

2 Corinthians 9:7—Invest #3

October 15, 2017

In the 19th Century the now extinct passenger pigeon was the most numerous bird in North America. The birds were so abundant that single flocks of birds were said to be a billion or more strong.

Charles Mann describes them in his book 1491—

“Passenger pigeons were greedy eaters with terrible manners; if they found some food they liked just after finishing a meal, they would vomit what they had previously eaten and dig in. Gobbling their chow, they sometimes twittered in tones musical enough that people mistook them for little girls. They gorged on so many beechnuts and acorns that they sometimes fell off their perches and burst apart when they hit the ground. But in flight they were angelic: they cut through the air with such speed and grace that they were called “blue meteors.”

When passenger pigeons found an area with grain or nuts to eat, they formed a long, linear front that advanced forward, heads peck-peck-pecking at the ground. Acorns, beechnuts, and chestnuts; strawberries, huckleberries, and blackberries; wheat, oats, and maize—all went down the pigeons’ iridescently feathered gullets. To grab their share, the pigeons at the rear constantly fluttered over the heads of their compatriots and landed at the leading edge of the front. Then the birds in the back flew over them. The line of birds advanced in a continuous swirl, the conservationist John Muir recalled,

“revolving something like a wheel with a low buzzing wing roar that could be heard a long way off.”

Passenger pigeons traveled in massive assemblies, billions strong, that rained enough excrement to force people indoors. As a boy, Muir saw a mob of birds sweep “thousands of acres perfectly clean of acorns in a few minutes.”

Because of these nuisances and many others—the bishop of Quebec came up with an utterly unique response to the problem.

Mann says it this way,

“Pigeons destroyed farm fields so often that the bishop of Quebec formally excommunicated the species in 1703.”

He must have been exasperated and I bet all of his parishioners were in hearty agreement with the bishop’s ecclesiastical pronouncement.

But I am sure that excommunicating the Passenger Pigeon did exactly zero good. They still marauded crops and murdered harvests. His words were well meaning but empty.

In just a second I am going to read a passage from 2 Corinthians 9 and the summary is going to be this—A follower of Jesus give generously.

And you might think—not me. No matter what this passage has to say—that will do me zero good. No matter what it says there is no way that I can give generously.

Maybe you say—

I can't afford it.
I can't imagine it.
I can't see it.

Or maybe you say—your words are well meaning but they will be empty.

I would gently remind you that these are not my words and the word of God is not like the words of men. In fact, before we are done today we are going to see how God can change our hearts into hearts that want to give willingly from the heart.

PROP: God wants you to want to give.

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And 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.” 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

PRAY

The last two weeks, we have asked two different questions of the Bible about money. Our culture asks a lot of questions about money—

How can I make more money?
How can I spend my money well?
Where can I invest my money?

What should I spend my money on?

Questions swirl.

But only the scriptures have the answers that satisfy. We have asked two questions so far in our series on money:

- How does a disciple view money?

How? As belonging all coming from and belonging to God. All is his and we have resources that he has given us to use.

- Why does a disciple give money?

Why? We give because of all that God has given us in Jesus Christ. Jesus impoverished himself to make us wildly wealthy. We give money to him because he gave himself for us.

A new question this morning.

How is a disciple to give money?

Did you see what the text itself said?

A disciple is to give money cheerfully. Strictly speaking the text doesn't say give cheerfully—instead we read:

“...for God loves a cheerful giver.”

What does that mean?

It doesn't mean that God hates all those who do not give cheerfully, nor does it mean that God only loves the cheerful givers.

Rather, it means those disciples that give cheerfully please God. This means at least two things—

HOW you give matters at least as much if not more than IF you give. What you want matters. You will never give willingly if you do not want to.

God is not just out to get us to give to keep the lights on around here but because we want to.

Do you know what that means?

When you give eagerly of all that has been given to you—no matter how much you have—when you give cheerfully—you please God. And the opposite is also true. When you give begrudgingly of what you have—no matter how much you have—you displease God.

The reason to give cheerfully is NOT:

- Because Paul said.
- Because it is right.
- Because you should.

Why?

To please God.

At root level—every follower of Jesus will want to please God. Because we are made new there is a sense in which

all that we are we want to be pleasing to God. We want to honor him and serve him and please him.

This is not the same as earning salvation from him.

Paul could offer no greater motive to give cheerfully than to say—God loves a cheerful giver.

How are we to give? Willingly.
Why are to give willingly? To Please God.

Putting these two ideas together I would say—

PROP: God is eager for you to give willingly and as you do you will please him greatly.

Give willingly and you will please God.

How does a disciple give? A disciple gives willingly because he/she wants to.

Our passage gives us three ways—The roadmap to willing giving.

1. Give Generously (2 Cor. 9:6)

The first step in wanting to give willingly is not waiting around for the desires to develop but to step out in generosity.

Vs. 6,

“whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully...”

I've gotten many prayer requests over the years—but never once has someone said—Could you pray for me? I need to be more generous with my money. I'm concerned that I am greedy.

Did you know that there are at least 10 times more warnings in the Bible about greed than—warnings about lust or adultery.

You know why?

If you commit adultery you know it, but the greedy never do. Nearly never. Greed is something we never see in ourselves.

We aren't going to want to give if we are trapped in a bog of greediness. How do we get out?

Perspective:

Vs. 6,

“whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully...”

This is a bit of agricultural imagery.

The farmer would plow the ground to prepare it for seed and then walk about throwing seed all over. He would plow it over again so that the birds wouldn't come and eat up all the seed.

To sow sparingly means that you keep as much seed as possible and if you do that you would naturally reap a spare crop.

As everyone knew in that day—to have a good crop you have to scatter a lot of seed. Throw a lot of seed and get a larger harvest.

In agriculture, what seems like a loss is really a gain.

In an agrarian society, everyone would be nodding their heads.

What is he saying?

A small gift would generate some harvest—a larger gift would generate a larger harvest for both those that give and those that receive.

But what is the nature of the harvest?

Is this just a bare—give a lot so that you will get a lot?

Am I saying—give money to get money? No.

What is he talking about?

Vs. 8,

“And 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.”

Generosity might be sown in cash, but God allows us to harvest—ALL GRACE.

What does that give us? Something so much better than just more money. The generous benefit in so many other ways.

Harvest of:

All sufficiency
In all things
At all times

That you may abound in every good work.

In other words, when we give generously we harvest a crop of strength for doing good things for his glory.

What does this mean?

You might be afraid that if you give generously that you will lack resources. You won't. When you give generously you put yourself in a position to prosper in matters far more important than money.

And as you begin to give generously—giving will be no great chore because you will see how when you sow money—you'll reap grace.

There is a real connection between generosity and abounding in good works.

The first step in the road of willing giving—giving from the heart is by taking the step to giving generously.

2. Give Freely (2 Cor. 9:7)

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion *for God loves a cheerful giver.*”

Notice a few things—

Generosity is for everyone.

‘Each one must give’: All are included in that statement. Each Christian is meant to consider HOW to be generous with their resources. No one is exempt.

Generosity takes planning:

‘Each one must give as he has decided’: Plan and think ahead. The reality is if we don’t plan we probably won’t think—we will probably not (most of us) drift into generosity.

Part of the reason we are saying making a specific number a goal. NOT to stir you up, but so that we can each plan in our own way. Part of the reason we said we want to raise 150k is so that we each know what part to play.

And as we’ll see we think you will agree that it will be well worth the investment.

Generosity flows freely:

‘NOT reluctantly or under compulsion’. This means that generosity is not begrudging. It is also not first about the amount. But about the heart.

The widow who gave her two mites was far more generous because she gave out of her poverty when the rich gave out of their wealth.

One of the reasons the text says—God loves a cheerful giver is the same reason we love cheerful givers.

If someone came to you on your birthday and said, I bought this gift for you. I didn’t really want to. I didn’t think it was worth the sacrifice. I thought of many other things that I could have used this money on, but I went ahead and bought this for you.

Happy Birthday.

What would you say?

Wow. Thanks. I might say—listen—keep the gift and spend it on yourself. No one wants a gift given begrudgingly from an unwilling heart.

If we give to God like that—he feels exactly the same way.

Keep it.

But God delights when we delight to give him our money.

This may sound like crazy talk from crazy town to you.

Separating us from our hard-earned money is difficult. I get it. But we can be generous because all we have and all we earn is a gift from God. We could have been born in 6th century Mayan culture or 10th century Chinese culture or early 20th century Russian culture and worked and worked with nothing extra to show for it.

But we are Americans living in 2017. And our hard work generally pays bigger dividends. God put us here. God gave us these opportunities. God gave us all we have.

Now you might think—well if I'm not able to give freely NOT begrudgingly—If I'm not able to do that maybe I should wait to until I feel generous to give.

No.

First of all, if you wait to feel like wanting to give. You will probably wait a while. Feelings are fleeting and they come and go. If we wait for the right feelings, they may never come.

No, the idea is that we give generously and ask the Lord to help us to be cheerful about it. That is generally the way it is with obedience. If we wait around to feel obedient, we will do more waiting than obeying.

If we obey we are going to feel like continuing to obey.

When you give generously you will continue to want to give generously.

Roadmap to giving from the heart has had two stops on it so far—

Giving Generously Giving Freely

3. Give Expectantly (2 Cor. 9:8)

We've already seen vs. 8 as the result of the harvest—but also we can see a sense of expectancy in it.

“And 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.”

For something as trifling as sowing a bit of money—we can expect something as stunning as grace in return.

No bank in the world can give a return like that.

All sufficiency
All things
All times
Abounding

That is language you don't read much in the Bible.

One of the primary reasons that we might not give from the heart is because we are afraid we will go without. Or experience some lack.

Fret not.

NOT all sufficient in general but as we trust God and freely give—God grants us supernatural sufficiency to do and be what we could not imagine otherwise.

NOT able in all things—but as we trust God and freely give—God grants us an ability to please him in all things that is not normally there.

NOT able at all times—When we freely give God’s grace gives us a new ability to please him in all things at all times.

God loves AND blesses a cheerful giver.

How does this connect to our INVEST series?

As I’ve said in the past two Sundays every dollar that you give is used either directly or indirectly for gospel ministry. These plans are no different.

We want every square inch of our building to be useful space. Our kitchen—we think—could be improved. We have used it—you have used it—for the glory of God.

But, we think we can do a bit better.

Let me show you.

Here is what it is—

Here is what it could be—

Additionally, we are planning on updating the bathrooms.

Aaron—

Gifted pastor and good thinker. We wanted him to explain how we are going to spend the money should we get it all in. And why we are thinking that 150k is doable for our little church.

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You might think—we are going to spend all this on the building and only that on missions.

Good question.

I have two responses to that:

1. We have other budget categories in our normal operations budget. We give away 10% of our total budget which we happily send to SG for the Global Missions and church planting efforts. And we spend other monies on evangelism and mission.
2. We have not undertaken a building improvement project for 10 years. We have more or less just maintained.

If you spread that amount over 10 years—13k a year would not be so much when compared to our overall budget. We just feel like the time is right to pursue that now.

And we give expectantly—watching for what the Lord might do. Building improvements will not change one soul

in and of itself—but imagine the conversations that can happen in there.

- Your teenager talks after SM with her discipleship leader—and a question is put to her about Jesus that she can't shake.
- You walk in a weary road traveler tired in every way possible—and you meet with a kind encourager that builds you up in the Lord.
- You meet a new person who becomes—over time a cherished old friend.
- You hang again and again and again with friends and you realize that you understand who Jesus is and what he has done better because they are in your life.
- An unbeliever stumbles in not even sure it is safe to walk in a church—but there is comfortable, non-threatening place to get some coffee and talk to people who seem normal. And over time they meet Jesus and are changed forever.

As we build this—we will build Jesus into the lives of others. I want to do that. I know you do too.

Give Generously—and as you sow you will reap more than you know.

Give Freely—give freely and experience the blessing of God.

Give Expectantly—and watch what God will do.