

## Theme: First and Proportional

Text: 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 for 9/3/2017

*Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. <sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

We're in our fifth week of our "Joyful Generosity" series, and I hope this has been a blessing for you. As we near the end, let's do a quick review of what we've talked about so far. First, where does everything come from? Scripture says, "**The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it**" (Psalm 24:1). That knowledge affects how we view everything we have in life. Second, do we have a God of abundance or scarcity? We have a God of abundance! That also affects how we view everything in life. Third, "where your treasure is, \_\_\_\_\_" (Luke 12:34). There is a close connection between our heart and our money. Finally, do you remember how much King David gave for building God's temple? David joyfully gave about five billion dollars. Joyful generosity!

Now maybe you're thinking, "I don't have five billion dollars." And that's okay. God knows exactly how much each one of us has. And God has some very practical giving advice that he is sharing with us through his Apostle Paul. As Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth he said, "**Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do**" (v. 1). Paul was in the middle of collecting an offering for the church in Jerusalem which was struggling because of a drought. Paul wanted all the congregations to participate, so he shared some of the most practical giving advice in the Bible. He said: "**On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income**" (v. 2).

That one verse is what we are going to be focusing on today. The first words that jump out at us are, "**Each one of you should set aside a sum of money.**" How many people were to participate in the offering? "Each one of you." The way the IRS works today, you can earn quite a bit of money before you're expected to pay income taxes. That's not the way God works. Giving to God isn't just for the rich or well-off. It's for "each one of you." Every single person has been blessed by God with something. So, every single person has something to give, including "each one of you!"

Here's how God wants us to give: "**On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money.**" Sometimes you hear the excuse, "If I give my money to God, I won't have anything left!" God doesn't ask you to give him everything. What he asks you to do is to give to him first. God knows you're not King David with billions of dollars. He knows you need money for all kinds of things. That's why he gives you money. God doesn't ask you for all, but he does ask you to give to him first. On the first day of the week, before everything else, the Christians Paul was writing to were to set a sum of money aside for God. God loves to hear his people say, "You first, God!"

In the Bible, there is a concept called "firstfruits." Firstfruits giving was one of God's commands to the Israelites. When they started harvesting their crops, they gave the first crops to God. They didn't give all their crops to God, but they said, "You first, God!" When

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new animals were born, they didn't sacrifice them all to God, but they always gave God the firstborn. "You first, God!" Even with a firstborn child, they obviously didn't offer their child, but they gave a special offering for that first child. "You first, God!" Not all, but the first! What was the whole point of firstfruits? It made them trust in God. Even after a long winter, they gave the first grain to God trusting more would come.

I think you know why God says, "Give to me first." How many of you have a lot of money left at the end of a pay period? Probably not many. "God first" easily becomes "God gets what's left!" What do financial planners recommend when saving for retirement? Pay yourself first! Take some off the top and put it in your retirement account. If you don't do it first, there may not be enough left to fund your retirement account.

That's how God asks us to give. For us today, it might not be every Sunday, but with every blessing, God wants us to say to him, "You first, God!" When your check gets deposited in the bank, say, "You first, God!" Before the bills, or the mortgage, or even your IRA: "You first, God!" Earlier we recited together God's promise: **"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine"** (Proverbs 3:9-10). God doesn't ask you to give him everything. He asks you to trust him enough to give to him first.

Does that describe us? Do we say to God with a smile, "You first, God!" Or do all the other things we feel we need overwhelm us: house payments, car payments, school payments, clothes, bills? And then, without realizing it, what's left? I had a professor who would often talk about the "tyranny of the urgent." The seemingly "urgent" things in life easily push out the important things in life. God doesn't ask for all. He only asks to be first. Are we willing to say, "You first, God"?

Think of it this way: Have you ever been last in line at a potluck dinner? What are you usually getting if you're at the end of the line? All the stuff no one else wanted to eat. Maybe you can get one of the good meatballs, but what's left after that? A bit of soggy salad, the Lima bean casserole no one touched, and some kind of dried-out looking meat dish. Do you like leftovers? If Jesus were to show up, whether it was to one of our potluck dinners, or to worship, would we put him first, or would he end up with the leftovers?

What's amazing is that God never gives us leftovers. Remember how I said God commanded his people to give the firstfruits? That's exactly what God has done. God gave us his firstborn. He gave us Jesus. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16). A confirmation student asked, "If Jesus was innocent, why did he die?" Jesus died because he put you first. Jesus said, "You first!" when he died on the cross to forgive your sins. He gave up his life for every time we put ourselves first. God invented the phrase "You first!" God has put you and me first, even when it came to his own Son. So how can we not say, "You first, God!"

But how much should we give first to God? Here's what God says: **"Each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income."** God doesn't give a

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number because every person is different. He doesn't want us to compare. He doesn't want us to give what somebody else gives. He wants us to look at what he's given us and give in keeping with our income. Giving to God first means giving to God our best, in keeping with what we have. It's going to be different for each of us, but the attitude is the same. God first while giving my best.

What exactly does God mean when he says, "**in keeping with [our] income.**" God is a big believer in percentage giving. In the Old Testament, believers were to give ten percent or a "tithe." That was the law for the Israelites. Ten percent of crops, herds, fruit, everything. Some churches today demand ten percent. The problem is that the tithe is part of God's Old Testament laws and was meant just for the Israelites. If a church demands ten percent today, it should also have daily sacrifices, celebrate the Sabbath, and not eat pork, because all those laws go together. Today God doesn't demand ten percent, but he still tells us to give "in keeping with [our] income," and a percentage is the best way to do that.

When we hear we don't have to give ten percent anymore, that often causes a problem. We often start to think, "Now I don't have to give much at all!" That's our sinful nature talking. That's not faith! God doesn't force us to give a certain percent. Instead, he says, "Give your best from your heart." The truth is, if you don't want to give, don't give at all. God doesn't want your money without your heart.

But I know God has your heart. You love Jesus. You want to give back to God to say, "thank you" for our Savior. So how much do we give? Remember, God first while giving my best. I can't tell you what your best is. God wants you to look at everything he has given you and decide what percent you want to give back to him. A percentage means our offerings will go up or down in keeping with our income. If you don't know where to start, try using that ten percent as a guide. If your income is \$50,000 a year, ten percent would be about \$100 a week. If you make \$20,000 a year, ten percent would be about \$40 a week. Could you give that much? Could you give more than that? I'm not telling you that is what you must give. I just want you to think about it. What's my percentage right now? Does that put God first? Is that really my best?

King David's best was five billion dollars. The widow we heard about in the Gospel reading, her best was two little coins. The widow gave a few pennies. David gave five billion dollars. In God's sight, they both gave exactly the same. Both offerings were given with a heart that put God first. This is what makes God's way of giving offerings so great. He doesn't want you to compare yourself to anyone else. He doesn't hold everyone to the same standard because he has blessed us all in different ways. God just reminds us that he has blessed *every* person. Everyone has something to give. God first while giving my best.

I told you earlier about the practice of "firstfruits." There was also a special Festival of Firstfruits at the beginning of their harvest season. When the Israelites harvested the first grain in the spring, they were to take the grain to the temple during Passover week and offer it on the day after the Sabbath—on a Sunday. They gave first to God and trusted that more would follow.

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Do you know what big event happened on Firstfruits Sunday? Easter! Jesus rose from the dead on the Sunday after the Passover. As Jesus was rising from the dead, all Jerusalem was filled with people bringing their firstfruits to God. On that day God was also giving his firstfruits. Scripture says: **“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him”** (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). The whole point of firstfruits was that when you see the firstfruits, you trust that more will follow. Why did Jesus rise from the dead on Firstfruits Sunday? When you see Jesus rise, you know that more will follow. Everyone who believes in Jesus will rise also, which includes you and me. We can put God first as we give him our best because we have a great God who has put us first in every way. Amen.