

# The Generous God

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[ 0 : 00 ] We are not going to be continuing on in Ephesians. Our pastor George, it's a convenient table, our pastor George is currently on a study leave in the Holy Land.

He'll get back this upcoming week. So this morning we'll be in 2 Corinthians 9, verses 6 to 15. That is the section that Matt read for us.

This morning we're going to talk about money. A good pastor always feels a bit uncomfortable with talking about money and preaching about money because his income comes from the tithes of the people.

And let me just say, if that marks a good pastor, our pastor is excellent because our pastor has so much discomfort in talking about that, he's pawned off the sermon to me.

His underling. And he is so excellent that he's not even in this room or the city. In fact, he's in another continent. Our pastor is fantastic.

[ 1 : 12 ] Listen, that's not actually how it went down. George, when he was leaving a few weeks ago, he gave us a couple passages to pick from. And this was one that felt like the Lord, out of all of them, said, give it a shot.

Precisely because it made me feel uncomfortable. Talking about money can be dicey, especially for a preacher. Except that when I began to dig into this text and started to see what it had to say, realized that this text is less about money, although it most certainly is about money and giving. But this text, in fact, is about radical, loving, transformative, expressive, imitating discipleship of Jesus Christ.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to be rich. And I'll just say this right off the bat. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be rich. Why? Because God has sent Jesus, his son, to earth to pay for our sins completely.

To ransom us from the grave completely. And to not just save us from something, but to give us something. New life. The resurrection of the dead. That we are now sons and daughters of the living God.

[ 2 : 36 ] That our cup is always not to the edge of the top. It's overflowing. We are blessed people. To be a disciple is to be rich.

But to be a disciple also is to be an imitator of Christ. It means following the example and direction of our King Jesus. It means recognizing that we have been bought with a price and that the life we now live is not our own.

I think for some of us here, we need to hear that. That the life you live, if you call yourself a Christian, if you have confessed faith in Jesus Christ, that he is your Lord and Savior, he has forgiven you of your sins, your life is not your own.

His ways always lead to blessing and praise towards him, but they are his ways, not our ways. We don't enter into this relationship with God only to start calling the shots.

He has laid out for us the way he wants us to live. And including in that is how we approach money and how we approach our resources, how we approach our talents, all the commodities that we may possess.

[ 4 : 02 ] And really the attitude towards those things as a Christian disciple of Jesus Christ is an attitude of generosity. So our text today, we'll jump right into that.

We'll address that. It'll look at three things. Excuse me. It'll look at the motivation for being generous, the results of being generous, and the foundation of what generosity is all about.

So we have the motivation of generosity, the results of generosity, and the foundation of what generosity truly is. But first let me pray and then we'll just jump into the text.

Lord God, it's a dicey subject. Pastors in North America have not got the best rep for teaching on money.

Lord, the heart of this text is generosity. Help us to see with your eyes, to be moved by your Holy Spirit. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 5 : 05 ] So before we get into the text, a bit of a background with what's happening here. Chapter 9, our text today, verses 6 to 15, is nestled within chapter 8 and 9, obviously.

But what's not obvious is that Paul is making an appeal to the Corinthian people about a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. Paul here is essentially making a pitch for famine and poverty relief. So we know from the early chapters of Acts that in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and there was a huge conversion.

Thousands of people converted. But we don't necessarily see the fallout. We get a bit of it here. Undoubtedly, the saints in Jerusalem would have been ostracized from their family if their whole families didn't come to faith.

Kicked out of their families. If they had businesses, it's likely that their businesses would have suffered. If they had any kind of employment with somebody who was not a believer, it's likely that they would have lost their job.

[ 6 : 18 ] They would be pushed to the fringes of society. You know, this actually happens a lot in the world today. Not so much in our culture, but in places like Iran or in China, places like India.

The Jerusalemites were poor. They were very, very poor. And Paul here is making a big pitch, not only to the Corinthians, but also to the Macedonian church.

We see that at the beginning of chapter 8. Macedonians were poor themselves, but he's making a pitch to them for this famine relief. And then he comes to the Corinthians, who have an abundance and have been collecting funds for over a year, but for whatever reason, are struggling with being generous.

They're struggling with being ready, as the text says. Something has to do with, something about their lack of readiness must have had to do with not being cheerful in their giving.

Maybe their zeal that they once had was waning. They were becoming reluctant in their giving. And it's this context that we find our text and bring us to our first point, the motivation for being generous.

[ 7 : 29 ] So look with me in chapter 9. We'll start in verse 6. And we'll go to verse 9. The point is this.

Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly. And whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things, at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, He has distributed freely, He has given to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply their seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

Paul makes it clear that what he is making an appeal to, this famine relief, is not some sort of tax. We see this if we go up just one verse in verse 5 of chapter 9.

[ 8 : 38 ] And he says, So Paul here plays on this imagery found throughout Proverbs of sowing and reaping.

It's full, full of that imagery throughout Proverbs. And he's calling the Corinthians back to the scriptures, back to the heart that God so desires for His people.

So Paul encourages the Corinthians to be generous in order that they may reap a bounty. What kind of bounty? Well, we'll see in verse 10. Notice that he doesn't say anything about a dollar amount.

So in the Old Testament temple system, a tenth was what was required. But here Paul simply says that it is a personal matter and that personal choice must not be reluctantly given nor given under pressure.

Why? Because God loves a cheerful giver. Here's the motivation for generosity. It is to reciprocate God's grace that He has given to us.

[ 9 : 55 ] And we know this because, like I mentioned, this section is nestled within a broader section of chapter 8 and 9. And in chapter 8, verse 9, this is what it says. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor so that you by His

poverty might become rich.

So what we have here is Paul making an appeal to the Corinthians to remember the example of Christ Himself that He gave Himself up willingly, not through some kind of compulsion, but He sought joy to go to the cross to endure the sufferings.

And that should be our attitude, our motivation to give generously. And this results in two things. The cheerfulness, God loves a cheerful giver, but also faith.

So let's look first at the cheerful giving. Why is reluctant giving such a big issue? Why is it? I mean, if it results in the same thing, if you reluctantly give somebody \$5 or joyfully give somebody \$5, they have \$5 in their hand.

I mean, the ends kind of work out. They both have the \$5. But why is there something not okay with reluctant giving? Well, remember, we talked about how this text is about discipleship.

[11:31] And to be a disciple of Jesus Christ means to follow in His ways to be saved by Him, to follow in His ways, empowered by His Spirit. And this is not following the example of Christ.

Like I mentioned, Christ did not give Himself up for us reluctantly. It did not, in one sense, it pained God, but in another sense, it pleased God that our suffering should be laid on the Messiah.

That God gives freely and graciously, not reluctantly. And therefore, reluctant giving is not God honoring. And by the way, you might get a \$5 bill, no matter what, from a reluctant giver and a cheerful giver.

But that reluctant giving, it might be \$5, but it comes with some strings attached, doesn't it? Or you feel like you might be in their debt. Or that person might scoff at you and look down their nose at you.

Or maybe they just don't go through with it and take the money away and then you're left with nothing. But the point is, there is a difference between reluctant giving and generous giving.

[12:48] This giving that we're supposed to engage in this cheerful giving is voluntary. It's what Paul says in chapter 8, verse 3. It is given freely.

We looked at it in chapter 9, verse 5. And generously, excuse me, in verse 6. So giving cheerfully to bring gifts with joy that come from a place of blessing and not with tight-fistedness that harbors resentment.

That is what God wants. Growing up, I would hear every now and then, God loves a cheerful giver. And I just thought, it's just, it's like you're taking the edge off of asking people for money to, whether it be pastors or ministry leaders.

But no, no, it is, it is, it is a call to follow in the very example of Jesus Christ himself. To give cheerfully. Cheerful giving and being a miser don't mix.

But remember, if you're feeling like, oh, I don't want to give if I'm not giving cheerfully, understand that Paul is saying it is voluntary. You need to decide what you're willing to give yourself.

[14:01] Now, when we give to the church, all the resources come together and we have a godly council and a godly pastor that try their best to seek the Lord and ask for the Holy Spirit to lead and then invest and to bless in the different ministries in our church, in the city, beyond, with our missionaries.

So, you know, there is this aspect of just a communal giving that ends up happening to the church. It's like more buying power, right? We put all our pot together.

But ultimately, ultimately, you guys are individuals and the call is to make that call yourself. But make sure that it's done cheerfully.

And again, why do we do this? Because God himself is a cheerful giver. But you might not feel like you can give much or you're reluctant to give.

Or you might have this feeling inside that if I give, I will suffer. If I give, I won't have enough for bills, I won't have enough for potential car repair, I'm hoping to, you know, have some leisure activity, vacations coming up.

[15:17] Or maybe your kids, you know, like you've, you've budgeted a certain amount of money to put your kids in sports or activities. Whatever it may be, whatever it may be, the call is still to give generously.

Again, but I'm not going to say to you, you have to give this amount. That's between you and the Lord. Seriously. Remember, Paul is making this appeal to the Corinthians who are in abundance, but he's also made the appeal to the Macedonians who are poor themselves.

So, it's hard to be a disciple of Jesus. It is hard to counter our flesh, to counter the devil, and most certainly to counter the world and its influences.

There are real and large obstacles standing in the way of walking with Jesus. We can keep this religious zeal for only so long, but you'll get wearied or you'll get worried.

And just like the Corinthians, your excitement, your drive for the Lord will start to wane. And that's just a part of it. But, what do we have here?

[16:27] We have, in verse 8, this wonderful declaration of, sorry, in verse 6 and 7, this wonderful kind of charge to give generously. But then in verse 8, this wonderful kind of declaration by Paul that God, if you give, He will provide.

Look with me at verse 8. And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times you may abound or literally overflow in every good work. It's a bit of a wordplay going on there. You aren't able as yourself to change every problem that you see. Our church isn't able to address every issue or problem that we encounter.

But the areas that we encounter that God is leading us to, He will, He will provide for us. Not so that we can store it up, so that we can be a conduit of blessing.

But this requires faith. And that's hard. Because we are potentially putting ourselves out on the line when we give in such a way that hurts. But He is saying, listen, give generously.

[17:52] You'll reap generously. But understand, God will supply. Maybe the supply will be in the form of other people giving to you.

That will require some humility. That's hard. It's easier to give than to receive for most of us. Maybe it will be one of those things where what He will end up doing is He will challenge you to refashion your life and priorities.

So that certain areas of your life that previously you could afford or that you could devote time to. Because remember, this isn't just a money thing. This is a resource thing that you have time to put towards.

Or certain talents that you've used for yourself. Now you're being challenged to use them for the benefit of other people. All of those situations might cause you to refashion your life a little bit.

But again, God will provide. All sufficiency doesn't mean some sufficiency. It is absolute. We need to trust God.

[19:00] This is His word and we are disciples. Again, disciples of Him. Listen, I'm talking like, oh, I've figured out. Like, I am in the boat with you guys. And sometimes it is hard to put our faith and trust and hope in God.

But sometimes I think that when Jesus says, if you have the faith of a mustard seed, He actually means the faith of a mustard seed. But who is that faith in?

It's in Jesus. And it says here that He is able, verse 8, to make all grace abound to you.

So I challenge you guys that as you think of generously giving, generously give, trusting that the God that created the universe, the God that did not withhold His own Son, will provide for us.

We don't know how, but He will. He gives us His word that He will provide.

[20:09] I'll just pause really quickly here. If you think that this is some kind of, I don't know, like, I could potentially see this, like, we turn some words around, like, maybe this is a talk that a cult leader would give.

Like, just give me the money and God or whatever deity, like, you will be blessed. But, I would encourage you guys that if you are truly, if you are truly moving in the direction of faith and trust and hope in Jesus, to hold God's feet to the fire, so to speak.

God is, He is not a distant God. He is ever close. And, He knows the things we are going to ask before we ask them.

So, I would challenge you to do your best to push away the skepticism and to look to be generous givers. There's a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful story in 1 Kings.

It's the story of Elijah and the widow. And, this is precisely this generous giving that results in cheerfulness and an increased faith in God's provision that is talked about here.

[21:37] We see it in 1 Kings chapter 17. I'll read this to you. You don't have to turn there. So, this is in light of a famine and a drought in Israel. And, this is what it says.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, Elijah, saying, Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there.

Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you. So, he arose and went to Zarephath. And, when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And, he called her and said, bring me a little water in a vessel that I may drink. And, as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, bring me a morsel of bread in your hand. But, the widow said, as the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And, now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son that we may eat it and die.

[ 22 : 39 ] And, Elijah said to her, do not fear, go and do as you have said, but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me. And, afterward, make something for yourself and your son.

For, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, the jar of flour shall not be spent and the jug of oil shall not be empty until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.

And she went and did as Elijah said, and she and he and her household ate for many days. The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

God, he doesn't fool us. He's not a trickster. If he says it, he means it.

He makes the promise and he follows through because he is able to. It's a wonderful, wonderful story. So, giving generously, the motivation for giving generously is in light of what Christ has done for us, the generous God giving to us, and it results in cheerfulness, it results in increased faith.

[ 23 : 50 ] But it also results in a couple other things, not for us, but for others. So you see what's happening is that there is trust in God that results, there's blessing from God that results in thanksgiving to God, and that we in turn put that blessing to other people that increases their faith and our faith, which then helps people to trust in God's blessing and provision as they give.

good time to throw up that first picture if you have it. My drawing. Oh, there it is. So I scribbled this on a post-it. Andrew just made me not look goofy.

So, this is essentially what we're going to see. This is what generosity results in. So we have generosity and it results in thanksgiving and faith. And we'll see here that blessing will ensue.

The Jerusalemites will be blessed. They will be physically blessed. They will receive from Paul the gathered famine relief from the Macedonian church, the Corinthian church, and they will have their needs met.

And then they will in turn thank God and bless God for that generosity. And then them, they themselves will give out of their blessing. And then we'll have this continual growth in thanksgiving and blessing and faith and generosity.

[ 25 : 16 ] continues and grows and grows and grows. It really truly is like just a little yeast that spreads. So, look with me in verse 11 to 14.

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way which through us, that's Paul, the apostle, talking about collecting the money, through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

Thanksgiving to God from whom? The Jerusalemites. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. What ends up happening is the Jerusalemites have their needs met and the result is thanksgiving and praise to God.

[ 26 : 30 ] Not only that, they'll turn around and they'll begin praying for the Corinthians. Their affections towards the Corinthian people, it will grow. Corinth is very far away from Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. Maybe these people potentially could have met. My guess is not a chance. But the point is there's people that are called by the same God that are brothers and sisters in Christ in Asia Minor and in the ancient Near East and they have affection for one another, brotherly love for one another.

They're unified together. But all of a sudden it says that the Jerusalemites, they're going to be praying for the Corinthians and longing for them. So this generosity results not in our own personal growth in what it means to be cheerful and our personal faith, but it will result in their needs being met and their praise to God.

And in verse 12, Paul says this, for the ministry of this service is not only, put your finger on that, not only supplying the needs of the saints, but also overflowing in many thanksgiving to God.

That not only, but also, it's taking something that's good and contrasting it with something that's better. So not only are you supplying the needs, but also it's bringing thanksgiving and glory to God. [ 27 : 52 ] That's the ultimate thing when we're talking about being generous givers. It glorifies God. He gets the praise. He gets the honor. It's wonderful.

People's faith grows. Generosity ensues. All things are from God and for God. God enriches for generosity which results in thanksgivings to Him. So the Jerusalemites, although they themselves are unable to repay the money, not that that was a condition upon which they receive the money, but instead they reciprocate again with affections and prayers.

And the wonderful thing about this is that although we are a local church and like we're a part of the Anglican Network in Canada, which is a part of the Global Anglican Communion, we are connected by virtue of faith in Jesus Christ to every true Orthodox Christian that lives today and that has ever lived before us, we are unified with them.

And the thing is when we grow in unity and we grow in affection with people, it transforms the world. So not only is the result personal, but it benefits others.

It actually benefits the world. In John 17, verses 20 to 21, Jesus in his high priestly prayer prays this, I do not ask for these also, but also for those who will believe in me through your word, that they may all be one just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

[ 29 : 39 ] When we are generous, it proclaims to the world that there is a God and that he has sent his son, Jesus Christ, and that God desires to bless.

So wherever the church has been truly walking in the way God has called her to walk, there has been incredible blessings for the world. Hospitals have been built, children have been educated, widows and orphans have been cared for, lepers have been tended to, oftentimes, at the peril of the Christians looking after them.

It is a giving of themselves cheerfully. One example, there is a letter, it's called the Epistle of Diognetus.

It comes from the second century and it talks about what the Christians look like. It's a longer epistle, I'm only going to read a couple of the verses and it says, of Christians, they dwell in their own countries but only as sojourners.

They bear their share in all things as citizens and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like all other men and they beget children but they do not cast away their offspring.

[ 31 : 04 ] They have their meals in common but not their wives. They find themselves in the flesh and yet they live not after the flesh, they obey the established laws and they surpass the laws in their own lives.

They love all men and they are persecuted by all. They are in beggary and yet they make many rich. They are in want of all things and yet they abound in all things.

So what happens when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity, when they give generously, when they put their faith and trust and hope in Jesus, trusting that he will provide for the things that he has called them to do as his disciples.

This last bit, we have the motivation for generosity, we have the results of generosity, but the ultimate foundation of generosity is Christ himself. Look with me at verse 15.

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. This inexpressible gift, even though Paul here, he talks about, excuse me, he talks about how the Jerusalemites will praise the Lord because of the submission of the Corinthians, because they have put their hope and trust and they're walking in obedience and faithfulness to Christ in verse 13.

[ 32 : 32 ] But ultimately, the thanks that Paul gives to God for his inexpressible gift is Jesus himself. Again, chapter 8, verse 9.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

Jesus, when we put our hope and faith in him, again, he saves us from sin and from death. He gives us a new family. He unites us with people in far off lands and far off parts of our city, with neighbors, with relatives.

But the ultimate, inexpressible gift that God gives us is himself. We are made to worship God. We are.

And when you don't worship God, you don't stop worshipping. You just worship other things. But those other things are not meant to be worshiped and they cause a strife.

[ 33 : 38 ] And in our affluent city, we struggle with money, whether it is coming from a spot of great wealth or great poverty.

Money is something that is tough, that we struggle with. All too often we worship. But if we, as God's people, can understand that he has given us himself in Jesus, that we can worship him and know him, and not just know him, but be known by him, warts and all, like genuinely, that we don't have to strive for more money, we don't have to strive for a better reputation, for a better job, for more obedient children, for whatever it may be, that will somehow give us credibility.

We don't have to strive for that because we have credibility in Jesus that we are already operating at an overflow, not a surplus, like at an overflow, overflow, overflow, overflow, because we have him.

That will change the way we live. And that is what is offered to us as Christians. If you are not a Christian, this is the day, because tomorrow is not guaranteed.

It isn't. Tomorrow may be guaranteed for some people, but it's not necessarily guaranteed for you. So I'd encourage you to put your faith and hope and trust in God, and he will give you himself, and you will know what it truly means to live as a human being, made in the image of God, made for God, known by God because of Jesus Christ and what he has done.

[ 35 : 25 ] Lord, thank you so much for the call to be generous. Now, this call to be generous isn't a sly way of getting more money into the church coffers. It is a call to discipleship, to be like Jesus Christ, who again, chapter 8, verse 9, the grace that he has shown us, though he was rich, became poor, that in his poverty, we might become rich knowing you.

Lord, transform our hearts. Help us to see this. Help us to spur one another on in good works. Help us to do the good works you called us to, knowing that you will supply our needs so that we will be all sufficient in all things at all times to do every good work.

And Lord, thank you so much that all of this is for your renown, for your glory. Lord, help us to be disciples of Jesus that are truly, truly gripped by your gospel and learning to live for your glory.

In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.