

November 22, 2020

“Altar-ed Giving: God’s Altar-nate Plan for Giving”

[2 Corinthians 9:6-15](#)

Altar-ed Living translates – at some point and in some way, often one degree at a time – into Altar-ed Giving!

Last week I encouraged you to look up some biblical passages on money, giving, generosity, and stewardship. You may or may not have; most people are not drawn to these types of passages, but they’re hard to avoid if we open up our Bibles, because the Bible talks more about money and wealth than just about anything else. Money, wealth and possessions impact just about every area of our lives. It’s why Jesus felt the need to say, “Where our treasure is, there our hearts are also.”

Last week I also mentioned the ‘oops’ regarding the passages I picked out and put on the sermon bookmarks. Had to scrap those . . .

As of Monday, I wasn’t actually sure which passage to go with for this second sermon on giving, so I looked at several passages for us:

-Luke 21:1-4 – The poor widow who gave her last two coins (“More than all the others!”)

-Luke 10:25-37 – The Parable of the Good Samaritan

(Time, care and resources)

-Matthew 14:13-21 – Jesus multiplies loaves and fishes

(Also Mark 6, Luke 9, John 6)

-Luke 19:1-10 – Zacchaeus gives away his money, repays others

-Exodus 36:1-7 – Bezalel and Oholiab

[Had sermon from Exodus 31, 35 for Bible Jeopardy one summer, under Obscure Bible Characters: “Who Is Bezalel?”]

(Exodus 31, 35 – Stewardship of talents and passions; value of beauty and art)

(Exodus 36 – Tabernacle Capital Campaign; “Stop! No more!”)

And then I thought, why not continue with Paul’s letter to the Corinthians? He certainly has more to say about giving. We just got ourselves familiar with some of what was happening with the churches in Macedonia and Corinth and their giving. Why not stay in the flow and look further into what he writes about this giving opportunity to the poor and the widows in Jerusalem? So here we go.

What you need to know about what he wrote between where we left off last week in 2 Corinthians 8:15 and where we pick back up in 2 Corinthians 9:6 is that Paul continues his ‘strategic’ approach of gently – and not-so-gently – inviting the Corinthians to step up to the

plate and share from their financial abundance. I would add to what I said last week and say he is even being a little manipulative. You could even say he's using a little shaming technique. He goes so far as to say they might be "humiliated" (2 Corinthians 9:4) if some of the Macedonians come with Paul to collect the offering and they aren't ready to give.

Paul's a big boy and can defend himself; he might even admit this wasn't the best approach to helping people hear AND FEEL the Gospel. If the Gospel is about God's free gift to us that we cannot earn or pay back, we have to be careful whenever we find ourselves making people feel obligated or guilty about giving. We DO need to remember the most important thing Paul said in chapter 8: "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9) That's the Gospel in a nutshell. And that is supposed to be our motivation for living and giving.

READ PASSAGE

So what else do we learn about Biblical generosity and the giving of our financial resources? What's the Word of God in this for US? What do you hear, see . . . feel?

I want to make this short and sweet; defined loosely by someone who doesn't have a good sense of time, is VERY passionate about Biblical Stewardship . . . and – let's be honest and sincere – has some skin in the game and benefit personally from your financial giving to FPC.

I have four words for you today about God's Altar-nate Plan for Giving. They are the same words Paul had for the Corinthians 2,000 years ago. According to what Paul says, we should give:

Willingly

Paul gives the people of Corinth some grace and space – some freedom – to decide for themselves what they should give to the special offering. "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind to do, not reluctantly or under compulsion." (2 Corinthians 9:7) That means asking people to give is biblical, but arm-twisting or guilt is a no-no.

[We try to walk that tightrope here at FPC and I'm sure we miss the mark in our approach; some think we talk about giving too much, while others think we should talk about it more. We actually need your loving feedback on this and realize we'll never get it just right for everyone.]

So Paul says, give **Willingly**. Then he says, give **Cheerfully**. He actually says, "God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7) Don't you love being around cheerful people? Or maybe you don't . . . at least at certain times. Like during COVID! Typically, we are drawn to authentically cheerful people. (Not fake, cheerful people.) We love the lift they give us. We

like to do our share of whining, but not for long and we need cheerful people to snap us out of our bad moods. And it can be hard to give cheerfully. We're not sure if we'll have enough. We wish we had more expendable income – like someone else we know and envy. We're tempted to give joylessly but “God loves a cheerful giver” because their cheerful giving is contagious. Having said this, I have it on pretty good authority that God is still willing to work with ‘grumpy’ givers!

There is also something good about giving when you don't feel like it; or worshipping when you don't feel like it; or praying, or loving your spouse, or doing your homework when you don't feel like it.

Paul says, give **Willingly**. Then he says give **Cheerfully**. Then he says, give **Confidently**. Paul spends the next few verses seeking to instill confidence in us; confidence that God will supply our every need (not every want but every need). “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, SO THAT by having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8) Then he quotes from Psalm 112 (about God “scattering abroad and providing for the poor”) and goes on to say, “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.” (2 Corinthians 9:10)

He supplies for us SO THAT we can supply for others.

And if this is true AND WE ARE CONFIDENT IN THIS TRUTH – that God will supply everything we need so that we'll have plenty to give and plenty to live on – then we don't have to ‘hold on’ tightly and keep everything to ourselves.

Paul says to give **Willingly**. Then he says to give **Cheerfully**. Then he says to give **Confidently**. And finally, (in this passage) he invites us to give **Gratefully**. In the end, it turns out that generosity gives way to gratitude – in us and others. The word ‘thanksgiving’ or ‘thanks’ shows up three times in the last few verses of chapter 9. When we let go; when we give that which is close to our hearts, we make more room for Jesus. And Jesus, “who became poor that we might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9), loves to displace everything our hearts cling to, so that our hearts can then be filled with GRATITUDE. Thanksgiving can be more than a holiday. It can be a way of life – including how we give. Giving while full of thanks often results in giving others a reason to be thankful too. Those who would receive the offering in Jerusalem would be full of thanksgiving soon enough.

Giving takes many forms:

- Word of Encouragement (phone call, letter, text, face-to-face)
- Time & Labor (Thank you to the many FPC Good Samaritans)
- Leadership and Abilities (to help struggling non-profits and struggling people)

Tom Hansen – First Presbyterian Church of Grand Junction, CO

FPC is like this in so many ways around town and around the world . . . You inspire Shelly and me (IJM, Young Life and Foster Parenting are the places we invest, but that’s just us. Where do you invest or want to invest? Where is God tugging your heart and resources?)

-The Gift Prayer. Don’t ever underestimate the harvest that will come from the prayers you pray for God’s Kingdom and other people!

SO HERE’S WHAT I AM ASKING:

I am asking each of you to give to FPC.

[Estimate of Giving cards]

I am asking you to consider making an over-and-above, one-year gift to our Capital Campaign in 2021.

[Please watch the 4 short videos that will be released – STARTING MONDAY, November 23 – through email and online over the next three weeks.]

And I’m asking you to give to the many other Kingdom-building ministries and endeavors that reflect the love of God “from one degree of glory to another.”

[The elders, staff and I love encouraging you to give to outside ministries: like IJM and Young Life. We didn’t know we would end October with a slight deficit and may have been tempted to play those two down a bit over the last several weeks had we known. But God knew and didn’t want us to tone anything down.]

At FPC, we believe God will supply all of our needs! Including the needs of other ministries, individuals, organizations . . .

How about Bezalel and Oholiab Revisited?

Wouldn’t that be awesome?!

At the very beginning of our passage today, Paul tells us something else he knows to his toes.

“The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” (2 Corinthians 9:6)

I don’t think this means we should give to get; or that it always works like that. I think Paul is saying something that, deep down, we know is true. The bountiful life; the full life; the abundant life . . . the life we all actually crave at the deepest levels of our being . . . is the generous life . . . a life we give away. That’s the life Jesus lived and offers to us.

May His life ALTAR our lives. Happy Thanks Giving!

Questions for Personal Reflection and Small Group Discussion

1. Of the attitudes for giving Paul highlights (Willing, Cheerful, Confident and Grateful), which do you resonate with most? Which is the least natural for you?
2. What are the realities in your life that make these attitudes/mindsets more difficult to embody?
3. In the midst of this pandemic, and all of the uncertainty it brings – including financial uncertainty – how confident are you that God will provide? What evidence do you have of His provision from your past?
4. When God provides for you financially, is your first thought typically what can I do, buy, GET for myself, or what can I do, buy, GIVE to others?
5. In what specific ways do you hear God calling you to give?
6. What does this passage have to say about being "Rooted in Jesus, Growing in His Love [Together], [and] Branching Out to Serve Others"?