowed and eyes closed.
3. Choose a different song than was announced and begin singing it as loud as you can.
2. Send a note to the organist asking if he plays requests.

And the number one thing to do during a boring church service is...

1. Slap your neighbor. See if they turn the other cheek. If not, raise your hand and tell the preacher.

Thank God that our worship services aren’t boring!

Now, let’s read what God has to say about this offering taken 2,000 years ago, because there are powerful principles in this chapter that apply to every offering we take today.

2 Corinthians 9:1-15. Paul writes, “There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints ...” [He must not have meant that, because he proceeds to write an entire chapter about it. Since he’s just emphasizing some truths he wrote in the last chapter, let’s skip down to verse 6.] “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: ‘He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’ [Psalm 112:9] 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. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing

in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

Paul devotes two entire chapters to this offering without ever once using the word "money." Perhaps even back then, people were a reluctant to give to God. It reminds me of the bi-vocational pastor who was applying for a job as a policeman. One of the questions he was asked during his final interview was, "What would you do to disperse an angry mob?" Without hesitation he said, "I'd take up an offering!"

We're going to learn that according to God's Word, the offering should be the happiest, most joyful experience of the worship service. The problem is that many people have been told, "Give 'til it hurts," and that's exactly where they've been stuck for years. For them, giving is like pulling teeth. But you shouldn't give until it hurts, God wants you to give until it blesses! Here are three principles that will bring you to a place where you can "Give 'til you giggle!"

1. WHEN I GIVE, MY ATTITUDE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE AMOUNT

The Bible says, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion." Look at those two words, "reluctantly" and "compulsion." Does that describe the attitude you have when you give? Over the past 30 years I've observed three wrong attitudes that people have when they give.

(1) I've got to help God out!

A person who gives with this attitude simply sees a need, and even though they may not care about that need, they recognize somebody has to give to it, so it might as well be them. A person with this attitude thinks, "Poor God, there's a need, and I'm going to step in and help meet that need. Lucky for God that I have some money to help Him out!" Now they would never say that out loud, they just think it, but, of course, God knows our thoughts and the intents of our hearts.

Whenever God hears those kinds of thoughts, surely, as it says in Psalm 2:4, "The One enthroned in heaven laughs." God doesn't need my money. God says in Psalm 50:10, "For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills." When we give, we aren't doing God a favor, He is doing us a favor by allowing us to participate in what He is doing.

(2) I've got to pay God's tax!

Some people consider giving God a tithe (10%) as a law that they must follow, like paying income tax to the government—and who giggles when they pay their taxes? In the Old Testament, the tithe was basically a tax. Every Jew gave 10% of their resources to maintain the operation of the Temple. Now, I believe in tithing, but I believe that is only a starting point for us. We aren't under the Law any more, we're under grace—but shouldn't we who are under grace want to do *more* than those who were under the Law?

I’m often asked, “Pastor, should I tithe on my gross income, or on my net?” My answer is, “tithing isn’t some legalistic rule that we follow where we have to meticulously figure every penny. It’s a guideline we use for giving our love offering to God.” Tithing isn’t commanded in the New Testament. Jesus never commanded us to tithe, but He did *commend* tithing. In Luke 11:42, “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.” The Pharisees were so meticulous about tithing that they figured out how to give 1/10 of their garden herbs—that’s legalism. Jesus said they ought to have tithed, but should not have neglected the more important issues of the heart like justice and the love of God. If you think tithing is something you’ve *got* to do or else God is going to send His heavenly IRS agents to audit you, then you’ve got the wrong attitude about giving.

(3) I’ve got to get God’s riches!

There are some ministries teaching a “prosperity-health-and-wealth” message that says if you will give to God (meaning give to their ministry) God will heal you of all your sicknesses and He will make you rich. It’s funny, but I’ve noticed some of the television preachers who proclaim this message have to wear glasses to read the Bible—I’m thinking, “What’s wrong with this picture?”

This heresy reduces God to a slot machine that pays off if you just pump enough quarters into it. God does say if you give it will be given unto you, but that promise is good only if we keep on giving away. As we learned last week, when you start getting greedy and hanging on to God’s blessings, the cycle is broken.

Ray Stedman wrote about a man who received a letter from a well-known tele-evangelist saying that the ministry needed a quick infusion of cash to pay off some debts or the ministry could no longer be on the air. The tele-evangelist had figured how many viewers he had and divided the amount of money he needed by that number. He asked every viewer to send him \$76. In the letter he promised that you can’t out give God, and for every viewer who sent him \$76, he would personally guarantee that God will give triple that amount back to the giver (\$228). The man sent a letter back that said, “Sir, I agree that you can’t out give God. So I have a better idea. Why don’t you send me \$76 and that way God can give you the \$228 and you can pay off your debt that much faster!” He never got a reply.

Those are three wrong attitudes. What is the correct attitude for giving? It’s found in these five simple words in verse 7, “God loves a cheerful giver.” Do you know what that says in the amplified Bible? It says, “God loves a cheerful giver!”

Doesn’t God love everybody? Of course God loves everyone, but He has a special love reserved for those who give cheerfully to him. Parents, we love all our children equally don’t we? Of course, but sometimes when a child is especially loving and obedient we find it easier to love that child. That’s what I think God is saying here. He loves everyone, but He finds it easier to love His children who give to Him, not grudgingly, but cheerfully.

That word “cheerful” is the word *hilaros*, from which we get our English word hilarious. Here’s how Jack Taylor describes a hilarious giver: “I wish I could draw you a picture of a hilarious giver. If I could, I would capture the look of uncontained delirium, electrifying enthusiasm, ecstatic expectation, a countenance exploding with delight. Almost giddy, always gleesome, a hilarious giver has discovered that it really IS more blessed to give than to receive.” (*God’s Miraculous Plan of Economy*, p. 157) So, how can you start giving hilariously rather than reluctantly or grudgingly? The answer is found in understanding the power of a seed.

2. I SHOULD GIVE JOYFULLY LIKE A FARMER PLANTING SEEDS

In the middle of this section on giving, Paul inserts a farming metaphor. He writes, “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.” There is an irrevocable law that has been established that can be called “God’s Law of the Harvest.” There are four dimensions to this Law, and when you understand it, you can give joyfully and generously.

(1) God always supplies the seeds

All planting begins with a seed. Seeds come in all shapes and sizes, but they all have one remarkable quality—they possess indwelling life. In this context, a seed represents the resources God has given you; this includes your money, your talents, your abilities, your health, and any other blessing you can use for God’s glory. All our seeds have been supplied by God—we can’t make them. Humanity can discover seeds and plant seeds, but only God can create a seed. A scientist has never formulated a seed from nothing.

The life force within a seed is trapped there until certain conditions apply. You can shine it or enshrine it, extol it or enthrone it, hallow it or hoard it, but until you plant it, it’s as dead as a doorknob. The seed must die before it can produce life. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (John 12:24) Jesus wasn’t just talking about farming. He was referring to His life. His body had to die and be buried before there would come the amazing multiplication of life that sprang from His resurrection.

When planted and watered, things begin to happen within the body of a seed. It can no longer hold the life within it on the inside. It responds to the chemicals in the soil and the moisture by first expanding, and then bursting, and then by sending down roots into the soil. At the same time, it sends shoots upward toward the heat of the sun. Seeds are a miraculous entity, and only God can supply them to us.

(2) I’ll always reap WHAT I plant

That means you won’t get beans if you plant peas. If you plant corn you won’t harvest cherries. If you want to harvest peanuts, you must plant peanuts. This law of likeness translates into the spiritual realm as well. If you want God’s best blessings, then give him your best.

This is true in every area of life. If you plant encouragement in others, you'll reap a bumper crop of encouragement. If you plant respect in others, you'll reap respect. If you plant love, you'll reap love. God's Word says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." (Galatians 6:7-8)

(3) I'll always reap LATER than I plant

You don't reap a crop from the gifts you plant immediately. A farmer must have patience. He cannot circumvent the process; he can only participate in it and wait until the seed has finished its work. We're such a fast-food, micro-wave culture that we want results *now*. In fact, we want them *yesterday*.

When my daughters were small, there was a vacant lot next to where we lived, so we decided to plant some watermelon seeds. Pretty soon, there was a watermelon vine growing, and out of one of the blooms, there sprang a tiny watermelon. The soil wasn't very fertile, so the melon was struggling to become the size of a baseball. I can remember Jenni saying, "Come on, Mr. Watermelon! Why don't you grow faster?" One afternoon I stopped at a road-side stand and bought a huge watermelon. When I got home, I placed that watermelon in our vine and wrapped the vine around the stem. Then I went in and said to Jenni, "Let's check and see how our watermelon is doing today." When she went outside and saw that watermelon, she screamed for joy, "Wow! Finally, it grew!!" Then I had to tell her I had bought that watermelon and placed it there to teach her a lesson—that when you plant something, you must be patient and wait, because fruit and vegetables don't grow overnight.

God says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9) When you give money to missions, it may take some time before that money results in a harvest of souls in Africa, but it WILL happen in time. When you give love to someone who is unlovely, there may not be an immediate response, but that seed will result in a harvest if you just don't give up.

(4) I'll always reap in proportion to how many seeds I plant

This is the law of multiplication. It's simple mathematics at this point. Plant a few seeds, get a small harvest. Plant many seeds and reap a huge harvest. And if you plant zero seeds, you reap zero because a million times zero is still zero. A smart farmer doesn't hoard his seed, he plants it joyfully. Paul writes, "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." (2 Corinthians 9:6)

The first church I ever served in South Alabama was in a rural area where there were lots of farmers. These were men who planted many hundreds of acres. These farmers were some of the most patient and spiritually mature people I've ever known. Why? Because they lived God's law of the harvest. When they planted, they didn't just plant a few seeds, they were extravagant in their planting. They joyfully planted thousands of seeds because they understood that he who plants sparingly will reap sparingly, but he who plants generously will also reap sparingly.

Have you discovered this principle yet? Imagine for a minute that I told you about a stock you could buy tomorrow for \$6 a share and that in 6 months it would be trading for \$60 a share. If you knew for certain it would increase tenfold, how many shares would you buy tomorrow? One? Ten? A hundred? No, if you're a wise investor, you're going to leverage everything you have and buy thousands of shares.

Now I don't know about a stock like that, but I do know about seeds, and that's what God is saying. A tiny kernel of corn I can hold between my fingers will grow into a plant over six feet tall. And on that stalk will be several ears of corn containing several hundred seeds—that's more than a 100-fold return!

The reason God gives us seeds is so we can plant them. John Wesley the founder of the Methodist Church had a simple personal financial policy: "Get all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can." Today, we're so selfish that the popular philosophy in our culture is: "Get all you can. Can all you get. Sit on the can and poison the rest!"

But God made us to be generous with the seeds He gives us. Remember, I'm not just talking about money here; I'm talking about all blessings we receive from the hand of God. You can't fight this law of the harvest, it is irrevocable. You can only get in on it and plant the seeds God gives you. Are you joyfully planting God's seeds?

(3) I GIVE OUT OF GRATITUDE FOR THE PRICELESS GIFT GOD HAS GIVEN ME!

In the final verse of this section Paul busts forth with a doxology giving the reason why these Gentile Christians might want to give sacrificially to help the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He writes in verse 15, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" He says we give out of thanksgiving to the God who has given us an indescribable gift. This indescribable gift is eternal life in Jesus.

This gift is indescribable because of the Father who has given it. God is too powerful to fit into any human description. As the song by Chris Tomlin says, "Indescribable, uncontainable, You placed the stars in the sky and you know them by name. You are amazing God!" I learned more about God the first minute after my daughter Jenni was born than in all the years I had studied in college in seminary combined. When I became a father I realized I wanted to give my child everything that would benefit them. I found I loved to shower my daughters with gifts. It wasn't a chore to stay up until past midnight on Christmas Eve putting together a Barbie Carwash—it was a joy. Our Heavenly Father gives with that spirit of Joy.

This gift is indescribable because of the Savior who embodies it—the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23) Eternal life is IN Jesus Christ. If this card represents eternal life, and this Bible represents Jesus, and I place this card in the Bible, the only way you can receive the card is to receive the Bible. Eternal life is IN Jesus, so to receive eternal life you must receive Jesus Christ.

This gift is indescribable because of what it can do for you. This gift removes the penalty for your sin and makes you a new person. This gift imputes to you the very righteousness of Jesus Christ and adopts you into the Family of God. This gift makes you an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. It is through this gift that God the Holy Spirit comes and takes up residence in your heart. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

CONCLUSION

So, when you give to God, are you giving grudgingly and reluctantly? Or do you find yourself giggling as you give? If you want to be a giggly giver, you've got to understand that your attitude is more important than your amount. Recognize God's law of the harvest and start joyfully, extravagantly planting seeds. And give out of a sense of gratitude for the grace God has given to you.

Both my grandmothers were Godly women, who prayed for me until they died. My father's mother told me more than once that she prayed for God to call out a preacher in our family and I was the answer to that prayer. She had a picture in her living room that fascinated me from the time I was a child. It was a picture of Jesus standing on a dusty road and there was a group of men walking away from Him in the distance. But there was one man who was kneeling at the feet of the Jesus. There was a caption on the frame of the picture that simply said, "But Where are the Nine?" As a child I didn't understand what that meant, so one day I asked my grandmother to explain it to me. She told me Jesus healed ten men of leprosy, but that only one man returned to say, "Thank you." And that when Jesus saw the single man, a Samaritan, He asked, "Were there not ten men healed? Where are the nine?" Then grandmother said, "David, don't be like those nine men who left Jesus without saying 'thank you.'"

Since I've grown up and studied that passage myself, I think there wasn't just an isolated event in life of Jesus. I think Jesus was teaching us that, generally, about 90% of people go through life never truly recognizing what God has done for them and falling at His feet to say "thanks." Are you going to be like the 90% of the ungrateful people, or will you step up and be like that man who fell at the feet of Jesus and show your gratitude by become a channel of His blessing to others? Will you commit yourself to be one who gives 'til you giggle?

OUTLINE

1. WHEN I GIVE, MY ATTITUDE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE AMOUNT

Wrong attitudes: I've GOT to...

- (1) Help God out!
- (2) Pay God's tax!
- (3) Get God's riches!

2. I SHOULD GIVE JOYFULLY LIKE A FARMER PLANTING SEEDS

God's Law of the Harvest:

- (1) God always supplies the seeds
- (2) I'll always reap WHAT I plant
- (3) I'll always reap LATER than I plant
- (4) I'll always reap in proportion to how many seeds I plant

(3) I GIVE OUT OF GRATITUDE FOR THE PRICELESS GIFT GOD HAS GIVEN ME!



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes