

OUR GIVING GOD: BEYOND WORDS | 2 Corinthians 9 | 10.20.19

INTRO: Is it fun to give? When is it most fun to give? When is it most rewarding to give?

As I thought about these questions several stories came to mind and I thought I'd share a recent one. Friends that we worshiped and worked with in Chicago were coming through Bakersfield on a vacation. They gave us a two month heads up that they were coming and asked if they could spend the night. They have four children. We live in a tiny two-bedroom apartment. I asked if we could put them up at a nearby motel for the night. "No," they said, "We want to be with you guys. We're okay with being cramped. We want to spend the time with you." So we swept our carpets every day for a week, bought some snacks and breakfast items that we knew they liked, got out the blowup mattress, and received our friends, fairly late at night. We didn't talk a lot about college football that night - he didn't want to because, well it hadn't been a good year for his team (not a good decade either!)... otherwise we had the best time! It was fun! We found out our son isn't the only kid in the world who at the time preferred to sleep in a fully lit room with background noise, and we enjoyed a long evening of conversation and deep sharing that was good medicine for all four of us adults.

I think all of us have a story or two about giving, and if you don't have a story about giving, you may have one about receiving that inspires you to give.

As we talk more about giving this morning, I want to emphasize that God has ABUNDANCE planned for those who give cheerfully. We are going to look at ALLOWANCE FOR ABUNDANCE... how can I make room for God's abundance in my life? Then we are going to talk about

ATTRACTING ABUNDANCE... loaded words in today's spiritual climate but we will see it here in a Biblical principle. Then we are going to talk about ADVANCING ABUNDANCE and finish with God's Greatest Gift... His greatest expression of generosity to us. Because our God is a Giving God.

ALLOWANCE FOR ABUNDANCE

Eagerness and Enthusiasm, 9:1-4 Someone say, "Make room." I make allowance, or room for abundance in my life through eagerness and enthusiasm, or another way to say it is by ***being willing and excited.***

The Corinthians were eager to help because they saw the need. Christians in Jerusalem were facing a great need. They had double taxation (from their own government and the occupying Roman forces), they had famine and food shortages, they struggled under a horrible economy in general, so – they didn't even have food down, let alone clothing and shelter. Jerusalem was a large city and there weren't enough jobs to go around. And even subsistence wages were heavily taxed. In addition to that, people of Jewish heritage who were spread out across the known world often moved back to Jerusalem to retire there. So, the congregation of Jerusalem had many people who were underemployed, many others who were jobless, and many others who were unable to work due to physical condition or age. Yet Jerusalem was the mother church, already caring for the poor in her own congregation, supporting the work of the Apostles and others who went out as missionaries, evangelists, and church planters. They had outgrown the temple courts and had the constant pressure of setting up worship services wherever they could, and they had their own spiritual leaders and caregivers who gave their full-time attention to

the needs and ministries of the church. Many new Christians understood that they received the Gospel and initial discipleship and nourishment in the faith because of the generosity of the Jerusalem church, and as they learned of their struggle, they were inspired to do something for them.

The Corinthians were eager to help because they were in community with others who were helping. The church in Corinth was not alone.

There was a larger region of Achaia that encompassed at least seven other cities with churches in them, including the church in Macedonia, with whom the Corinthians had a friendly competition of sorts. When the enthusiasm of one congregation lagged, all they had to do was look at the enthusiasm of the others, and they got inspired again.

Do you surround yourself with people who are excited about the church? Who want to give, and are happy about doing so? Or are your friends ambivalent or active complainers? The ones who give when it suits them... but then there are strings attached? The company we keep has important effects on us. The people we spend our time with can either bring us closer to Christ or take us further away from Him and His purposes for our lives.

The Corinthians were the pacesetters. They were the first to see the need and step up to do something about it. They sent an initial offering to the church at Jerusalem and promised that within the next year they would be able to “bless” them again – “blessing” is what the phrase “generous gift” means. Paul was hopeful that they would continue to do this willingly, and according to their means (8:11-12), because ***it’s about your willingness to give, not your means to give*** (8:12), although the Corinthians knew that they were way better off than the Jerusalem

Christians, or the Macedonians who had already pledged to give and gathered their offering and would soon be sending delegates to go to Jerusalem with representatives of Corinth. And, as the Corinthian Christians were giving generously to the needs of the Jerusalem Church, they were assured that in their time of need, the generous gifts of others to the church may in turn provide for them as well (8:14), and, as we shall see, God Himself would provide.

Preparation for Enthusiastic Giving, 9:3-5

The Corinthian Christians sent an initial offering and pledged more, but Paul was aware that their preparation for giving was beginning to lag, and so he was looking for ways to encourage them but not coerce them to finish their work of giving. Hence he sent Titus to coach them along and encourage – not force – them to prepare their offering for Jerusalem so that when the Macedonian delegates come, they would find Corinth as ready and willing to give as they were.

What does preparation for giving look like in your life? Some of you are great with budgets, and you're just naturally numbers people. Some of us are horrible with numbers and struggle to put budgets together. One of many principles that I heard Dave Ramsey say in Financial Peace University – which by the way will be offered here in January – was something like, "You need to tell your money where to go, otherwise it will just go."

Preparation and wise decision-making (Proverbs 3:5&6) bring security and confidence in giving that yields enthusiasm. There is a security that comes from preparation and wise decision-making that gives you a confidence when you give. There is a godly satisfaction when you give

a planned gift that you can see is making a difference in your church and the world around you.

TIME TO TALK ABOUT FRIES

And now a few words about french fries... I just want you to know, in my extensive research I even went to National Geographic just for you!

STEFAN BOHNENBERGER IS famed for having made a cross of gold from a pair of French fries.

Titled “Pommes d’Or,” the crossed fries were displayed in a room of their own at the Munich-based art gallery Mosel and Tschechow, where, according to the artist, they were intended to demonstrate “the metamorphosis of a profane, everyday object into a sacred artwork.” Trouble arose in 2005, when it was discovered that the original plain-potato fries on which the gold cross was based—an integral part of the exhibit—had mysteriously vanished.

Bohnenberger sued and was awarded a compensatory sum of 2,000 euros for the missing fries, possibly the most money ever spent on two strips of potato. This was a high point in the history of the French fry.

The French fry—though indisputably a fry—may not actually be French. Some claim that fries originated in Belgium, where villagers along the River Meuse traditionally ate fried fish. In winter, when the river froze, the fish-deprived villagers fried potatoes instead. It’s said that this dish was discovered by American soldiers in Belgium during World War I and, since the dominant language of southern Belgium is French, they dubbed the tasty potatoes “French” fries.ⁱ

I could continue to talk about French fries; long before the boys in Belgium, Thomas Jefferson first started serving them, along with Macaroni and cheese, at Monticello. Did you know that potatoes originally came from Peru? I could do this all day and it would be interesting but would have nothing to do with the story of the French fries that Pastor Richard told two weeks ago. We're good at doing that, aren't we? If we talk around something long enough, we don't have to address the heart of it. :) ***The point of the fries is: God is the Source of our blessings.*** As we share the blessings He's given us with others, especially through the church, we begin to ***allow*** abundance and, in a biblical way, we begin to ***attract*** abundance.

ATTRACTING ABUNDANCE, 9:6-7

Sowing and Reaping: This principle of sowing and reaping is timeless! And it's in this way that we attract abundance.

"You reap what you sow." (Galatians 6:7)

Also, the words of Jesus from Luke 6:38. "Give, and it will be given to you... With the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Whatever you sow, positive or negative, your harvest (reaping) will be later and greater. However much you sow, positive or negative, your harvest (reaping) will be later and greater. It won't be fair, but it will be later and greater. That's great if you sow good seed and not so great if you sow negativity. If you sow good seed from a grateful heart, guess what kind of harvest you will reap?

As I was preparing to talk about this I was looking for a little inspiration about giving and I watched a message by **Craig Groeschel**, the pastor of LifeChurch in Oklahoma – you know, the church that gave us the free Bible app? He said this: **God designed us to pour, not store.** When we give we ***pour***, and live as God designed. That doesn't mean that those who make wise financial decisions that result in tremendous wealth-building are automatically sinful, but ***hoarding is not in God's design***.

Neither is giving when your heart isn't in it. And that's the difficulty with talking about money. Too often we are treated to people who make us feel guilty about what we are not giving or we fall prey to gimmicks, from anointed prayer handkerchiefs to bobbleheads of favorite Christian celebrities. Guilt-giving and gimmick-giving lead to grudge giving. Guilt and gimmicks are primary reasons to make sure you take the time to make a decision about your giving. Then your giving will be attitude-based giving.

Attitude-Based Giving: “decision from your heart.” This kind of decision-making involves the mind, emotions, and faith – all three – to make the decision. God gave you a mind and emotions for a reason. He also made you alive in Him for a reason. He wants you to use your mind, your emotions, and your faith – all three – when you're making a decision to give. This is how you guard against a sales job where you're not guilt-giving, not grudge-giving, and not gimmick-giving, but you're **CHEERFULLY** giving. Because I've made my decision, now there is no pressure, there is no resentment, and there are no strings attached to it. Giving becomes a celebration instead of a duty, because I realize that when I give I am initiating and participating in a cycle of abundance in my life.

Someone say, ***"It's not the size of the gift that matters."*** [go ahead]
"It's the size of the heart of the giver that matters."

Initiating the **Cycle of Abundance, 9:8-11** – LOOK AT HOW GOD BLESSES
THE CHEERFUL GIVER!

(Group participation) ***All times! All things! Everything I need!***

You're going to abound in every good work. Not just barely get there.
Not just do one little thing. Not just do my one little bit and then
nothing more will come of it than that. ABOUND... ***All times! All
things! Everything I need!***

Look at how God provides: seed and bread! All along the way He
provides! From the time the seed is planted to the time the grain is
harvested, through the milling process and into the bread, and then
into your mouth...

All times! All things! Everything I need!

This is good news to everyone up and down the food chain too. Not
everyone is a great farmer, not everyone is a great baker, not everyone
is good at the milling process, and not everyone is able to gather in the
grain when it is ready to be gathered. BUT EVERYONE CAN DO THEIR
PART and as they do their part with CHEERFULNESS they participate in
something greater than themselves! And together as the Church we all
advance God's abundance.

All times! All things! Everything I need!

ADVANCING GOD'S ABUNDANCE, 9:12-15

Supplying Needs but even more than that...

Overflowing into more from others: reaching others with the Gospel, inspiring others to praise God, and coming back to you as others pray for you. The initial offering overflows into MANY EXPRESSIONS OF PRAISE (9:12b)... from running the marathon with Team World Vision, to going out and filling your box for Operation Christmas Child to going with the knitters group to the Women and Children's Recovery Center at the Mission to singing in the Choir or Worship Team, there are many expressions of praise, and they flow from the expression of praise of the Church. That's why your church needs to receive your priority financial giving, but that's also why your church doesn't insist that the church receive ALL your giving. We love overflow!

And one other observation about giving... cheerful giving as God designs it brings God's people together. We see primarily non-Jewish congregations giving to the mother church, which was majority Jewish. It didn't matter, and it doesn't matter today.

You are connected because of Jesus Christ and your generosity.

GOD'S GREATEST GIFT

Jesus is beyond words. He is INDESCRIBABLE.

God's gift inspires us to give.

TAKEAWAYS:

Through cheerful giving, I can initiate and participate in a cycle of abundance in my life. (2 Corinthians 9:6)

Cheerful giving comes from a decision made in your heart, using your mind and emotions and inspired by faith. (2 Corinthians 9:7)

ⁱ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/food/the-plate/2015/01/08/are-french-fries-truly-french/>