

## **Give Until it Feels Good**

2 Corinthians 9:5-11

### ***Introduction***

(Let everyone know that we will have offering as the end of the sermon) We've all heard the expression, "give until it hurts." That's how many look at Christian stewardship and giving. But God doesn't merely call us to give until it hurts. God calls us to give until it feels good. God never intended giving to be dreaded or dull, but that is often what we make it out to be.

There are many who are attracted to Jesus, but are suspicious of the church when it comes to money. They feel like Jesus loves them, but the church just loves their wallet. They say things like, "The church is only interested in your money," or "Every time I go to church all they talk about is money," or "It always seems like the church is raising money for something." Unfortunately, there have been many television and radio ministers who've added to this misconception by constantly begging for money, and threatening that the sky might fall if they don't get it.

Now there is no doubt that churches could always use money. It reminds me a story that Wayne Smith tells. Wayne was the pastor of Southland Christian Church in Lexington, KY for 40 years. One day an old farmer called the church office and asked to speak to the head hog at the trough.

The receptionist said, "If you're referring to our senior minister, you may call him Brother, Pastor, even Reverend if you feel so inclined. But it would not be proper to refer to him as the Head Hog."

The farmer said, "I'm sorry. I'm just an old pig farmer and I just sold a few pigs out of my herd. I was going to donate ten thousand dollars to the building fund at your church, so I was hoping to catch him in the office."

The receptionist said, "Oh...just a minute...I think I hear the Big Pig coming down the hall."

But the heart of giving isn't about the church's need to get. It's about our need to give. God's design is that our giving free us from the traps of materialism and greed, and the anxiety, emptiness, and insecurity that comes from materialism. It is God's design that our giving be a fulfilling experience, filled with spiritual rewards and God's blessing and provision. God doesn't desire givers who give little, who give with little thought and little joy, and who experience little

reward. God desires extravagant giving with extravagant joy and extravagant rewards. God wants us to give until it feels good. Is there even such a thing? Please read with me 2 Cor. 9:5-11 where Paul talks about this kind of giving.

Giving until it feels good doesn't come easily or naturally, and that is why giving is seen as a spiritual discipline. Again, it's a spiritual discipline, not just because it requires on our part, but because through giving, the Holy Spirit disciplines us. God uses giving to shape us and mold us to become more like Jesus. As we learn to walk with God we need to learn to walk with him in our giving. We don't give because the church needs money. We don't give because God is short of cash. We give because God is a good, generous, giving God, and we give because we have a good, generous giving, Savior. We give to be like Jesus.

2 Cor 9:5-11

*5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.*

*6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, 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 in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written:*

*“He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever.”*

*10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

There are several things we can learn about giving until it feels good from this passage. The first is we need to have generous giving.

### **I. Generous Giving (Vs. 6)**

Listen to verse 6, “*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*” Instead of thinking how little we can get away with giving, we need to learn to think of how much we get to give. Many Christians give as little as possible. They have developed all sorts of reasons and justifications to explain why their meager gifts are actually generous gifts.

Now we might fool others. We might even fool ourselves. But we don't fool God. He can see straight through our smokescreen of excuses. He looks beyond the gift. He looks beyond the

reasons and excuses and looks at the heart. He desires a generous heart, not just a generous appearance.

It's like the man whose wife had a cat that irritated him constantly. He hated that cat. He hated having cat hairs all over his coat. He hated stumbling over that cat in the dark. He hated being kept awake by the cat's incessant meowing in the night.

When his wife went to visit her mother, he drowned the cat. When his wife came back and asked about the cat, he said, "I guess the cat ran away." His wife was distraught and despondent over the loss of the cat. She pleaded with him to find some way to have the cat returned, so he put out a \$1,000 reward.

A friend of his told him, "That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard – offering \$1,000 reward for a cat you don't even like."

The man replied, "When you know what I know, you can afford to be generous." That's what it's like to give as a follower of Jesus. When you know what we know, you can afford to be generous.

Scripture calls us to be generous in our giving, even sacrificial. But as Donald Whitney writes in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, "Giving isn't sacrificial unless it's a sacrifice."

Some people give the appearance of generosity when they're not generous at all. Many Christians give only meager amounts, if they give at all. I recently read the following statistics. 80% of all giving in the church is done by 20% of the attendees. The remaining 20% is given by the next 30% of attendees. That means 50% give nothing at all.

Some say that we should give a tithe. You will sometimes hear people refer to the offering time in church as tithes and offerings. Tithing was the principle in O.T. Israel that the first 10% belonged to God. The first 10% of your crops. The first 10% of your flocks. The first 10% of your income. Now the word tithe doesn't appear anywhere in the N.T. Nowhere in the N.T. are Christians called to tithe. The N.T. never attaches a specific percentage or amount to our giving.

The New Testament standard and model for giving is not tithing, but radical, generous giving out of a transformed life. Even in the Old Testament, giving wasn't limited to 10%. 10% was merely the minimum requirement. Above and beyond the tithe were a variety of other gifts and offerings the people were asked to give. 10% wasn't the limit. It was just the starting point.

Most Christians give so little that tithing would be a huge improvement. Dave Ramsey once spoke about how different America would be if all Christians tithed. He said in 90 days, “There would be no more welfare in North America. There would be no existing church or hospital debts. In the next ninety days, the entire world could be evangelized.”

The N.T. goes beyond the external requirements and goes straight to the heart. It doesn't say you should give this amount or this percentage. But it tells us that we should purpose in our hearts to give generously, abundantly, sacrificially, extravagantly. While there are no examples of tithing in the N.T. there are numerous examples of radical, sacrificial, extravagant, generous giving out of a transformed life which went far beyond tithing.

There's Zaccheus who, after having his life transformed by Jesus promised to return 400% of anything he had taken from anyone, and promised to give half of everything to the poor. There's no tithing there. That's just extravagant, generous giving springing from a transformed life.

There's Mary who worshipped Jesus by anointing him with perfume and cleansing his feet with the perfume and her hair. That jar of perfume was worth a year's worth of wages. That's generous giving!

There's Barnabas. In the early days of the church there were many needs. Barnabas saw the need and sold a property that he owned and gave it all to the apostles. Barnabas saw the need and acted radically and sacrificially to meet the need. No wonder he was called the son of encouragement.

There are the Christians in Macedonia. Here's what Paul says about them in 2 Cor 8:2-4,

*Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.*

Paul uses two different groups of words in this text. One the one side we find *sparingly, grudgingly, reluctantly, and compulsion*. On the other side are *generously, cheerful, and abound*. Which group best describes how you give? It is generous giving that will enable you to give until it feels good.

I am not in a place to tell you what radical, generous giving should look like in your life. That's between you and God. What I am certain of is that the Church is entering one of the most challenging seasons of ministry in its history. We are to answer that call. As Americans we have

been uniquely blessed with resources and money like no other people in history. Do you realize that even the poorest of us, live with more than almost every person who has ever lived in the history of the world. God is going to hold each of us accountable for how we utilize the resources he has given us to advance His Kingdom causes during this season.

## **II. Purposeful Giving** (2 Cor. 9:7a)

First, we need generous giving. The second thing this passage can tell us about giving until it feels good is that we need purposeful giving. Purposeful giving. 2 Cor 9:7 begins by saying, “*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give.*” Other translations say what he has *purposed* in his heart. The word translated *decided* or *purposed* here means to bring forward out of one’s stores. It is to prepare something in advance and to set it apart for a specific purpose. And notice where it begins, in your heart.

How much thought, prayer and preparation go into your giving? Do you just show up on Sunday and then at offering time think, “Oh, I need to give something. How much can I spare this week”? Does your wife turn to you about halfway through the song service and ask, “Honey, how much should I make the check out for this week?” and you say “I don’t care. You make that decision, but remember we got big plans for Friday.”?

(Show our budget with giving as the top item)

Such giving does not come from the heart, and it doesn’t put you in a position to experience the reward and joy of giving.

There are two things that will enable and enhance purposeful giving from the heart.

**1. Regular Giving** – The first is regular giving- giving on a consistent, periodic basis. It helps giving become part of who you are. It is just a part of your nature. When you give every now and then or only when you feel like it won’t do that. That is not purposeful giving. It is not giving that will feel good. It’s important to give every time you receive: every week, every two weeks, or every month when you get paid. I have even known people who get paid once a month, but structure their giving for every week, because they want to experience the worship and joy of giving every week.

**2. Planned Giving** – Purposeful giving also requires planned giving. It takes preparation of the heart and planning in the mind. Giving that feels good rarely happens as an afterthought. If you don’t determine to do it ahead of time and make the necessary arrangements, the demands of life will crowd it out. Look back at the early verses of chapter 9. You see that in 2 he describes

their willingness to give as “*eagerness*,” and says they were “*ready*” to give. Again in verse 3 Paul says he wants them to be “*ready*.” In verse 4 he doesn’t want them “*unprepared*.” In verse 5 he wants *arrangements* made in *advance*. All of this is so that, as he says at the end of verse 5, “*it will be ready as a generous gift*.”

If you want to give until it feels good, you have to plan to do it. Some do this by writing out their offering check first thing. Others simply commit to giving a certain amount or percentage. I know of others who put their offering aside in an envelope or even a cookie jar. Some put it in a separate account so they don’t accidentally dip into it. Whatever you need to do to give from your heart and plan your giving, you need to do it.

So purposeful giving, giving that feels good, requires regular, consistent, systematic, planned, deliberate, intentional giving. Just so you can be sure that what I’m saying is what was taught and practiced in the N.T. look at 1 Cor 16:1-3

*Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

Here again we see purposeful giving. It was regular- the first day of every week, and it was planned- set aside in advance.

### **III. Joyful Giving** (2 Cor. 9:7)

So first we need generous giving. Secondly we need purposeful giving. Thirdly, this passage teaches us joyful giving. Joyful giving. Let’s look now at the rest of verse 7. “*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver*.” The word Paul uses for *cheerful* here is *hilaron*. It is from this word that we get our word *hilarious*. God loves a hilarious giver. Unfortunately, the only one laughing at much of our giving is Satan.

When was the last time that the offering was announced and you wanted to jump up and shout for joy, and do a little dance, because you were so enthused about giving? The very thought of it seems ridiculous to us. That just shows us how far we are from the heart of God in our giving.

Friend there are three types of giving.

First there is **grudge-giving**. This is giving because we HAVE to. This is how we give to the IRS or pay a traffic ticket. We give with no joy, and we receive no blessing. We dislike this

sort of giving and only do it because worse things will happen if we don't. This is how some people give to God. They give as though they are paying off a mafia boss. They give because they fear that God will punish them if they don't.

Next there is **duty giving**. This is giving because we OUGHT to. This is how we give to the power company. We don't hate this kind of giving, but there is no joy in it. It is a merely a transaction. There are many who give to God this way, as though they are paying one of their bills.

Finally, there is **thanks giving**. This is giving because we WANT to. This is how a young man gives to his lover, when he gets down on his knee, and hands her a ring and asks, "Will you marry me?" Great expense, great sacrifice, and great planning and preparation went into that gift. Yet it was a great joy, because it came from a place of love and adoration, and an expectation of greater rewards and blessing to come.

Has giving to God ever been like that for you? Have you ever given with such joyful hilarity? Have you ever given with the certain hope and expectation of greater rewards and blessings to come?

(Take offering early. Have everyone cheer and applaud)

Let me close a story from a little book called *Take God At His Word*. There was a man building a house in a rural area. Needing water for his new home, he commissioned an expert to dig him a well. The old well digger, seasoned in the art of the trade, scouted out the property, searching for just the right spot. Sure enough he found an underground river and put in a well. As he prepared to leave, he gave the homeowner some important advice, "Every day you must pump some water from the well. If you don't, you'll be sorry." The home owner thanked the man for the advice, and for weeks he followed the well digger's instruction, and pumped water every day.

As time went on, however, the home owner began to take the cool, sweet water for granted. One day he left on a trip and made no arrangements for someone to pump water from the well each day. When he returned, the water at the bottom of the well was stagnant and almost gone. He tried pumping fresh water, but nothing came out.

He went to town and found the old well digger and told him that his well had dried up. The old gentleman asked, "Did you remember to pump water from the well every day?" The homeowner confessed his neglect and asked why it mattered.

“The water in the well comes from an underground river that feeds the small tributaries of water that are connected to your well. Water must continue to flow through these tributaries so that your well can continue to receive water. If you quit pumping the water, the ground will dry up slightly and the underground river can’t find its way to your well. This cuts off the water supply. Remember the source of the water is the river, not the well.

The source of our financial well-being is not our own money and resources, it is God’s provision. Our money is only the well. If we don’t pump that well by giving on consistent basis, we will be cut off from the source and our well will run dry.