

Natalie W. Bell
November 3, 2019

Harvesting Gratitude
2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Luke 16:10-13

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹ As it is written,

“He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;

his righteousness^[b] endures forever.”

¹⁰ 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.^[c] ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹² for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

In **1 Corinthians** Paul addresses many specific controversies brewing in the congregation, but at the end of that letter he encourages giving to the poor, especially the Jerusalem church.

In **2 Corinthians** Paul comes back to this issue of giving.

The **Christians in Jerusalem** were being persecuted and suffering financially. Paul recognized this need as an opportunity for the Gentile churches to help the Jerusalem church, so he started a collection.

So, once again he asks them to give to the needy, especially their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

Perhaps the Corinthians had pledged to support the Jerusalem church, but had not followed through on that pledge.

So Paul reminds them of their commitment.

We don't know ***why they hadn't followed through.***
 Maybe times had gotten tough.
 Or maybe they just wanted to hold onto their resources.

Do you know what ***that feels like?***
 Ever wanted to be ***generous,***
 but found it's just not easy to part with that money?
 I think we all have, right?

I'm guessing the Corinthians were normal people, like us,
 thinking about ***what they might be losing*** if they give.
 You know what I mean?

Sometimes we ***give and think,***
 That could have been an insurance payment.
 That could have fixed our broken car.
 That was enough to cover our groceries for the month.
 Sometimes we see a ***loss,*** but God sees a ***blessing—***
 and God encourages us to see the world in a completely different way!

So how can we ***see giving, God's way?***

Well, think about ***gardening, or farming.***
 Because, Paul uses an everyday ***farming metaphor*** in this passage
 to help encourage the church, and address their fears.

He talks about the ***law of the harvest:*** the more you sow, the more you gather.
 The more you plant, the more crops come in.
 Makes sense, right?

What if what Paul is saying is ***true in our giving*** as well?
 If we are faithful in giving, God will not only provide all that we need,
 God will bring in a harvest, to bless others!

Listen to Paul again:

*The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly,
 and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.
 7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or
 under compulsion, for God loves a ***cheerful*** giver.*

*8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.....10 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. 11 You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us;*

What Paul is talking about is NOT fund-raising.
It's an **attitude of stewardship, of generosity**.
It's a way of seeing that everything we have is a **gift** from God.
And in gratitude we give back!

I like what Pastor Brian Wilkerson says, He says,
You should feel something when you write the check
or put the money in the plate,
a feeling of **gratitude** for God's goodness,
of **compassion** for the people or cause you're giving to,
or even a little **twinge of anxiety** about the amount you're giving away.
If you don't feel anything when you give, you're probably not being generous.
Generous giving is cheerful. Paul says that we are not to give "reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."
Pastor Brian Wilkerson, sermon A Crop is A Crop, preachingtoday.com.

Giving IS about **gratitude**, not guilt.
Sometimes people say you should give "**til it hurts.**"
And there are times when we need true sacrificial giving.
But what about giving '**til it feels good?**
What about giving 'til we're filled with **joy?**
What about giving until it feels like you're making a **difference?**
After all, giving generously brings **joy!**

This perspective is key to understanding **God's economy**,
It's that fuzzy math of God, that we talked about last week!
We know what the **world** says about money—
we hear and see it every day, all the time.
Get more, buy more, you deserve more.
If you give it you wont have enough!
Giving means less for you.

But God's economy is completely the *opposite*, isn't it?

Paul is saying that the best way to deal with our *financial worries* is to *give generously*.

Cheerfully.

Which seems *counter-intuitive*—

but it's so true: the *more* generously we give, the *more abundantly God provides* for us.

We worry that if we're in need, shouldn't we hang on to what we have? Not according to the *law of the harvest*.

Not according to *God's economy*.

We give, and give generously, and when we do so, we are blessed.

Does this mean there is a *formula*--

Where I give to God, in order to receive more in return?

Well, this is NOT about being selfish, or seeking personal gain.

Yes—we will receive far more blessings than anything we ever give.

But—God does not promise to provide us what society tells us we should have.

We are not promised to be rich if we give a certain amount.

We are promised to have ***what we need, and more***.

We don't give with the expectation that God will reward us in return.

We give because we are like what ***Pastor Alice Abigail says***,

When we are givers, we are RIVERS. Dr. Alice Abigail, "Generosity Changes Everything"

We give because we want to have ***blessings flowing in and out*** of our lives.

We don't want to be a stagnant body of water.

We want to be a river, with living water flowing in and out.

The truth is, giving brings life.

It's like the old saying, you may a living by what you get,

You make a life by what you GIVE.

We give because it brings ***joy***, it brings ***life***, it brings ***blessing***.

We give because really, all that we have, is a **gift from God**.
We are not the owners of it, we are just **caretakers**, stewards.

Generosity is **not a guarantee** that we'll never have financial problems,
or have to go without something.
Instead it's a **promise** that God knows what we need,
and will provide all we need, and more, so we can do all we're called to do!

Only God knows how you will be blessed when you give!
But **you will** be blessed.

When have **you been blessed** as a result of your giving?
Those are the stories we want on those pieces of bread in your bulletin,
Stories of blessing, of how and why you give to God.

I can think of numerous times that while **writing a tithe check**
I worried about making it to the end of the month--
then something unexpected would happen to help make ends meet!

One time it was a **St. Francis hospital overpayment** check from many years
before!

I've received an anonymous gift of cash in the mail,
or a large birthday or Christmas gift.
It seems like every time I've worried about money, the money comes.
Somehow. Somewhere.

It's God's economy.

I wonder if this is what **Jesus was saying in Luke 6:38?**

*He says, **Give, and it will be given to you.***

*A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over,
will be poured into your lap.*

For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

I wonder if this is what Jesus meant when he said

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

And Paul recounts those words in Acts 20:35.

It's not the amount that matters either, just the act of giving!

How have you been **BLESSED through giving?**

Isn't there joy in knowing that you are helping put food on someone's table,
or you're helping a child grow up in the faith,
or you're making sure someone who is isolate or lonely has community?

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:11,

you will be enriched in every way for your generosity!

That's the '**harvest**' God is talking about, right?

We ARE blessed when we give---in amazing, abundant ways, right?

When have you seen a 'harvest' in your life, from giving?

Isn't this about seeing our giving **make a difference?**

We all want that, right?

Think about the Clean water mission in Malawi--

Those wells literally **save lives,**

sometimes an entire village!

Places like **Heifer Project**, and the **Presbyterian Mission Agency**
have these amazing gift catalogs—you know what I'm talking about?
Where you can send animals to needy families,
As a gift to honor or remember someone you know
at a holiday or birthday.

Well, what if we had a FPCO Gift Catalog?

Can you picture what it might look like?

I can imagine a picture of the **musicians**, with a caption that says:

Help us worship with music!

Another page might have a picture of our **staff**, saying:

Support a ministry leader today!

What about our friends in **Malawi?**

Help bring them clean water!

What about a picture of the **Youth Group and kids**,
worshiping, eating, playing games, memorizing scripture.

Help these young people grow!

Maybe under a picture of our **church building**
 It might say: *let's keep these doors open—all week long!*
 Really, the possibilities are endless!

Because the truth is, when you **give—you do change lives.**
 Giving is powerful and transformative.

You know what Friday was?
 November 1st is **All Saints day**,
 and we remember all the Saints today,
 those around us, and those who have gone before us.

This year we **said goodbye** to some of the saints in this church—
 Some went to heaven, some moved out of state.
 And you know what?
 They were **givers—generous givers.**
 What a blessing they were to us!

And what I hope is, that their gifts, and all of your gifts,
Will inspire even more giving,
 Even more ministry and mission!

Because that's the truth of giving.
Generosity is contagious.
 Giving brings a **harvest.**
 We give, because God gives us so much.
 And when we **give, God gives so much!**

When we are givers, we are **rivers---**with blessings
 Flowing in and out of our lives.

The question is, does our giving reflect that?
Is our giving a reflection of our blessings? Of our gratitude to God?
 Are we givers, who are rivers?

Because giving makes **blessings abound!**
 When we give cheerfully, the blessings flow!
 That is the essence of God's kingdom, and God's economy.

It's not the world's view of our time, talent, or money.
But it is God's view—the view of the harvest.

So, why do YOU give?

And how have you been BLESSED through giving?

I know that every month when our tithe is electronically given,
and we receive that acknowledge from church,

I say a ***prayer of thanks.***

I thank God for my family, a wonderful husband,
a loving church and a great job.

I thank God that church has saved my life more than once,
and God has provided for my every need.

There are not enough sermons to count all of my blessings!

What about you?

What are your blessings—and how do they inspire you to give?

How are you a part of the ***harvest*** of generosity and giving?

How are you a ***cheerful*** giver?

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel:***

the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

Thanks be to God for every single gift!

And for that, all God's people say, Amen.