

**In God's Image: Why Give to the Church**  
**2 Corinthians 9:6-15**  
**Sunday, February 15, 2026**

This is the third and final Sunday in our generosity initiative, "In God's Image." So, here's where I hope we all are after the first two weeks. First, I hope we all recognize that we are created in the image of a God who is supremely generous; a God who loves us so much that he gave his only Son for our salvation. In other words, we are created to live generously—to give freely of our time, our attention, our abilities and gifts, and of our material resources. We were created to give as Jesus gave.

Which leads into the next thing I hope we know: there is joy in giving. As Jesus said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. Since we were created to be generous, that's where we find our true blessedness and joy.

Which leaves the question I'm going to address today. Where should I give? As most of you are aware, there is no shortage of 401(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations out there to which we can give our time, our attention, our skills, and our money. How do we pick the right ones?

Well, it probably won't surprise you that I'm going to suggest giving to the church. But, in doing so, I want to make one thing very clear up front. You should not limit your generosity to just your church. The church is not the only place where good things are happening. There are a lot of local, national, and international charitable organizations that do really good work.

But the church is about more than just doing good work. As St. Paul says, we are the body of Christ; Christ's presence in the world today. The church is where new and eternal life is

found, not just for those of us already here, but more importantly, for those who haven't yet discovered it. And as important as the work of all those other charitable organizations is, *nothing* is more important than living and spreading the Good News of New Life in Jesus Christ.

Which is, in large part, what Paul is reminding the Corinthian church of in this scripture. Now, by way of background, at that time, Jerusalem was going through a multi-year famine. So, Paul was taking up an offering among the many churches he worked with to help out those poor "saints" in Jerusalem.

In this scripture, he's encouraging the Corinthians to give to that offering. And he bases his request on three principles.

First, he reminds them of the blessings they themselves have received from the church, of which the Jerusalem branch was an integral part. So, in verse 8, he says, "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." The Corinthian church was, on the whole, relatively wealthy. He's reminding them how God has blessed them in that respect. But throughout this letter he also reminds them of the blessing of New and abundant life they have received through God's gift of Jesus and the church; of how Jesus lived generously and of how Paul himself provided to them an example of that same generosity in his work among them.

And the same applies to us. If you're here with us today, God has blessed you. For one thing, we live in a pretty prosperous community in the most prosperous country in the world. We've got some diversity in terms of income and standard of living, but I'd say most everyone here is able to get the bills paid and food on the table without too much trouble.

But that's really the most trivial aspect of our blessedness. God has blessed us with life. God has given us creation. God has given us the bodies and minds which have brought us where we are today. And finally, through Christ's body, the church, God has given us salvation: new and eternal life through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Just as with the Corinthians, everything we are and everything we have is a gift from God.

So, Paul goes on to point out to those Corinthians how, with all their blessings, they have the opportunity through the offering to bless the less fortunate folks in Jerusalem. He says in verses 11-12, "<sup>11</sup>You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us, <sup>12</sup>for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God." In other words, he's making the same point here that we talked about last week: it is more blessed to give than to receive. By blessing the saints in Jerusalem, the Corinthians themselves are being blessed.

In the same way, we have been blessed by God to be a blessing. God did not give us our bodies and minds, our skills and abilities, our relative wealth, for us to hoard them all for ourselves. God blessed us so that we can *be* a blessing to as many other folks as possible.

And finally, Paul points out the end result of all this blessing: "<sup>13</sup>Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ." Through their generosity, God is glorified. By living generously in a culture in which giving was *always* predicated on getting something in return, they were presenting themselves as an attractive alternative of unconditional generosity. They were living so that the people around them might want to get them some of that.

And, once again, the same applies to us. When we live with loving generosity in the midst of a world that's all about me, we stand out; we are different. And I guarantee that most people, when they encounter authentic generosity like that, are going to want to get some of it for themselves.

Now, I hope I've convinced you why your generosity should be directed toward the church. In a world of charitable organizations, we are unique in seeking to share with the world the salvation that Jesus came to make available *to* the world.

But maybe I haven't. And if I haven't, that's on me, not you. But I don't want you to miss out on the main point of the last three weeks: you are created in the image of a generous God. Your fullest and best life is lived in generosity. If, for whatever reason, you don't want to give to the church, you've still got to give.

Which now leaves the question of, "how much?" How much should we give?

Now, if you've been in church any length of time, you know the next words that are going to come out of my mouth: the tithe. Ten percent of your income. But I'm going to be honest. That concept makes me uncomfortable, although probably not for the reason you think.

For one thing, it doesn't appear in the New Testament. It's an Old Testament rule. As such, it was intended to promote generosity by giving the Israelites a clear instruction and goal. But, like many rules, what it ended up doing is creating a ceiling for people's generosity. If someone got to the 10%, they'd stop, figuring they'd checked off that box on their holiness checklist.

Another problem with the tithe is that it's a one-size-fits all rule, which doesn't make sense when it comes to generosity. Maybe a percentage is better than a flat number, but 10% for someone who's barely able to cover the groceries, mortgage, insurance, and utilities hits a lot different than 10% for someone who makes more money than they know what to do with. And anyway, there are some folks with lots and lots of resources who are retired or otherwise not generating traditional income. A percentage doesn't make any sense for them.

More importantly, we are all at different places in our spiritual journeys. I wouldn't expect a person who's just been introduced to the idea that we're created in the image of a loving and generous God to express the same sort of generosity as someone who's lived with that understanding their whole life.

Nevertheless, I feel like I ought to give you *some* guidance. So, rather than just making up a new arbitrary rule, I'm going to invite us to look at John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Now, here was a guy who *really* believed that everything he had was a gift from God, and that everything God had given him was to be used to help God's beloved children. So, early on in his career, he figured out just how much money he needed to live on per year: about 30 pounds, or roughly \$9,300 in today's dollars ... per year. And then, for the rest of his life, that's how much he set aside to live on. He gave the rest away. Which wasn't insubstantial. With all the income he generated from book publishing and other ventures, it is estimated that he gave away about 98% of his lifetime income.

Now, I'm not suggesting any of us ought to do exactly what John Wesley did. He didn't have a wife and he didn't have kids. He didn't have the sort of insurance and medical cost

nightmares we're dealing with. But I do think his example might help us expand our understanding of generosity. Generosity isn't an add-on. It isn't just something we fit in between all our other needs, wants, and desires. John Wesley saw it as a natural and primary outgrowth of who we are as God's beloved children. It's central to who we are as people created in God's image. It's who we were created to be.