Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Living for the Joy of Giving
Scripture: Luke 16
Code: 42-208

Turn in your Bible, if you will, to Luke 16. I want to give you one final message in this section of Luke 16:1-13, actually trickling into verse 14. And I'm not going to go back over what we've covered for two weeks, but I will read the lessons that Jesus drew from the parable that He told in the first eight verses. Just look at verse 9. "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, money, "That when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. If; therefore, you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, money, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that, which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon, or money."

Now we have talked about the lessons our Lord has given us here and I just remind you what they are. Jesus told a parable about a man who used his access to money to purchase friends for his future. Knowing he was going to be terminated by his employer and he would be out on the street and he needed a future, he needed a hope, a place to stay, and income, used his access to his master's money to put people in his debt so that in the future they would be obligated to take him in. He used the resources available to him to secure friends for his future.

Jesus said about that, that the sons of light are often not as wise as the sons of this age. It the sons of light were wise, that is those of us who are believers, those in the kingdom, if we were wise we would use our money also to secure friends for our future and not an earthly future, but a heavenly future, and Jesus says if you use your money wisely you will make friends for yourselves who will receive you into heaven. That is to say when you arrive in heaven there will be a welcoming committee there who are there because you invested your money in gospel enterprises that reached them and they being informed by God of that will be there to welcome you when you enter into heaven. Using your money to purchase friends for eternity, using your money to advance the gospel, using your money for heavenly purposes, laying up your treasure in heaven, that's what Jesus, is talking about.

And He goes on to say it's not a matter of how much you have, it's a matter of your heart attitude. If you have a little and you're faithful you'll be faithful with much. If you have a little and you're not faithful you'll be unfaithful with more. The issue he said is your heart attitude and if you are not faithful

in little things you will not be faithful in greater things and furthermore you will forfeit your eternal reward, not just the friends that will welcome you there, but the true riches in verse 11. If you want to be entrusted with the true riches, that is the fullness of the heavenly reward, it's going to be a reflection on how you used your money here.

Furthermore, in verse 12 he said, "It's not yours." If you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's then whose going to give you that which is your own? Speaking again of the fact that everything you have is God's and if you're not faithful in how you use God's money, which is given to you as a stewardship here, it will show up in the fact that you will not be given a full reward that would be your own in eternity to come. Then he says, "It's a matter of who you serve, who you love, who is your master."

We've talked about all of that and I don't want to go anymore into that except to say we have learned some very important lessons about money. You can't take it with you. It's all going to stay here, but you can invest it in such a way as to reap the reward the reward of that investment forever in the friends that will be there to welcome you in eternity, in the extent of your eternal reward and riches, the capacity you will have to serve the Lord forever, and to enjoy the bliss of heaven. It does matter how you use your money and it matters a lot.

On the other side the negative is I Timothy 6:9-10, don't love money, love the Lord, don't love money. If you love money everything is distorted, corrupted, and you're pierced through with many sorrows and pains that are needless. So now we come to this question: How do we use the money? We talked about attitudes toward money. We talked about materialism. We talked about those things last time. I want to talk today about how do we use our money. How do we use it to honor God? And I'll give you some things that are pretty obvious. I'm not really going to preach a sermon. I'm just going to talk to you a little bit. Just shepherd you a little in this area, rather than expositing a Scripture, we'll bounce around a little bit and I hope I can give you some biblical wisdom that will help you.

First of all last time we recognized that it is God who gives us the power to get well, that God has enabled us to have money, and have the things that money provides, and He does it sovereignly as He wills in differing amounts based upon his own choice. But He intends some basic things to occur with whatever it is that we possess. One, support your needs. God knows that you have to survive; you have to live. You're not supposed to be a charity case. You're supposed to take care of yourself. The Bible says if a man doesn't work he doesn't eat, so you're given the priority responsibility for you as an individual to take care of our own needs. That is why God has given you what He has given you in terms of resources and talent and opportunity, so you can engage yourself in such a way as to take of yourself, always recognizing that the source of everything is God and using what God has given to meet your needs in a reasonable way.

Secondly then to support your family. And to support your family, would mean if you're a husband your children and your wife. If you're a family member and somebody in your extended family has a need you, of course, then become responsible for that extended family as I Timothy 5 says. Only in a case where there is no extended family should a widow then be taken over by the church and cared for. There should be a care extended if there is a family member with any relationship with any resources to take care of that other family member in a time of need. So we are given the resources we are given for personal needs to be met and for family needs.

A third and very important thing to think about is this: support your nation. The Bible is crystal clear on the fact that we are to pay our taxes, that we are to be good citizens, and we are to render to the government what is due to the government, tax to whom is tax is due, Romans 13, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom is due. Government is an institution of God. Romans 13 makes it very clear that the powers that be are ordained of God. Government is to protect the innocent and punish the evil and the instruments of the government, the ministers of the government bear a sword and they don't bear it in vain. They bear it to use it against evil doers and for the protection of innocent people and they need to be provided for, they need to be supported. And that's part of giving your money to the nation, pay your taxes.

Moving a little bit beyond that as you use your money for your personal needs, your family needs, and as you pay your taxes, I think it's reasonable to say that God expects you to enjoy sensible comforts with a worshipping heart. I don't think we're supposed to take a vow of poverty and go around in dirty clothes, eating brown bread, and drinking water for the rest of our lives. I don't think God filled this planet with the richness that He did for us to ignore it and live in some level of destitution. I think we can enjoy a measure, a reasonable comfort with a worshipping and grateful heart.

Beyond that purchasing what is spiritually beneficial, purchasing what aids us in the advance of the kingdom, purchasing what provides for us strength, well being, measure of comfort so as to enable us to advance the gospel, to demonstrate hospitality, to show love, all those kinds of things are reasonable things.

We are also told with our money to give to others who are in need. In fact Jesus said if you give to the poor you'll have treasure in heaven. So you support your needs, support your family, support your nation, you enjoy reasonable, sensible comforts with a worshipping heart, you purchase what is spiritually beneficial, and what works to enable you to advance the gospel and demonstrate Christian love, show hospitality, to serve and minister to others and you give to others in need and that is specifically a way that you will lay up treasure in heaven.

Now that's all outside what you give to God. But that's what I really want to talk about is this matter of giving. How are we to give to God? Now the simple answer is hey ten percent, that's it. You were probably, some of you were raised to think that ten percent was the magic percentage and that if you,

who gave ten percent, you did your duty, you fulfilled your spiritual obligation; you were a spiritual not a carnal member of the church. And there are churches that make you sign covenants to give ten percent, very large churches that make you sign a covenant to give ten percent. If you're not willing to sign that covenant for ten percent you can't be a member of that church. You're liable to get thrown out on your ear if you don't do that.

There are other churches that not only make you give ten percent, make you sign a covenant to give ten percent, but monitor that. And I suppose they would even attach your wages if you fell short. I'm not sure how that would work, but there are certainly churches that have taken a heavy, a very heavy-handed approach to making sure people tithe to the church.

That's the fast answer, that's the easy answer. And people have said to me through the years, that's a way to get a lot of money. That is a way to get a lot of money. Why not? That's just a great way to get a lot of money because the average giving typically the last survey I saw in America is somewhere between two and three percent, so why not get people to commit to ten percent and hold their feet to the fire on ten percent. You get a lot more money if you do it that way. That isn't the issue. If you're going to use that as an issue why not make it twenty percent. You get a lot more that way. I mean if you're going to set an arbitrary number, then why set it at ten percent. There's no reason for that. You say, "Yeah there's a reason. It's biblical." Well I'll get to that in a moment.

Now as we think about giving let's just set that idea aside for a moment. That's the quick and easy answer, but I want to show you what the Bible says about that in a moment, but before we even think about giving there are some prerequisite principles. There are some things that have to be understood. One: if you want to be a faithful giver to the Lord, these are the foundations, okay? These are the basics. One: transfer ownership of your money, your possessions, your time, and your talent, and your earning power to God. Give it all to Him. He gave it to you, it came from Him, it came to you, as a stewardship you are God's money manager, as we said last time. Transfer ownership of everything to God. All your money, all your accounts in the bank, all your retirement, all your possessions, all your talents, and all your earning power, you transfer to God. It's yours, I give it to you completely.

Now this is something that has to take place continually as we have I think in our fallenness to take back all these things for our desires to be fulfilled. And so there's a constant need to transfer ownership of everything to God.

Secondly, make it the purpose of your life to exalt Christ and proclaim the gospel. Make it the purpose of your life to exalt Christ, the Savior, and proclaim the gospel. That's the purpose of my life, therefore, everything I have works to that benefit. Everything I have goes in that direction. I don't want to make it the purpose of my life to achieve anything less than the extent of the gospel, the advance of the kingdom, the glory of Christ. Nothing! That's the object of everything.

Now let's get real practical. Thirdly, after you've transferred ownership of everything, and that's a heart decision, after you have determined to make the purpose of your life, to exalt Christ, proclaim the gospel, extend the kingdom, the third thing you need to do is put yourself in a position to use that money now to honor God and to accomplish that purpose. Now you say, okay, it all belongs to God and it's all going to be directed either indirectly or directly toward the advance of the kingdom, but I have a problem. I'm in debt. I owe more than I can pay. I'm paying the minimum on my credit cards and I got a lot of those. I just took out a loan to pay off debt so I'm paying off debt with more debt. I don't have any discretionary funds. I have overdue bills and so essentially what I've done is transfer my debt to God. Thanks a lot! I've taken God's money, it's all His, but it's in the hands of other people who don't care about the kingdom. So I basically cannot exercise my hearts desire and use these resources for the kingdom and the kingdom alone because they're now in control of somebody else.

Well what you need to do is pretty clear. Get out of debt. So that's the third thing if you're in debt, get out of debt. Reclaim your opportunity to advance the kingdom. Reclaim God's money that is now in the hands of probably the ungodly. How do you get out of debt? Pay your bills. Pay your bills, make a commitment to do what you can to pay your bills. Pay them on time. You don't like pressure from unpayable bills, but a lot of people live with it. You've got to come up with a strategy to get your bills paid and to eliminate the pressure of unpayable bills. You've got to overturn the deadly debt cycle. It's not easy, but there are a few things to do.

One: inventory spending, inventory spending in the order of importance. Be sensible enough, be wise enough and plan enough and careful enough to inventory your options. Decide what the priorities are and meet those priorities with the resources that you have. Eliminate all nonessentials. Eliminate all nonessentials. Sell whatever you can to free you from debt, to generate cash. Sell anything that's causing you debt, that's perpetuating debt. Consider additional work to get out of debt. Don't borrow money for depreciating items. Don't borrow for luxuries. Don't use a credit card in which you're going to have to pay interest for a luxury, something that you don't even need. And when you think that you really need something before you buy it wait and see if God might provide it before you ever buy it. This is called specific prayer and it's a great adventure and if it's a real need God's very likely going to meet it.

Pursue contentment. Make contentment a goal of your prayer life. Make contentment a goal in your own heart. Lord, please make me content. Stay out of stores. Those places are deadly, deadly. Stay off of that TV channel that sells you everything. Stay away from those sales pitches on the computers. I mean these are just basic things. You got to get control. You can transfer everything that you have to the Lord, all your earning power, all your talent, all your ability to generate funds, all your creativity, all your money, all your possessions, but if you're deep in debt all the Lord gets is a debt and you can't respond to spiritual opportunity to give.

You can't lay up treasure in heaven because you've got it distributed all over the world and it's all in the hands of somebody else. Got to change that dramatically. Change your lifestyle. Downsize. Live more frugally, more cheaply. Don't eat out as often, whatever. You can figure that out.

Now those are the foundation things. One: you have to have the right attitude about this; it's all God's. You have to understand that God has given it to you to manage. You're God's money manager and He wants you to manage this for the advancement of His kingdom. He wants you to enjoy it in a reasonable and sensible way so that you can give Him glory and gratitude because He's filled this earth with such marvelous riches He wants you to enjoy them and thank Him for them, but primarily all of that enjoyment redounds to His glory and the focus of your life is to advance the kingdom. Use your money to spread the gospel. In order to do that, you've got to get control of your money.

Let's talk about giving. To get yourself in a position where you can give, and this is a wonderful place to be, where you have some discretionary money, where you're living on a lot less than you are receiving so there's always money there, you can enjoy giving in the riches way that God would have you give and lay up treasure in heaven.

Now let's go back to the tithe. Somebody said this is pretty easy stuff. You just give a tenth. Let me tell you about the tithe, okay? In the Old Testament where that comes from, and if I had time we could spend a couple of weeks on this, but I'm not going to do it. I'm just going to give you the short version. If we look at the Old Testament we find this idea of tithe. Tithe means a tenth, just a word that means one tenth. People say well the Jews gave one tenth. That's the Old Testament principle. No it's not. The Old, let me tell you about the tithe. It was never, a Jew never owed God a tenth. If there was a Jew who only tithed a tenth he would be in violation of God's law. If there was a Jew who gave a tenth to God he was doing what Malachi 3:10 says, robbing God. Because there was not just one tithe in Israel, there were three. Let me tell you what I mean by that.

Required giving: let's look at this in just kind of a quick fashion. I don't want you to turn to these passages. We'll get too bogged down. There were three tithes. Number one: Israel is a theocratic kingdom, okay. Israel is a theocracy. That is, it is ruled by God. It's not a monarchy ruled by a king; it's not a democracy ruled by people; it's not an oligarchy ruled by family; it's not an aristocracy ruled by the rich; it is a theocracy. God is the ruler and God sets the rules, God is true king. Any other king is subject to God who is the ultimate king. In a theocratic kingdom of Israel the government was basically in the hands of the priests and the priests mediated the will of God, the purposes of God. And they carried out the sacrifices, they had their order in the temple time and when they weren't in the temple the two weeks they were prescribed to be there, all these 24 orders of priests, they were scattered around the country and they were implementing the will of God and the word of God and the purposes of God and the ceremonies that God had ordained in the lives of the people across the nation. So they were the officers of the theocratic kingdom. Well they had to live, they had to be

supported and so there was prescribed in Leviticus 27, Leviticus 27, you don't need to turn it, but Leviticus 27: 30-33 prescribed a tithe to be given to the priest.

Numbers 18 speaks of the same thing and refers it to the priests. It was to support the officials of the theocratic government of Israel, ten percent to go to their support. Ten percent of grain, ten percent of animals, ten percent of any crop, or you could give an equivalent amount in cash. That was what the tithe was. That's one tithe. Every year you gave a tenth to the nation to support the kingdom and the officers of the kingdom, the implementers of the law of God in Israel namely the priests.

There's a second tithe, Deuteronomy 12:6-17. Deuteronomy 12:6-17 describes a completely different tithe. This tithe was to fund national festivals, Passover, feast of weeks, feast of Tabernacles, many other feasts. There were these massive national festival events that were held and they required money to provide for all the people who would come and feast and be there and participate and stay there and all of that. They were large and expensive functions. And so there was another tenth that was knows as the festival tithe. You had the priest tithe and you had the festival tithe.

So every Jew was required every year to pay twenty percent of his income, twenty percent, not ten. There's a third tithe, Deuteronomy 14:28-29, talks about a third tithe for the poor, for the poor because there were people who were destitute. As Jesus say, "the poor you will always have with you," and that's true. There are people with diminished capacities, with very limited talents, who have physical infirmities, or mental problems, or who just are raised in an impoverished environment and never rise from it, and there's always going to be those people and the poor are always be there and God who loves the poor and cares for the poor and has laid that out many times in the Old Testament provided for the poor so that every third year there was another tithe, okay? Every third year, so every year you paid twenty percent and every third year you threw in another ten percent breaks down three and a third every year, so a Jew was paying twenty three and a third percent of his yearly income to the government, to the theocratic government.

It was going to the temple and from the temple it was dispensed and from the temple it was used. They were responsible to make sure that it got to the priests and it got to funding the festivals and it was disseminated to the poor. So there you have basically what the tithe is. It is a form of taxation. The total is twenty three and a third percent. You couldn't harvest the corner of the field because the corners of the field were to be left for the poor, kind of profit sharing if you had a good crop. The poor could just come in and take it free. If you dropped a bale off our wagon when you were pulling in your crop you couldn't pick it up. It was to be left in the field so the poor could receive it.

There was also a third shekel temple tax paid by every individual. There was seventh year Sabbath land rest and there was also the release year when all debts were forgiven. So you could actually have loaned money to somebody and the person would be forgiven, which would take money out of your hands obviously. They easily paid twenty-five percent per year for these national structures. This

is taxation. This is not free-will. They had no choice about it. It wasn't giving to God in the truest sense in an act of worship. It was paying your tax. If they didn't do it, it robbed God because God was the king. But in addition to this taxation system in Israel, and by the way it was the same in Egypt. You read in the Pentateuch about in Egypt how Joseph established about a twenty percent tax rate in Egypt. So it's not unlike this amount. And by the way this is the basic tax structure in the United States, which was drawn even out of this biblical pattern, which traditionally has been at about twenty, twenty-two percent.

So in addition to this there was free will giving. In addition to this giving you gave to God. This isn't really giving. This is paying your taxes. This is required. This is by law. This is not from the heart willingly, this is do it or you're in trouble. Pay your tax.

What about free will giving? In the Old Testament the people could give whatever they wanted. In fact let me show you a couple of quick verses. Proverbs 3, there are a lot of them, but Proverbs 3:9, "Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce." There it is. Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce. Give the Lord what you want out of your wealth and give Him the best. Give the Lord the best. Bring the best. It doesn't say when, doesn't say an amount, doesn't say anything about time or quantity. They were to give the first fruits, the best of the crop, whatever they wanted to give they could give.

In Proverbs 11:24, a similar thing. A principle, "That one who scatters yet increases all the more; one who withholds what is justly due it results only in want." The generous man will be prosperous." Know this you can't out give God. If you're generous you'll prosper. If you scatter, that is if you lay it out, if you give God will give you're a return. That's a principle we're going to see in a minute in the New Testament.

Deuteronomy 16:10 says it very clearly. "Every man shall give as he is able according to the blessing of the Lord your God, which He has given you." That's not the tithe. That's in your giving to God in your from-the-heart-free-will giving. Just give as you are able according to the blessing of he Lord your God, which He has given you. Just look at what He's given you and out of that give whatever is in your heart to give. Give the best; give generously.

An illustration of this, and there are a number of them, might be helpful. At the end of I Chronicles, the last chapter, I Chronicles 29, this is at the time of the building of the temple, which was incredibly magnificent thing, as we know, Solomon's Temple. And there's a little bit of a rehearsal here of that, which was provided for the temple, gold, silver, bronze, iron, onyx stones, verse 2, inlaid stones, stones of various colors and kinds, precious stones, alabaster, all of this brought to the house of the Lord, 3,000 talents of gold, the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver and on and on. Down in verse 7, the fathers' households, verse 6, the princes of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and hundreds. Everybody's collecting money from the people. Everybody's gathering

money from all the people that are under them and they come in with this money and verse 7 says "The total is 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, and 10,000 talents of silver, and 18,000 talents of brass, and 100,000 talents of iron. And whoever possessed precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord in care of Jehiel, the Gershonite. And the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly."

This is free will giving. Give what you want in whatever amount you want personally determined. Verse 10, the Lord blessed, actually verse 9 it says "Their offering to the Lord was with a whole heart and King David rejoiced greatly." They gave whatever they wanted. "David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly and said, 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of Israel our father forever and ever. Thine, O Lord is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O Lord, Thou doest exalt Thyself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from Thee and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might, and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone.'" That's praise.

"Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee and praise Thy glorious name." Why is he praising God? Why isn't all this saying you people are amazing, you people are astounding, how wondrous you are, how generous, how glorious. Verse 14, "Who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from Thee, and from Thy hand we have given Thee." We give you the glory because we couldn't give it to you if you hadn't given it to us. Hey verse 15, "We're just strangers and renters. We don't own anything." I love that. We're just tenants, we're just renters. Tenant farmers were people who just rented land. We're just renters. "Our days on earth are like a shadow and there is not hope for anything but death. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build Thee a house for Thy holy name, is from Thy hand and all is Thine."

Now that's the foundation I told you about. You turn everything over to God and you understand that all of it is to be to His honor and His glory, and you get yourself into a position where you can give it. Verse 17, "Surely I know, O my God, that Thou triest the heart and delightest in uprightness and I in the integrity of my have willingly offered all these things so now with joy I have seen Thy people who are present here make their offerings willingly to Thee. O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Thy people, and direct their heart to Thee." This is the kind of giving that was spontaneous free will giving.

They gave what ever they want as the need arose, and they gave lavishly and they gave generously and they gave from the heart. Now in the New Testament the pattern is exactly the same. In the New Testament it's exactly the same. Turn to Matthew 22, Matthew 22, and just quickly the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus, verse 15, verse 17, "Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll tax to Caesar, or not? This is a big issue, huge issue. Now understand Caesar is established in the Roman world as a god, so he's a rival of the true and living God.

So this false god, this idolater, who is him self an idol, is in control of Israel. This is a repulsive thing to the Jews. The Romans have moved in and they have sold to traitor Jews, tax franchises to extort money out of them for the Romans and for themselves. Tax collectors were not allowed in the synagogue. They were hated and despised by the people more than any other person, and so this whole taxation system is just about as repulsive as anything could ever be, to give their money to pagans, to a false god was very difficult. They were oppressive and the tax collectors were abusive, as we well know.

So, do we pay our taxes? Jesus answers in verse 21. "Render to Caesar things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." What he's say, pay your taxes and give God what you want. Caesar will tell you how much. God will not. God wants your heart. He wants your will. Pay your taxes. Give Caesar the money. Give God what you desire to give Him. It's the same thing, required giving is to pay your taxes. Romans 13:6-7 again, "Tribute to whom tribute is due; tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom is due." Pay your taxes. And above that give God what you want.

Now here we are in America and we're paying anywhere from, I don't know, twenty something percent to nearly fifty percent in taxes in America. Some think that is exorbitant. There's a real sense in which those who have the most do have the responsibility to care for those who have the least within the framework of biblical economic ethical behavior, which is to say that nobody should eat unless he works. So we help, we don't fuel indolence, laziness, but we have the responsibility to pay our taxes whatever they are. Hey, the powers that be are ordained of God; pay your taxes. Then give God what is God's. How do we know what is God's? How do we know? How much should I give? Well let me show you a model.

Turn to II Corinthians Chapter 9, and we'll kind of wander around in here for a few minutes. II Corinthians Chapter 9, but before we go to Chapter 9 let's go to Chapter 8. Both chapters, I'll bounce back and forth, but in Chapter 8 I want you to see verse 9. Here's the model for giving. Chapter 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." Now the Macedonians were a tremendous example of giving. Go back to verse 1, "The churches in Macedonia," verse 1, according to verse 2 were in a great ordeal of affliction. They were under very very serious stress, distress, persecution. They had a very insecure future. They didn't know what their future would hold. The gospel was being persecuted. They were being persecuted. They were under a great ordeal of affliction. And in the middle of this "great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality." That's an amazing statement. With no future to know about, with a very insecure future, in deep poverty, 'cause many of them could lose their jobs in the culture, they were poor to start with, not many noble, not many mighty. God has chosen the poor.

In the midst of this deep poverty with super abounding joy they overflowed in a wealth of liberality. This is all the New Testament can say about giving. You just give even in the midst of an insecure future, when you don't know what's going to come tomorrow, even in a condition of deep poverty with joy you overflow in the wealth of your liberality. How could you give like that? Well verse 5, "This not as we expected, but they first gave, what, themselves. They first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God and once you give yourself and you say it's all yours we're back to that foundational principle, once you've given it all to Him and it's all His and all you want to do is use it to the advance of His kingdom. And even though you don't have a lot you don't owe it to somebody else, you're free to give it, you give it, you give it with joy, you give it with an overflowing sense of happiness.

So the first principle I want you to understand when it comes to giving is that giving is free will, whatever you want to give, whatever you want to give. But know this what you give is an investment with God. Now you can go over to II Corinthians 9 and pick up verse 8.

"God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything you may have an abundance for every good deed." That's so full of superlatives you almost trip over them. In the context of giving, know this, God is able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiency in all things you may have a abundance for every god deed. In other words you can't out give God. You give, you give, you give, the way the Macedonians gave, you give liberally, you give generously, you give out of your deep poverty, you give joyfully, and you give even though you have an insecure future and you know this God will replenish. God is able to make all grace abound to you. He's not talking about heavenly grace. He's talking about the grace that's going to meet your needs. You will have all sufficiency in all things and an abundance for every good work.

And actually in verse 10 he says, "It is God who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, and He will supply and multiply your seed for sowing." God will give you what you need to live as well as "the harvest of your righteousness." "And you," in verse 11, "will be enriched in everything for all liberality." You can't out give God. So like the Macedonians you give and you give and you give generously out of your deep poverty and you give joyfully and now you can go back to verse 7. Here's the sum: "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver."

How much should I give? Whatever I purpose in my heart to give. Whatever I'm able to give. Out of what I've got. Generously. From the heart. As I have purposed in my heart. It's something between you and God, but whatever it is you purpose to do don't violate that. Don't be Ananias and Sapphira. They made a big statement how much they were going to give God and in thinking about it they decided to give half and God killed them at the offering. That would send, that would lead to a big offering the following week I'm pretty sure.

So be true to your purpose. Be true to your conscience. What it is you purpose in your heart you do. That's why you don't get browbeaten here at the offering because I don't want you to do something grudgingly. I don't want you to give to God under some kind of compulsion or manipulation or some kind of gimmicks, or some kind of pressure, or some kind of fear factor. You just need to give whatever is in your heart to give as you purpose in your heart and not under any sort of reluctance or bitterness or duplicity, but cheerfully, eagerly, joyfully and the model. Let's go back to where I started in this discussion, verse 9.

Here's the model: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, He was rich, for your sakes He became poor that you through His poverty might become rich. The Macedonians are a wonderful model of giving. They started our poor and became poorer, but a better model is Jesus. He started our rich and became poor. Talk about generosity, though He was rich for our sakes He became poor to make us rich. Wow! This is sacrificial.

So what are we saying? Giving is to be willing, from the heart, purposed in the heart, joyful, eager, enthusiastic, notice there's some other things to think about. Giving is to be secret. Look at Matthew 6 and you're aware of this. Just a couple of other little principles to help you here: Matthew 6, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them, otherwise they have no reward with Your father who is in heaven." You can give in such a way, this is interesting, you can give in such as way as to assure a reward in heaven and you can give in such a way as to assure you're not going to get one. If you give to be seen by men, to parade your giving, there's not going to be a reward in heaven.

Verse 2, "When you do your alms, give your alms, don't sound a trumpet." Can you imagine what those Pharisees did? On the way in to give there were thirteen trumped shaped receptacles around the court of women and they would drop money in, they would blow a trumpet to announce their arrival. Look folks, I'm giving, this is how much I'm giving. These are the hypocrites. They did it in the synagogues too. They would give in the synagogues, the local synagogues in the same public way. They do it in the streets, he says in verse 2, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you they have their reward in full. Their full reward is they were honored by men. No reward from God. You don't want to give that way, so when you give your alms, this is an interesting way, this is kind of hyperbole, over the top, don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Be so secret that one side of you doesn't even know what the other side is doing. Not only do the people around you not know, but it's that secret. Let your alms be done in secret, and then your father who sees in secret will repay you, believe me in an open way in heaven to come. So your giving is to be secret and humble.

Jesus honors that 'cause you can't out give Him. "Give and it shall be given unto you" Luke 6:38, "Pressed down, shaken together and running over." And as we have already said it's not relative to

what you have. It's up to you to decide how much. You can give everything or you can give a portion, but it always needs to be sacrificial and that takes you back to that second point, the first point is turn everything over to God; the second point is to know that everything you manage for God has to be for the advance of His kingdom, not the advance of your own earthly life. Well you say is this just kind of willy-nilly? Well let me help you with that. This kind of giving should also be systematic.

Turn to I Corinthians 16. It should be systematic, systematic. Concerning the collection, verse 1, not much doubt as to this subject, concerning the collection. I told the churches of Galatia this, and I'm going to tell you the same thing. So this becomes normative for the life of the church. "On the first day of every week, that's Sunday, today, the Lord's Day, "Let each one of you put aside laid by him in store, the old Authorized says, "As he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." I don't want any special offering when I show up. You do this every Sunday, every week; it is that weekly responsibility of stewardship that makes you deal with the issue of money. Not just some emotional appeal, after months and months have gone by when somebody comes and has a need I want you to systematically every time you gather on the Lord's Day to have a collection brought together. How much? Whatever. Let each one of you put aside, laid by, as he may prosper. There never will be an amount. There's never a tenth. You can't find a tithe at all in the instruction in the New Testament. That's taxation. You give whatever you want. You give systematically and regularly every Lord's Day.

People sometimes say to me, "Well I only get paid every two weeks. Is it okay to give every two weeks? Sure, I don't think that violates the principle that is here. It's just the systematic orderly giving. Personally I prefer to give every week. I just think it's important to have that joy and that opportunity and that participation. I don't ever want to come to worship without giving. In fact, I find even if I've already given the regular giving and the plate comes by at the second service or in the evening service I just feel like part of worship is to put something in. Giving then is to be systematic in that it is part of the church coming together for the Lord's Table, coming together for worship, coming together for the exposition of Scripture, at the same time laying money aside to be used for the glory and honor of the Lord.

Giving is to express love, not law. It is to express love not law. If we go back to II Corinthians 8, again and there's so many things there. I know I'm jumping around a little bit, but II Corinthians 8:8, very important. Paul is giving this instruction here about stewardship and in verse 8, "I am not speaking this as a command," he says. "But as proving through the earnestness of others, the sincerity of your love." This is not about commanding you to make you sign a covenant that you're going to give a certain amount. That's absolutely ridiculous, unbiblical, that's legalism. Paul say, look, this is just about love. I'm not giving you a command as to what you need to do, but I'm just saying this is how you prove the earnestness and the sincerity of your love. You look at the Macedonians and the example and you see the demonstration of their love for the preachers of the gospel, the ministry of the gospel, the work of the kingdom, and the honor of Christ. It's about love; it's not about law.

In Romans 15, Paul said that the Gentiles sent money with him to the Jews. Why? Verse 27, "They were pleased to do so." They were pleased, why? They were indebted to them he says. They were indebted to them. They wanted to send an offering to the poor saints in Jerusalem because they felt indebted to them, why? For if the Gentiles had shared in their spiritual things they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. It was the gospel that came to the Jews, first of all, and then from the Jews taken to the Gentiles. The Gentiles had received spiritual things from the Jews and wanted to reciprocate by sending them material support. It was an act of love. It was an act of gratitude.

It's like Galatians where Paul says, "Let the one who is ministered to share in all good things with the one who teaches. Let the one who is taught share in all good things with the one who teaches." Out of gratitude, out of love, not an expression of law, but an expression of love and gratitude and thankfulness we give. And the key again is to be willing to be generous, to be systematic, to give from the heart, to be secret, to be humble, to be joyful, give whatever you want to give, but know this in the end what you give is an investment with God. It is an investment with God. And on that investment you will receive an eternal dividend.

Let's pray together. So much more to say, Lord, but time is gone for today and we're so grateful for the abundance that we have and we do worship you and thank you for the bounty, which you have supplied to us. We don't know why you have so favored us while so many in the world struggle. We don't know why you have favored us not only with material blessings, but more than that with the spiritual realities of salvation. We are not worthy, but we know understand that to whom much is given much is required, and we bear a stewardship of immense significance. But it's not something to discharge reluctantly because in an amazing act of grace You have told us that if we are faithful to use what You give us for Your glory, we'll enjoy the dividends forever. What generosity. It would be enough if You just forgave us our sin and let us barely into heaven to live in a small shack. It would be enough if you just let us in Your heaven on a minimal level, but You have lavished us with such opportunity to enjoy the fullness of heaven's bounty, to enjoy the fullest possible heavenly joys, to enjoy the most extensive kind of service, to be lord, as it were, over much, to serve You in heightened and intensified and broadened capacities forever, and to know the fullness of eternal joy by what we do with our lives here and with our money.

We desire to be faithful and we desire to have a heavenly perspective and set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth, and to put that treasure where moth and rust don't corrupt, thieves don't break through and steal knowing that wherever we put our heart our money will follow. We give You our hearts. We desire to turn everything over to You, to use all that we have to advance Your kingdom, to enjoy the blessings of life, with a worshipping heart, and to give in such a way as to bring You honor. We want to be good money managers of what is Yours and enjoy ourselves the return.

Thank you for this wonderful gift to us. Thank you for this promise of an eternal blessing that can't be even measured or understood an inheritance set aside for us eternal and unfading someday we will enter into. Until then, Lord, we will by how we live enhance that inheritance. This is such a kindness from You. At the same time we will enjoy even here the wonderful fruit of our faithfulness and we'll thank you in Your Son's dear name. Amen.

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