

Sermon for July 28, 2024 - 10th Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 9:8-11 (EHV)

Theme: **Don't be afraid to give.**

- 1) God enables our giving.
- 2) God blesses our giving.

⁸ God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work. ⁹As it is written: He scattered; he gave to the poor. His righteousness remains forever. ¹⁰And he who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed for sowing, and will increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be made rich in every way so that you may be generous in every way, which produces thanksgiving to God through us.

I am ashamed to admit it, but my stomach drops whenever a person or organization asks me for generous financial assistance that will force me to rethink my budget. Why? Because I have a selfish, sinful nature inside of me that doesn't want to do anything good. It tempts me with thoughts like: "That person or organization needs so much money that I don't see how my donation will help in any meaningful way. Besides, I need to take care of my family. I have grocery expenses, rent, utility payments, car maintenance, tuition fees etc.... Who knows when unforeseen difficulties or disasters might pop up – requiring a lot of money. Don't I have a responsibility to my family to prepare for those potential dangers as best as I can? And aren't the people asking for money at fault for their own problems? Shouldn't they have planned better or been more responsible? Why do I have to help them out? Besides, other Christians get to enjoy their wealth by purchasing nicer cars and furniture and going on expensive trips; when will it be my turn to do the same?"

Yes, my sinful nature does everything it can to try to prevent me from using the financial blessings God gives me to do the good God wants me to do. That is why our sermon text really strikes at my heart. Not only does it address my irrational fears for not wanting to help others, but it also gives me the Gospel motivation I need to want to help.

With the apostle Paul as our guide, let us consider these things under the theme: **Don't be afraid to give.** 1) God enables our giving. 2) God blesses our giving.

Part One: God enables our giving

Our sermon text is part of a longer discourse on charitable giving found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Christians in Jerusalem were about to suffer famine. The apostle Paul made this emergency known to the Gentile churches throughout Asia Minor. The congregation in Corinth was the first to promise aid. In the verses surrounding our sermon text, Paul encourages the Corinthians to fulfill their pledge to help – not because they had to, but out of love for God and their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

But this invites the question: why would the apostle have to encourage the Corinthians to make good on their pledge? Because he perceived how the devil and their sinful natures would try to tempt them with fears like: “What if the famine spreads or some other danger happens here? Will we have enough to provide for ourselves if we give our money away?” You see, most people in the ancient world lived hand to mouth – not possessing any “expendable income” that many of us are blessed with today. On top of this, most of the Corinthian Christians were not wealthy. I can imagine them wondering what good the little they could offer would be for the many who lived in Jerusalem. Would their charity make any sort of difference?

The apostle Paul confronted those fears and temptations with a promise: ⁸ *God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work.*

Yes, our God is full of compassion, mercy, and grace – so much so that he gave up his dearly loved, only begotten Son to rescue us from the hell our sins had earned. Now, if God *did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?*ⁱ

And that is exactly what the LORD promises to do for us: *God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work.*

Did you notice that the words “all” and “every” are used five times in this one little verse? God is making a point: you don’t have to worry about anything. No matter what circumstances you face in life, dear Christian, the LORD will make sure that you have everything you need – not only for yourself but also to help your neighbour.

Now, it is important to note that the phrase “having all that you need” does not merely refer to an abundance of material or financial blessings. Many wealthy people possess the means to help but cannot because their heart is not in the right place. Why? People are naturally selfish: not wanting to give away their wealth unless they also benefit from their giving.

For that reason, the LORD not only supplies Christians with the means to help others, but He also gives us the appropriate desire and motivation to do so. You see, proper Christian charity should never be forced or exercised out of guilt. No, God wants all our Christian giving to be an act of faith, exercised out of love. And that can only happen after the LORD overwhelms us with His love through the Gospel.

Yes, proper Christian charity can only flow from our faith in Jesus. How so? Because the more confident we are that the LORD will take care of our welfare, the more willing we will be to let go of the physical blessings to which we cling. The fear of “not having enough” can no longer prevent us from generously helping those in need. Why not? Because we trust our heavenly Father’s love to provide everything we need in Christ.

Let me explain what I mean with an illustration: Parents, if your son or daughter gave up their entire allowance to help someone in need, would you stop providing them with food, shelter, and the toys they enjoy? Of course not. You probably would be inclined to reward them for their love.

If that is how you, a sinful mortal, would react to your children’s expressions of generosity, how do you think your holy, heavenly Father will respond when you use your material blessings to support the ministry of the Gospel or offer aid to those in need? Do you think he says to the angels: “Look at my foolish child: doing what I asked him to do by giving away his material possessions to those less fortunate than him. I think I’m going to let him starve because he didn’t selfishly put himself first”? God certainly does not say or think that! Instead, God expresses joy and pleasure when we share our possessions with those in need out of love for him. Why? Because we are fulfilling the purpose for which he gave us our possessions in the first place. Quoting a Psalmⁱⁱ that speaks about a believer’s response to God’s grace, Paul writes: *He scattered; he gave to the poor. His righteousness remains forever.* In other words, the Christian, trusting in God’s salvation and continued providence, generously shares his gifts with those in need out of thanks to God. God will forever preserve such a man who lives out his faith in love.

Yes, generous, Christian giving is always an act of faith – revealing that God is your first love and priority in life – above all worldly things. It reveals your trust in him alone for your daily bread and blessings – recognizing that all you have comes from him. It demonstrates that you are truly concerned for your neighbour – mirroring the compassion God himself has for his fallen creation in Christⁱⁱⁱ.

How sad it is, then, that we worry about our finances. We think: “If only I had more money, then I could give more money.” But God is not interested in the amount of money we put in the offering plate. He is interested in the attitudes of our hearts as we make our offerings – desiring to see genuine fear, love, and trust in him above all things. Christian charity puts our Christian faith and love into joyful action. May this lead us to pray: “Lord, forgive my greedy heart and unfounded fears. You promise in Scripture: *I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you.*”^{iv} As I consider how you have faithfully kept your promise to me throughout my life and demonstrated your absolute love for me in Jesus, move me to trust you by generously helping others out of love for you with the gifts you have given me.”

Part Two: God blesses our giving.

The Bible is clear: God not only enables us to give but also loves it when we give – so much so that he promises to bless it!

It should be noted that the blessings he promises us in response to our giving are not blessings we deserve. They are gracious gifts from a loving father. On top of this, they are not necessarily financial. The blessings could be joyful contentment with less, a greater spiritual understanding and joy over his will, clothes that don't wear out, etc...

It must also be understood that the blessings God promises might not be immediately apparent. In His wisdom, God might allow us to struggle with difficulties or financial hardship to test and strengthen our faith in Him. But one thing the LORD will never do is abandon us, as King David once wrote: *I was a young man. Now I am old. But I have never seen a righteous person forsaken or his children begging for bread. Every day he is gracious and lends. His children will be blessed.*^v You see, our existence is not dependent on our possessions, but on the LORD's blessing – as the Scriptures say: *man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*^{vi}

Think of the other two Scripture lessons for today:^{vii} did God let his loved ones starve, even though they had no food or means to provide for themselves? No, by the power of his word, he provided for them through the gifts of others – even though those gifts were, humanly speaking, inadequate to accomplish any good! The LORD promises to use that same powerful word to spiritually and physically bless us in our giving so that our gift can continue to help others, as the apostle Paul states: *he who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed for sowing, and will increase the harvest of your righteousness.* ¹¹*You will be made rich in every way so that you may be generous in every way, which produces thanksgiving to God through us.*

When Paul brought the charity he collected from the Corinthians to the Church in Jerusalem, it certainly resulted in thanksgiving to God. Even though the individuals who gave the offering might have been tempted to worry that it wouldn't be enough, the LORD blessed that money to be just the right amount needed to save the saints in Jerusalem from starvation. They got to experience firsthand the beautiful fellowship they had with fellow Christians across the Roman world. The gift fostered greater peace and unity among Jewish and Gentile believers. It helped the Gospel spread.

Your generosity also results in thanksgiving to God. Through your church offerings, you are visiting the sick, evangelizing the lost, calling back the straying, teaching children God's Word, sharing Christ with those who do not know him, instructing new pastors and teachers, sending out missionaries, and making sure that the Gospel remains preached in Canada. Whenever you donate money or material goods to humanitarian organizations like food banks, clothing pantries, or even the person who comes to your door looking for a little help, you are also giving to God by showing love to those who are in need. And your generosity results in thanksgiving to God for the love He shows through your charity.

When I think about all these truths, then all the excuses my selfish, sinful heart gives for not generously giving to others in need don't hold much weight, do they? No, the LORD gives me every reason to want to share my blessings with others. Has he not done the same for you?

Brothers and sisters in Christ: **Don't be afraid to give.** Why? Because God not only enables us to share our blessings with others, but he also blesses our sharing! May these truths move our hearts to compassion – especially when people are in need. Clinging to the LORD's promise to provide, may we joyfully share with others the blessings God has entrusted to our care – all to the praise of His saving name. Amen.

ⁱ Romans 8:32 EHV

ⁱⁱ Cf. Psalm 112

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Matthew 5:42-45

^{iv} Hebrews 13:5 EHV

^v Psalm 37:25-26 EHVou

^{vi} Deuteronomy 8:3 EHV

^{vii} Cf. 2 Kings 4:42-44 & Mark 6:35-44