

## WHY GIVE? 12-9-12

(II Corinthians 8) I graduated from the University of Florida in 1978. I have moved several times since and lived in three different states, but somehow the fundraisers for the school manage to find me. A few weeks ago I got yet another call from someone with the University of Florida college of Arts and Sciences wanting to confirm the address they had for me since I was one of their valued alumni. Of course, after we got thru with the preliminary updating of the files my caller got to the real purpose of the call which was to solicit from me a donation to the college. Now I can imagine causes for which I would have less inclination to give, such as the University of Georgia football boosters, but it struck me right away that I was not going to wrestle over this decision. In fact, I said to the fella on the line, *why in the world would I want to do that?* I hadn't the slightest reason. Now I've never pledged money to anybody over the phone like that but there are times when I feel a real desire to help. Other causes however leave me totally unmoved, especially the ones they collect for at major intersections. Why should I want to give money to buy new uniforms for the NA JV cheerleaders? But this is the kind of thing you get hit up for and it must be that some people actually give for such causes although I have to believe they seldom stop to think about why they do so. When asked to give to something always ask, "why?" Doing that could keep some dollars in your pocket. But it could also open your heart and checkbook to those things that really do merit your support. Of course, it is my hope that you will see fit to give generously to the work of Christ's church, a work to which I am committed with heart, soul, strength and life, but whether you do or not I want you to see what God says are proper motives for giving.

In II Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul discusses this matter of financially supporting the work of the Jesus kingdom. He speaks of the manner of our giving and the amount of our giving, matters which I hope are relevant subjects of thought for you. But more basic to the whole concern is our motive for giving. Paul speaks to that in several ways in this section and I find here three motives laid before us for giving to the Lord and His work. The first lesson on motive is that you give to help others ⑧. *8:1-5 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected,*

*but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.* He says that the churches of Macedonia, Phillipi and others, were giving with great generosity. Incredibly, it says they were pleading with us for the privilege of giving. Think about that. In our day it's the charitable groups that have to beg the givers but God was so at work in these early believers that they were eager to give and what was their motive? Verse 4 tells you that they wanted to give for the sake of the saints. And that doesn't refer to Drew Brees or to St Peter and Paul. They were highly motivated to help other believers in Jesus who had need. I see that same kind of motivation in our church. From the very beginning of our New Hope Christmas store project, all the ornaments were taken like they were free donuts. I commend you for having such a heart to be a blessing.

Of all the motives for giving this is the most obvious to us and it is the one that is most frequently appealed to. Some people encourage your giving by promising that you will be given back ten or twenty times as much. Whether that will happen for you or not I cannot say but this much is clear, when I give to help someone else, that person or that group, at least is helped and that is reason enough for giving. Question? What would you do if you somehow acquired one million dollars? That's one of those theoretical questions that gets asked a lot but its an interesting one since it does tell you a lot about your value system. I remember seeing in the newspaper one time one of these little mini-profiles of a local resident. In trying to learn something about this one young woman they had interviewed the reporter apparently had asked her what she would do if she suddenly came upon a million dollars. Her answer was unremarkably typical. She said she would buy a big house and a Porsche, period. I thought about that answer and really came to feel sorry for this lady whose concerns in life so obviously began with self and ended where they started. Man alive I thought, what I could do with one million bucks! My car and house would never even come to mind. But the ways I could help others with that money are endless. You see, there are two very different approaches to life. One approach has as its aim my direct personal satisfaction and pleasure. What life is all about is filling self up as full as I can get in this life. The other approach sees my life as an instrument in the hands of God to bless others who are in this world with us. Its a concern to do all the good I can, to help others as thoroughly as I am able. You see, the sincere follower of Christ Jesus is someone with his needs met by Christ who is able then to live out this life for the sake of others, for family and church and the good of the world. Make no mistake about it, this me-first, heap-up-my-goodies way of life contradicts Christianity. Romans 14:7 *not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself.* II Corinthians 5:15 *He died for all, so that they*

*who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.* The Christian does not live for self, he lives for Christ who told us to lay down our lives for the sake of one another. Either I am a fool or that says something about how I use the million dollars I may have and the thousand dollars I do have.

Paul said in the passage we read that these Christians in Macedonia were eager to give. How can that be? What is there about the depletion of your savings that is positive for you? Well nothing if that is the way you look upon your giving. If your attention is focused on your bank account giving won't be very enjoyable. But these early believers were not pleading with Paul to have some strange delight at watching their net worth decrease. Their attention was directed toward all the good their gifts would do in helping the poor of the church and the leadership of the church. When you are focused on others you have motivation to give. Tell me, when you donate your money do you see dollar bills dropping from your wallet never to be retrieved? Or do you see the child who will have a way to learn about Christ, the lost person who needs to hear the gospel, the floundering Christian who needs fellowship and instruction? Man, if my dollars can add people to the armies of the kingdom and the choirs of heaven, if they can lift men out of darkness into God's marvelous light, then I am bound to be a joyful giver and a generous one. What then is your focus? Jesus gave Himself, the ultimate gift, when He died on the cross. At any moment He could have come down from the cross, but he stayed. Do you know why? Because He wasn't focusing on the pain and the flowing blood but on you and me, on the millions who would be saved by His sacrifice. **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 through His poverty might become rich.* Those three words tell us his motive, "for your sake." Jesus gave to help others.

As followers of this Jesus and as His church, that is what we are to be about. We are about helping people in the most critical and lasting way – through the gospel, leading them into vital relationship with Jesus and then turning them into helpers of others. As we tell you often, our mission is to make disciples of Jesus who worship God passionately, connect with each other in caring community and impact the world by word and deed. And we are doing precisely those things. God is at work here thru His people. I am peculiarly blessed to see and hear so very much. I am encouraged by folks like Emily Gingrich who heads up our Christmas Store outreach and contributes as well to Bethany Christian Services, a national adoption agency. I am challenged by the commitment to reaching college students that I see in Adrian Ciganic, and Dan Dupee, as well

as Jen Burkholder. I am thrilled to see young couples coming together in small groups to support each other in the challenges of discipleship in this generation. One of our small groups, now led by Steve Kendall includes five young couples, new to our church and new to parenting. And they are seeking to establish homes that will honor Christ and to support each other in the process. That kind of thing may not make headlines but it is what a preferred future is all about. Many of you are motivated to help others through the ministry of North Park Church, and I thank you. If you follow our financial reports in the bulletin you may have noticed that we are about ten percent below budget in our giving so far this year. We can do better than that. In fact, your elders believe that we can exceed budget in the year ahead, and if we can do that by \$80,000 then we will be able, this summer, to retire our mortgage and enter the next fiscal year with no debt and with \$60,000 freed up to invest in ministry here and abroad. That may sound like a big goal in an economy like ours and your first reaction may be, "I can't give that much." But look around you. Of course, you can't do it all yourself but what if everyone here would do what they were able. I'm convinced the storehouse would be full and overflowing. But I can't worry about what the other guy does; I have to stand before the Lord and do what I can. I heard someone tell of an incident on a crowded subway that was boarded by a rather large woman who could not find a seat. Disgusted she complained, "Aren't there any gentlemen on this train?" One small fella rose from his bench and said, "Mam, I can't meet all your needs but I'll make a contribution." That's the spirit we need. Every individual committed to doing what I can in order to help others. That is the first motivation for giving.

The second motivation for giving that we find in our passage is found in 8:8. **7-8** *just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.* Paul is saying that you give to prove your love ®. Now plenty of people say they love the Lord and other people; but we all know that talk is cheap. We have a saying that tells you to put your money where? Where your mouth is. You understand it too, don't you? When someone advises you to buy stock you need to find out if he bought the stock. When you invest some money in something it serves to prove your sincerity. Here Paul says that giving proves your love, that it is more than just talk. Maybe you've heard about the preacher who went to a farmer in his church and said, "Tell me Joe, if you had two horses would you give one of them to the Lord?" Joe said, "I sure would

Pastor.” Pastor said, “If you had two cows would you give one of them to the Lord?” Joe said, “I would.” “If you had two pigs would you give one of them to the Lord?” Joe said, “Aw, Preacher, that’s not fair, you know I own two pigs.” Joe talked a good game till the rubber hit the road. Tom Sine calls this the doctrine of passive availability. We are always offering to the Lord the things we don’t have. Your sincerity never gets tested that way. The book of James warns us against this kind of insincere talk about love. James 2:**15-16** *If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?* The real test comes when it begins to affect your schedule or your budget. Congressmen talk a lot about passing a balanced budget but every year they give themselves an increase of pay above the rate of inflation. Christians are great at talking about how much we love our children, and how concerned we are about our nation, and how we feel so deeply about the work of the great commission here and abroad. The word here challenges us to prove our love. I like the bumper sticker that says, “if you love Jesus tithe, anyone can honk.” We talk about how much we want to worship God, but singing can be easy. A financial offering may be a more substantive sacrifice. The Lord called the support given by the Philippians to Paul a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing unto him. They did more than sing, “I love you Lord” they showed it by their gifts. They proved their love for God.

Christians also talk about being filled by the Spirit of love; and again, the challenge of Paul is to prove it by your giving. One of the things that marked the old revivals was this spirit of generosity. In the biography of George Whitefield, the 18<sup>th</sup> century evangelist, I read about how they had trouble finding buckets big enough to hold all the gifts that were given. The ushers at their meetings would have to stop the collections to empty the offering baskets because they were so full. In Acts chapter 2 and 4 we read of the early church still freshly anointed with the Spirit of God giving to an incredible degree. They were selling property and lands and laying the proceeds at the apostles’ feet. A church’s giving is one barometer of a church’s health and I’m convinced that if revival ever comes, which I am praying it will, it will make an impact on our giving. If it does not, I won’t call it a revival. When the Spirit is active the first fruit is love and love is proven by giving.

So you give to help others. You give to prove your love. Thirdly we see that you give in order to reap ®. II Corinthians 9:**6-11** *Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able*

*to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; 9 as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." 10 Now 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; 11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.* Essentially this text teaches us that when you give you will be blessed. This is the idea of sowing and reaping. Now some folks are understandably hesitant about this idea. It doesn't sound right to give in order to receive. The whole idea of rewards for righteousness seems sub-Christian. But Jesus never hesitated to speak this way. He spoke of laying up treasure in heaven by your giving now. I agree completely that if your only reason for giving is to receive back for yourself something is fouled up in your heart. But the Scriptures clearly lay reaping out as a further motive for giving and I don't want to be more spiritual than God.

We do suffer in our day from a deviant strand of Christian teaching that promises to its supporters material blessings, health and wealth, as the direct consequence of their giving. You've all seen the TV evangelist who claims that God wants the viewer to send his ministry \$200, or if you don't have that much, \$20, although you need to be warned that you are much less likely to get a strange disease if your gift is in the \$200 range. The health and wealth boys have erred in saying that the reward for giving is always material and always in this life. The Scriptures clearly oppose that. But their misunderstanding does have underpinnings of truth. They do see correctly that blessings are promised to givers. Those blessings may take however, any form that the Blesser may care to give them. Many do reap material benefits of their giving. When God said, **Malachi 3:10** *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.* I believe God had in mind material blessings. I heard an interesting story about an architect I knew named Bill Poole. Bill had come to the Lord thru the ministry of Frank Barker of the Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham and about six months later when he went to see Pastor Barker with a problem. He said, "I have a payroll of \$10,000 due this afternoon and I don't have it. I've borrowed all I can borrow, people owe me but can't pay me." He said, "what am I gonna do?" His pastor said, "Well, let me ask you a question. Do you tithe?" Bill said, "you don't understand my problem." Mr. Barker said, "Well maybe I do. Let's suppose that I set you up in business in Atlanta and said, *you take the first 10% of the profit*

*and send it to me, that's mine for setting you up in business, the rest you can plow back into the business, you can live on whatever, but the first 10% goes to me.'* At the end of the year you send me 5% and you say *I'm sorry there's not much more but things are kind of slow getting started; we're really doing well to send this much.* Next year you send me 5% and say *business is doing better but I had to rent more warehouse space and I have a larger inventory; this is all I can send.* The next year you say, *business is great! It's doing so good I had to get a place at the lake to get away, so it's only 5%.* The next year you say, *business is still great but we had a baby and had to add a room to the house so it's only 5%.* What would I do?" Bill said, "You'd put me out of business. I think I understand, can we pray?" So the two men got down on their knees and Bill said, "Father, I'm gonna start tithing today. Whatever You do, that's settled. And I thank you for calling this to my attention. I never even connected the two. Now God, if you want to help, I could use some help." He got up, left the church office, went down to the post-office, stuck his hand in his box and pulled out a check for \$10,000. Six months later Bill was back at the pastor's office. He had the same problem except this time he had a payroll due of \$16,000. Pastor Barker asked, "Are you tithing? He said, "Yes." Well, is there any area of your life where you're in conscience resistance against God?" "No." So the two men just prayed together about the problem. Bill went down to the post-office, stuck his hand in his box and found nothin, zilch. The next day he had to call Birmingham city hall; he was bidding a project down there and he had to talk to somebody. He had done work for the city before and he asked to speak to a particular man. Let's call him Mr. Smith. So they connected him up and they start talking. After a few minutes the fella says, "who did you ask to speak to?" He said, "I asked to speak to Mr. Smith." He said, "Well this is Mr. Jones. But did you say your name was Poole? Is that Bill Poole of Poole, Pardue, Marson and Dean?" He said, "yes sir." He said, "well I have a check here for \$16,000 for you do you want to come get it or should I mail it?" He said, "I'll come get it." Now that's unusual. But it is not unusual for God to move on behalf of His people and in answer to prayer.

More wonderful than the Lord's material blessings to the giver are his spiritual provisions. God grants spiritual blessings to the man who gives. In fact, that is the emphasis of this passage. II Corinthians 9:10 *Now 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.* It is your righteousness that will increase as you give. Do you want to grow spiritually? Then give. Giving is not God's way of raising His money, it's God's way of raising His children. Could it be that the

increased sense of intimacy with God, the power to overcome temptation, the fruitfulness of ministry that you've been wanting has been hindered by your failure to give generously financially? We stifle and quench the work of God's Spirit in our lives by saying, "no" when the Spirit calls us to give. If you want more of the Lord, consider giving him more of what is yours. In Luke 16:**10-11** *He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. 11 "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the {use of} unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?* The true riches He speaks of are spiritual riches. Jesus is saying that if you aren't faithful with money God won't give you blessings of soul. These, the spiritual blessings, are what Jesus calls true riches. And Brother, let me tell ya, it may not sound good to the unbeliever, but there is no greater increase of your gift than to give money which lasts only a short while to reap a character which lasts forever and holds promise of blessing for this life and the next.

So you give in order to reap. You may reap materially or spiritually or both but for sure you will reap. And the more you give the more you receive. Now to the unbeliever that doesn't sound right. That's because the public schools don't teach divine math. God says, Proverbs 11:**24-25** *There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. 25 The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.* He says the more you give the more you have? Bunyan wrote a little verse that says, *A man there was they called him mad. The more he gave the more he had.* When you are banking on God's promise you cannot lose. That should be good news in these days of a shaky market. There is only one place to find a sure bet — investing in the kingdom whose builder and maker is God. It's like bobbin for water; you can't miss. And not only is it safe, but it also offers the highest yields for your investment so don't be doubtful; give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and overflowing. When you buy stock and your money doubles you always wish you had put more in. Think about that when you give. Our God doesn't pay dividends but mult dividends. He is he God who multiplies. **10** *Now 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.*

In all that we have discussed, the three motives of helping others, proving your love, and reaping the benefits, Jesus is our great example. II Corinthians 8:9 points us to him. **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 through His poverty might become rich.* There we see Jesus giving to help others. He said, Matthew 20:28 *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.* He gave his life to help others. He also gave His life to prove His love. Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* He even gave His life to reap a harvest, to take for Himself a people for His own possession. Question: Have you decided to follow Jesus? You think about that and what that means as we commit ourselves to the Lord.