

“The Generous Life”

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • August 23, 2015

This morning we are finishing up this series on living life with God, which as we've seen is way better than trying to do life on our own. When Jesus came his primary message was that living in the kingdom of God is available to everyone, right now. So for the past four weeks we have talked about being *with God* in our time. Every moment of every day is an opportunity to be with God, but we have to choose to be aware of His presence. Then we talked about using our minds to be with God in our thoughts, replacing not-God thoughts with God-thoughts. Then last week we discussed inviting God to be present in our relationships—in our marriages, and our families, in our workplace – any relationship is an opportunity to be with God.

Well today we're going to talk about one more area of your life that you can live *with God* or without God – that's your money. Money can do strange things to our minds. Whether we have a lot of it or don't have any, we can get so focused on money that we begin to crowd out other things. It occupies our thoughts. It makes us do crazy things. In 1 Timothy the Apostle Paul writes that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. If we allow it, money will separate us from God.

That's probably why Jesus talked about money more than he talked about any other subject. Of Jesus' thirty eight parables, twelve deal with the right or wrong use of money. One out of every six verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is on the subject of money. All throughout the Bible we find instructions from God on how we are to handle money in a way that glorifies Him. Basically, the way we handle our finances can be a joy-giver or a joy-stealer. The way we view our money can either bring us closer to God or move us farther away.

There are basically two ways of looking at money and giving. The first way could be called the world's way. This way says that money is simply math. I can count how much I earn and

how much I spend and as long as I spend less than I earn then I have some left over to save or to give away. If I look at my money this way, then giving means I have less. If I have ten dollars and I give away one, that leaves me with nine dollars. If I have a hundred dollars and I give away ten, then that leaves me with ninety dollars. If I have a thousand dollars and I give away a hundred dollars, I'm left with nine hundred. But now a hundred dollars is a lot of money. I start to think of all the things I could do with a hundred dollars. Maybe I should cut back on my expenses. Maybe I shouldn't give away this money. If I give it away I might not have enough. So I grasp it tighter. Fear and anxiety begin to creep into my thoughts. And those are not fruits of the Spirit. Fear and anxiety are the fruit of not-God thinking.

But there's another way of looking at your money and your giving. We'll call it the *with God* way. Jesus said, “give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” In today's passage from 2 Corinthians, Paul says something similar. He uses an analogy from agriculture. He says, “whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” What if we realized that the money we have is not the real resource but it's merely the seeds and our giving to God is like planting seeds?

If you look at what the Bible says about money, you will discover that your money, your resources, actually belong to God. Verse 10 is clear about this. “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food *will* supply and multiply your seed for sowing.” God has entrusted some of His resources to you with a purpose. So what is his purpose in blessing you with resources? This passage shows us two purposes. The first is in verse 10, to “increase the harvest of your righteousness.” To put it

another way, you will grow to be more like Christ. One of God's purposes with money is to give you an opportunity to grow in faith, to trust Him. Money is not really about money, it's about trust. Who are you going to trust to provide—yourself or God?

The second reason God blesses you with resources is for you to bless others. In verse 8 Paul says, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." When you are faithful with your money, God promises to provide everything you need. Notice it doesn't say you will get everything you *want*. But you will get what you need with enough to be able to help others. Verse 11 says it this way: "You will be *enriched* in every way to be *generous* in every way." That's a bold claim. Somebody should do some research to see if it's true.

Actually, somebody has. Christian Smith, a sociologist at Notre Dame, has done extensive research on the science of generosity. He studied 2,000 people to see how generosity affected other areas of life and he published the results in a book called, *The Paradox of Generosity*. What he found is that people who are generous with their money and time and relationships (any of that sound familiar?) are happier, healthier, and more resilient than their less generous counterparts. The people in the study who were generous were significantly less likely to experience depression or anxiety.

Not only that, but he discovered that people who were generous ended up better off financially. "By grasping onto what we currently have," Smith writes, "we lose out on better goods that we might have gained. In holding onto what we possess, we diminish its long-term value to us. By always protecting ourselves against future uncertainties and misfortunes, we are affected in ways that make us more anxious about uncertainties and vulnerable to future misfortunes. In short, by failing to care for others, we do not properly take care of ourselves."

Why is that? Smith says, "Practicing generosity requires and reinforces the perception of living in a world of abundance and blessing, which itself also increases happiness and health." Maybe the reality of the universe is that whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Give and it will be given to you. God is serious about your giving. In fact, it's the only time He ever says, "test me." In Malachi 3 God says, "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need." It's like God's saying, "90% of your income with my blessing is way more than 100% of your income without my blessing."

So how do we actually experience God's presence and blessing in our finances? It's in our giving. In particular I'd like to point out that it's in tithing. One of the findings of Christian Smith's research is that only 2.7% of Americans give ten percent or more of their income. But something happens when we commit to tithe. Our relationship with God changes. Tithing requires a certain level of trust that God is able and willing to provide for our needs. The result is that rather than concentrate on how little we have, we begin focusing our minds on how much God has.

There's one more piece to this puzzle. Proverbs 3 says, "Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the *firstfruits* of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine." The idea is that not only are we to give God ten percent of our income, we are to give him the *first* ten percent. In ancient Israel, when their crops began to come in, the people were to bring the first part of the harvest to God. It was a way of saying, "God I trust you to provide the rest." It was risky. A storm or insects could destroy the rest of the crop. But they brought the firstfruits as a way of expressing their trust that God would provide the rest.

So how about your giving? Are you living the *with God* life in your finances? One way to tell is to figure out what percent of your income you give to Him. Have you considered tithing? Leslie and I have been tithing for a number of years now and I can honestly tell you it changed our life. And with online giving, it's easy to give our firstfruits-it's automatically deducted from our account every time I get paid. Now I know that not everyone is able to tithe. Poor decisions in the past leave us in a position that prevents

that level of giving. But the first step is to make a decision to give. The Bible is clear that you should make a covenant with God to give, that you should give regularly, and that your gift should be costly to you – a sacrifice. Once you commit to giving on a percentage basis, aim to increase that percentage until you reach the full tithe. And then watch the way God uses you. As one author put it, “God always blesses those who have shown Him that they can be trusted.”

Amen