

# Giving

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[ 0 : 00 ] Nice to see you. Gift day. Oh no, he's going to talk about money. How very un-British of him.

We'll be talking about other things as well. Let's read together from 2 Corinthians chapter 9. In fact, I'm going to read the whole of 2 Corinthians chapter 9. Now it is not necessary for me to write to you about the ministry to the saints, for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Echaiya has been ready since last year and your zeal has stirred up most of them.

But I'm sending the brothers in order that are boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready as I said you would be.

Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you're not ready, we will be humiliated to say nothing of you in this undertaking. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you've promised so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift, not as extortion.

The point is this. The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

[ 1 : 29 ] 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.

As it is written, he scatters abroad, he gives to the poor, his righteousness endures forever. 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.

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us. For the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

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, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. Something very odd has happened to me this week.

[ 2 : 56 ] As you know, I'm a great fan of Christmas, but I don't always celebrate Christmas as early as others within the church. But this week, I have done two odd things.

Firstly, I bought a packet of mince pies. Morrison's deep-filled, ice-topped mince pies. Now, that, I have to say, surprised me more than somewhat.

I must have had a moment of weakness and confusion. And now, I find myself, next slide please, Josh, reading from a Christmas carol.

So, I'm going to have a little lie down after this because there's something obviously going wrong in my small and peculiar brain. What can I give him, poor as I am, if I were a shepherd, I'd bring a lamb.

If I were a wise man, I would do my part. Yet, what can I give him? Give my heart. The final verse of In the Bleak Midwinter.

[ 4 : 06 ] And I just wanted to read that, not because it's scripture, it's a nice poem, but it's not scripture. But it sets out and it helps us understand where giving starts, where giving continues, and where giving ends.

Giving starts with my heart. Where is my heart as I come to consider my giving?

Where is my heart as I come to consider, as Paul says, the indescribable gift that God has given us through Jesus?

And then, to continue on from that, how do I respond in my own heart to giving?

So, I want this to be really clear to start with. This is not a sermon of finger wagging. This is not a sermon of, here's a formula which you have to follow in order to be good, or deemed to be a good member of Whitby Christian Fellowship, or a good participator in the services.

[ 5 : 18 ] This is about an appeal to all of us to consider where our heart is as we worship God. We've just sung some lovely songs.

The moving, powerful words, where's our heart? Where's your heart this morning? And just because it was fun, there's a picture of a lamb there as well.

Next slide, please, Josh. Let me read again some verses, just a few verses from 2 Corinthians 9. It's a really complicated, well, it's not a complicated passage, there's such a lot in there, and some of it needs some looking at.

But let's have a think about this, and the red bits I'll be talking about in a moment. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangement for the generous gift you had promised.

Then it will be ready. So Paul is saying, you've promised us some stuff, you've promised us a gift, I know that you've got it ready, but just in case, I'm sending some folk ahead of you to remind you to make sure it's all there, ready for you, wrapped up with a bow on top, okay?

[ 6 : 27 ] Just in case. I know you haven't forgotten, but just in case. Be ready as a generous gift, not one grudgingly given. Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

As it's written, they have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever. Next slide, please.

How do I give? How do I give? I think the first thing to say is, please don't give anything to the church here, or wider.

Don't give to God begrudgingly. Because we go back to, where's your heart? If you dig in your pocket and you think, oh, for goodness sake, all right, have this.

[ 7 : 37 ] That's no gift. And if you just put it into a slightly different context, as we come to Christmas in about six years' time, oh, six months' time anyway, isn't it?

Must be at least that long away. I know somebody knows the exact number of days. I know. If on Christmas morning, Fiona delves under the tree and chucks a parcel badly wrapped at me, saying, they are, I suppose you have to have something, it's not going to feel great, is it?

I mean, I like socks. I really like socks. But if I get a present that is begrudgingly given, if I get a present that's given out of duty rather than out of love, it isn't really a gift.

And so whatever we give, and I'll come to some more about this in a minute, but whatever we give has to be done generously and not grudgingly.

And if you feel that you're giving out of resentment, please don't. Please don't, because that would be the wrong motivation. And God's absolutely able to cope without a grudging gift.

[ 9 : 01 ] So that's really important to start with. How's our heart doing? Paul goes on to say that if you sow generously, you'll reap generously. If you give plenty, you'll get plenty.

Now this is a very dangerous quote if we take it out of context. God is not a slot machine. You don't put in some money in a prayer, pull the lever, and you win the jackpot.

That's not how it works. How it works is this. God sees our heart. God sees our motivation. And God blesses us.

Blesses us abundantly. Blesses us more than we can possibly ever think or imagine as we give. So this isn't a if you give loads, you'll get loads back.

That's not how it works. If you give loads, if you give generously, and I don't mean loads, that's a bad word, an unhelpful word, if you give generously, then God will bless you.

[ 10 : 02 ] And God might bless you financially, but he might well bless you in other ways as well. And so we need to be really clear that we're not giving to get back. We're giving to give away.

And once it's gone, it's gone. And how God blesses us is up to him. And how God blesses us is a wonderful gift from heaven as we see his blessing pouring out on us as we serve him.

Give what you've decided to give. Each of you should give what you've decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. I'm going to come to the cheerful giver in a minute.

Give what you've decided to give in your heart. And that's really, again, these principles are so important as we think about a gift day. Choose what you have decided to give and give it.

Don't be like Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 4, is it? 5? 5, thank you. My commentary over there is once again in Acts chapter 5.

[11:12] Who said, we'll give you loads and then held some back. It didn't end well for them. You'll remember that they died quite surprisingly and suddenly. Choose what you will give and give it.

Choose what you will give before God. Ask God what you should give. Ask God how you should give and then give it. And just do it quietly and without show.

But do what you've decided. Give what you've decided. Because God is able to bless you abundantly. And then there's this verse in verse 8.

In all things at all times having all that you need you will abound in every good work. It's a complicated one this in today's age because there are people who haven't got all that they need. and we don't abound with goods. And this is where the complication of our relationship with God and our relationship with giving really has to come into play.

[12:28] God never promised that we would have it easy. And for some of us at the moment it's really financially difficult. And we know that. Recognize that and so does God. God knows that more than anybody else.

but this isn't about abounding having all things that you need in terms of money. It's in terms of what you need to live your life as a saved loved member of the kingdom of God.

And that can sound really vacuous if you're thinking yeah it's alright for you Andy but I'm really struggling financially. Absolutely understand that and we would ask that if that is the situation that you're in that first of all you would come and talk to one of us and we can pray with you but secondly please don't take the sermon where if you're not able to give you're going to be treated in some way differently or looked down upon.

That's not what will happen and is not our intention at all. Next slide please. How do I give?

God loves a cheerful giver. God loves a cheerful giver 2 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 7. Cheerful in the Greek is hilaros from which we get the word hilarious.

[14:01] And I like this. Our giving needs to be done with great joy and fun. It needs to be hilarious. We need to giggle as we give which is quite a good fun thing to do.

We need to be giving in a hilarious way and some people might think this is a bit odd. I mean some people might think you're a couple of sandwiches short of a picnic here but we need to give hilariously.

we need to give in a way which pleases us as we please God. And equally and this is really important if you can't give financially choose not to hilariously.

Giggle as you don't give if you can't give. because what God wants is to bless us as we come to him with our choice.

And again this comes back to our heart. It's much more important that what we choose to do before God as we talk to him than what the figure is or the capacity is.

[15:18] give hilariously equally don't give hilariously. Next slide please.

Giving is not just about money. We each have gifts and there's something very important here that we mustn't lose sight of.

We each have gifts that God gives us to use in the context of the local church. We've just talked about some gifts this morning. I don't have the gift to climb up scaffolding and paint the ceiling.

I'm not very good at heights and what I mean by that if I stand on a chair I go a bit wobbly. And people have invited me to go and have a look at what's up there.

I've declined politely but I've declined on the basis that it wouldn't do me or them any good because I would be uncomfortable as I was up there.

[16:23] Now others love it. Thank God for that because they have gifts. And just to take this a little bit further Romans chapter 12 really well known in Christ we though many form one body and each member belongs to all the others we have different gifts according to grace given to each of

us.

There is no one who sits in this church today no one who sits downstairs or even those in the more expensive seats upstairs who hasn't got a gift from God that they can serve the local church.

And do not believe that if somebody says well I haven't I haven't got a gift from God to serve the local church because that's not true.

Some of the gifts will be gifts which are very obvious. Some of the gifts will require being up front.

Some of the gifts will be less obvious and some of the gifts will be quiet and not up front.

Some of the gifts will produce a very obvious immediate response. Some of the gifts might take years even a lifetime before we really know what has happened.

[17:51] I think I've told this story before here but I'm going to tell it again. At a previous church in Leeds that we were at there were a group of older women. I used to call them the prayer mafia.

They weren't physically very strong or very able. They were quite frail some of them. They all had a lot of experience of birthdays which is a polite way of saying they were quite old.

But they used to pray. They used to pray for me and others not just me. It was kind of them to pray just for me but they prayed for lots of people. And they would say oh well we don't do really very much for the church Andy.

You do. You do because you pray and God hears you and God hears you and acts according to his holy will. So if you are saying well there's not a great deal I can do but I can pray thank you.

Please pray. That's such an important job. And if you're not able to climb scaffolding do something different. If you are able to climb scaffolding get up there. Get some painting done.

[19:02] Crack on with it will you. Yeah. Yeah. But we are each given different gifts. And one of the wonderful things about local church one of the wonderful things about being a body of Christ is that it will only function if each of us fulfil our calling and use our gifts to the full measure that God required us to.

So the giving and then we get into this really important part our giving is about our skills our gifts our time our efforts and that's really important and it's really important that we remember that and don't demean the giving of gifts of skills of knowledge we don't demean the fact that some people here are really good at practical stuff and we don't demean the fact that some people here are really good at less practical stuff we do what we can do but I ask you and I plead with you today don't go home today thinking that you've gotten out to offer because it isn't true it isn't true and if you are feeling like that please come and have a chat with me or one of the elders or somebody else because I'd love to pray with you and help you understand how vital you are we cannot do as a fellowship without any of you we need you all so our giving includes our gifts our skills our time our effort but it also is about money it also is about money that we need to do the work that we do within the fellowship next slide please giving then is about a

Christian lifestyle giving is about how do we live as a Christian it's a question that I ask myself quite a lot you know it's a question I ask myself as I go about my work how do I live as a Christian in a world which is increasingly in my experience not necessarily hostile to Christianity but certainly not very interested in it I think I'm quite fortunate in it I don't get a lot of active opposition I get some teasing but I can live with teasing I get called a God botherer I quite like that I love it you're a God botherer believe me I really do bother God all the time but it's not really very much persecution that but how do we live our Christian lifestyle how do we live as Christians on a Tuesday afternoon when it's raining or in a traffic jam or when

Sainsbury's is really busy or when whatever shop we're in has run out of whatever we want to buy or whatever whatever whatever do we consider that are we considering our lifestyle as Christians and for most of us it means that we have to give up some things that we used to do we have to stop doing some things that we have habitually done we have to behave in ways as God challenges us differently differently and we have to start doing some things which we never did before and as God changes us daily as he challenges us as he talks to us there might be things that God wants you to do differently today start doing it differently today start thinking differently behaving differently speaking differently doing differently prioritizing different things and part of that joyous life that we have this side of heaven is belonging to a local church being part of a local fellowship being part of a group of

Christians who God has brought together to be an expression of Jesus in Whitby and for those of you visiting in your home churches but while you're here be it in Whitby as well and it's a funny thing is local church and if you've been around churches for a while you'll know that churches are funny

things but we've got to get put up with the fact that we are who God has put together and I know and I've said this before I will say it again I'm sure in the future I know I irritate some people yes Fiona and I'm sorry I don't do it deliberately but all the time but you're going to have to get used to me because we're who God has put together in Whitby Christian Fellowship and the truth of the matter is that we're going to spend eternity together which is a long time so get used to me part of belonging to a local church is changing the way we do things and becoming more and more like [ 24 : 42 ] Jesus and part of becoming being part of a local church is giving our time our skills our energy but also our money giving is part of our Christian lifestyle it's normal it should be normalized it should be ordinary we should be giving because we give because that's how it works giving is proportionate and yet sacrificial and this is a sort of a bit of a slightly complex one in terms of where we take this how much you give is a private matter between you and God it is not something that I would be willing to stand up and say you must give this much it's a matter between you and God and I think those verses in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 help us with that many many Christians find the concept of a tithe a 10% of your income as a useful guide but it's not a

New Testament commandment if you're struggling to know where to start I think that the tithe is very helpful and many of us find that a really helpful way of thinking about it but it isn't a New Testament commandment the command is to give because we are required to support the work of the local church here and overseas don't look at what others have given don't compare the story of the widow who gave two little pennies and all those rich people who were shoving notes into the box that Jesus commended the widow who gave two pennies he commended her because she gave sacrificially but there was something else as well he was saying look doesn't matter what she's given what are you doing and where's your heart where's your heart in all this how do you balance and measure what you're giving don't look at what others have given don't look at the average or actually let me be one of the more generous and let's make sure that just by subtle hint dropping rather than publishing it in the

Whitby Gazette everybody knows how generous I've been God won't bless you for that give freely generously joyfully give from what you have remembering remembering that everything you have is a gift from God and just the word sacrificial there are times where God will call you to be sacrificial in your giving he might call you to be sacrificial in your giving financially as you pray with him to him and you speak with him about what you should give you will come up with a figure that you think goodness that's going to hurt okay that's what God has called you to do do it and he'll bless you he'll bless you abundantly for your obedience it might be that we have to be sacrificial with our time our energy our gifts if I'm really honest there are some days where I think oh goodness another meeting another piece of work another something to write another something to publish another something to whatever yeah crack on be sacrificial because God gave his only son because he loves us we cannot beat the sacrificial love that we have from our father

God so how much and how and when and proportion is a matter between you and God and you and God alone and be suspicious of people who say I want to check up on how much you have given I want to know how much you've given there's a church that we're aware of because it's in a different country and my Fiona and I visited it where my parents were living there and they used to publish how much was given Andy and Fiona Lloyd £2.73 or whatever that's terrible it was just it was just shocking but they did it anyway we're not going to do that I promise we're really not going to do that get a slide please giving is meant to be fun and this is where it really becomes quite interesting in giving we've already seen that we should be giving hilariously but Jesus is quoted in Acts chapter 20 as saying it's more blessed to give than to receive do you like giving presents I like giving presents I'm hopeless at choosing them I'm just hopeless but I do like the fun of watching people unwrap a present and looking pleased and not just children actually I quite like watching adults open what they've been given because it's fun isn't it it's fun seeing other people's joy and delight and thrill as they receive something that they hadn't got but they really wanted or really needed so we're meant to be giving and having fun while we're doing it we're meant to be thrilled as we see the bit of money that I was able to give has been put together with other bits of money that other people have been able to give and look look at what's happened in this building in the last two years by the generosity of a relatively small group of people who have been on the roof clambered on the ceiling done all sorts of clever stuff build kitchens and stuff in the children's room and the unity room and all sorts of stuff but that's been funded largely by you how much pleasure does that give us that we can sit in here and know that if it rains we're not necessarily going to get

wet inside that wasn't the case two years ago because it was leaking a bit well quite a lot in fact a very lot giving his attitude of heart and mind just as much as it is behaviour and so we need the help of the

[ 31 : 57 ] Holy Spirit we need to pray that he will help us understand giving and get fun out of giving get joy out of giving really thrill as we give and when it's a challenge when it's been sacrificial when it's really costing when it's hurting we need to go back to God and say help me with my attitude because I need to be able to do this with great joy rather than grudgingly and let's be really clear when I give grudgingly the outcome isn't always great because it feels grudging to other people as well and it feels grudging to God our heart needs to be one of generous giving because that's what God has done to us giving his worship next slide please giving his worship and thanksgiving this service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the

Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God overflowing overflowing with thanks to God as we give we're acknowledging the goodness of God in our own lives it's it's the it's the choosing as we give to use it as personal worship as this is a this is something I'm doing Jesus because I want you to know how much I love you I want you to know how much I am grateful to you how much I want to be part of the family and the kingdom of God and the idea of overflowing many expressions of thanks to God that bubbling over that real thrill of giving I haven't mentioned our granddaughter yet so I'll do it now our granddaughter this week learnt how to giggle and we have a little video of her giggling and she's just learning how to do it she's five months old she's very advanced driving next week playing the piano doing brilliantly but she's just learned how to giggle and watching a baby giggle it's impossible impossible not to smile because she just overflowed she was just giggling away and overflowing with great joy let's giggle as we serve

God let's giggle as we give next slide please and so on gift day as we come together to worship God as we come together to be with each other and be with him as we come together to consider giving our giving is part of our worship our giving needs to be cheerful and not grudging we need to give what we have agreed to give before God not dictated by man and we need to give our time our skills our energy and our money in service of the God who has done so much more for us than we can ever do for him let's pray