

“Giddy Givers”

II Corinthians 9:6-15

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“Am I paid up?” This was a question my seven year old son asked me as he was stuffing money into his offering envelope. That little boy will be twenty-nine on Halloween. I wonder if Josh remembers this conversation.

“What do you mean?” I asked him. “If I put seven dollars into my offering envelope, will I owe any more the rest of the year?” This was the same child that declared at the dinner table, “I wish you would put all the vegetables that I am going to have to eat in my entire life on this plate right now and let me get it over with.” I knew I had my work cut out for me.

How do you explain to a seven year old that it is a good thing to give some of his money to the church? Actually, I think I passed this portion of the test as I talked about how giving expresses gratitude for all we have received and helps people in need. If I recall, I made some headway there.

However, when I talked to Josh about his apparent lack of pleasure in this spiritual discipline, I’m not sure I got very far. It was obvious that putting his money in that envelope brought him no joy that evening.

I recall throwing a little scripture at him to see if that would change his mind. “God loves a cheerful giver,” I quoted from Corinthians. He promptly gave me one of those “I hope He finds one” looks. Needless to say, this was not our last conversation on this subject.

Have you ever talked to someone about giving? Were you comfortable? What did you say? Do you think you influenced someone to be more generous?

According to our text, it was time for Paul to have a serious conversation about giving with the Corinthian Christians. They did not follow through on a commitment they made to him to help the believers in Jerusalem. Too much hung in the balance for Paul to ignore it and he confronted them in love.

It seems the Judean Christians were suffering financially. Following Jesus cost them a lot. Some lost their jobs and could not provide for their families. Many were excommunicated from the temple and were isolated from lifelong friends. To make matters worse, everyone in Judea was suffering the effects of a deadly famine. Life was tough and people were desperate.

When Paul told the Corinthian believers about their plight, they quickly told Paul they wanted to help. They agreed to gather an offering that he could take to the Jerusalem Christians.

A year passed without the Corinthian believers taking action. Tensions between Paul and them delayed the collection. In the meantime, the Jerusalem Christians continued to suffer.

Paul sent Titus and two unnamed companions to the Corinthian church to persuade them to fulfill their promise. He also wrote the words to our text which encouraged them to give voluntarily, generously and cheerfully. He reminded them that other churches were watching them and it would be devastating if their promise to help rang hollow.

Evidently this appeal worked. On Paul’s third visit to Corinth, the offering was ready and waiting for him.

What is the message for us this morning? For me it is this. **Giving is an important part of our faith.** All scripture affirms this and speaks of the need for spontaneous and planned giving.

Why is giving such a vital part of our faith? There are many reasons, beginning with the fact that our *generosity reflects God’s nature.*

Dr. John Claypool often said that the world is here out of profound generosity. “Nothing in Genesis implies that God created the world or us because something was missing in His life. Instead, out of His fullness He created and sustains what He created. He gives for the joy of giving and the enhancement of the recipients.”

Church consultant and Smoke Rise member Ruben Swint wrote in his latest article, “We inherit a generosity gene because we are created in God’s image. Once we put aside our fear and begin to trust God, we can awaken the slumbering desire to be as generous as we have always wanted to be and know we could be.”

Giving expresses gratitude for what we have received. We give because we have been recipients of others’ generosity. We cannot count our blessings and hoard them.

Giving brings out the best in us. Do you notice a difference in the behavior of a selfish child and one willing to share? Sure you do. Which do you prefer? I wish all questions were that easy to answer.

Paul told the Corinthians that a spirit of generosity would result in good works that would point others to God. The more unselfish they were the better neighbor they would be.

Giving builds community. It brings people together by strengthening fellowship, promoting unity and breaking down barriers. This is what it did for the Jewish and Gentile believers. This offering demonstrated to the Jewish believers that there is one gospel, including Jews and Gentiles. Prayers and good wishes flowed between these two distinct groups.

How should we give? Paul outlines it in our text. We should give voluntarily, not give because we feel pressured. We should give generously, as a farmer sows his seed. We should give cheerfully, not grudgingly or reluctantly.

I must tell you where the title of my sermon originated. Recently in my Sunday school class, we talked about this passage and I explained the meaning of the word Paul used for cheerful in 9:7, *hilaron*. It is plain to see that our word for hilarious is derived from it. What Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians was that God approves a hilarious giver, or a giddy one. They dared me to use that as a stewardship sermon title. As you can see, I took the dare.

On a mission trip to Kenya twenty years ago, I attended a worship service in the little village of Gongoni. I still vividly remember how they took the offering. It caught me completely by surprise.

Everyone jumped to his or her feet and started dancing down the aisle. I’ve never seen such a joyful group of people. They waved their hands in the air and sang to the top of their lungs and one by one they danced by the altar and laid their offering on the little table in front of the pulpit. Some brought eggs, others some grain or fruit, but everybody brought something. The offering lasted for about fifteen minutes and I was later told it was their favorite part of the service. That was easy to see. Here I was witnessing the sheer joy of giving among some of the poorest people in our world. I’ll never forget it. It brought this scripture alive.

Have you ever been this excited about the opportunity to give? If not, I wonder why? What are you missing? What needs to change for you to be more generous and more cheerful about it?

I’m holding in my hands a small set of Allen wrenches. I’ve had them over twenty years. Josh gave them to me when he was in elementary school. It was sometime after we had our talk about giving.

I drove home from work one evening about a week before Christmas. Josh was waiting in the driveway. When he saw me turn the corner at the top of the hill, he came running out to the street. He did not wait for me to turn into the driveway but ran up to the car as I approached the house. I stopped the car and rolled my window down.

“I have something for you,” he shouted. “I went to Santa’s workshop at school today and bought your Christmas present. I can’t wait to give it to you until next week. I want you to have it now.”

He handed me a crumpled up brown bag. When I reached into it, I pulled out these small Allen wrenches. To be candid with you, I probably had little need for them. That didn’t matter. You would have thought he just granted my biggest wish. I did what any of you would have done and oohed and aahed over that gift as I had no other.

I also looked at Josh and realized he got the message about being a cheerful giver. Oh, maybe he didn’t realize it that day, but he would. That feeling was too good to forget and he would make the connection sooner or later.

Have you made that connection?

