

Introduction: Welcome to session #3 in our Fall Vision Refresh series. Today we move from understanding our mission to how that mission is resourced.

[Opening Wallet Exercise] - To begin our time this morning I want to try an exercise with you. I'd like to invite each of you to take out your wallet and hold it in your hand. Dig in your purse or your pocket and take out your wallet.

- Now, think about the contents of that wallet and all that it represents.
- Now, think about who made it possible for you to have everything that you have. Do you trust him to keep providing for you and to care for you?
- Now, let me ask you to do something else. Give your wallet to someone next to you who is not your spouse or family member. It's okay...just for the sake of our exercise just hand it over to someone near you who is not a family member. Don't open the wallets just hold them. Okay, how'd that feel? A little uncomfortable? A little anxiety maybe? Or was it exciting? How do you feel?
- Now, ushers, let's take an offering.

Today I want to look at what the Bible says about our money and how we manage it. And I want to talk about God's plan for resourcing his work in the world.

When you stop to think about it, the essence of Christianity is giving. It has been said that we are never more like God than when we give because the Bible says that God is a giver, "*God so loved the world that He gave.*" When God wants us to give, all he wants is for us to become like himself. God is a giver. He's given to us. He wants us to learn to be givers.

Biblically, giving is a responsibility; but more than that, it's an opportunity. This morning I want to share with you three main reasons why the Bible says we're to give. Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 8-9.

The Bible teaches Giving has a threefold focus: gratitude for yesterday, alignment for today, and faith for tomorrow.

That's it—it's a response to God's faithfulness past, present, and future. No other reasons for giving; not for gain, not for building up my ego, not to get my name on a little plaque, not because I feel guilty if I don't give, but for those three main reasons—God's faithfulness to you past, present, and future.

[**Transition**] - 2 Corinthians 8-9 are two classic chapters on giving. We're going to be popping around to several different places in these chapters.

The Apostle Paul is writing to the Corinthian church to encourage them to follow through on their plan to take up a collection for the church in Jerusalem who is struggling through a difficult time.

As he encourages them, he reminds them of some valuable reasons to give. I'm excited about sharing this message with you because I know that the results of giving in your life for you will be huge.

Why do we give? That's what I want to answer today.

Why do we give?

- Because God needs the money? No.
- Because God doesn't want us to have money? No.
- Because the church is hurting for money? No.

He wants us to give for three primary reasons. Look at chapter 8:7. Paul is talking to the church about giving. He says, *"But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving."* Look at what this is saying. God wants us to grow in giving, as much as you grow in faith, in love, in knowledge. He wants us to grow in giving, too. Why?

First reason...Giving expresses gratitude for what God has done.

1. Giving expresses gratitude for God's faithfulness in the past.

That's the first reason and it's the greatest reason. God says giving expresses gratitude for yesterday's blessings. It's the highest motive. Thankfulness.

2 Corinthians 9:7 *"Each man is to give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion."* [He says you shouldn't give because you're pressured to give or because you feel guilty.] *For God loves a cheerful giver.* And then verse 12, *"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but it's also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God."*

The number one reason we give is out of gratitude for past blessings. Giving is a healthy acknowledgement that you know who has provided for you and that you are trusting in him to continue that. Has God provided for you? Do your giving habits reflect the level of your gratitude?

We know that God is the source of all that we have. Think for a minute about all you have...life and breath and everything else...just do a quick inventory in your mind. Think of everything in your house, everything in your garage. Now think of the stuff in your storage units.

Now do you believe that God is the source of all of that? The Bible says he's the source of every part of our lives. He's the source of our intellect and know-how. He's the source of our skills and abilities. He's the source of everything. So...we give because God first gave to us.

Notice Paul's comment in chapter 8:9 *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."* God says we

give because God first gave to us. In Matthew 10:8, Jesus said, "You have been treated generously, so live generously."

[Illustration] - Think about it, what do we do when we really appreciate someone or really love someone and maybe there is a special occasion or sometimes for no occasion at all, how do we express our love and appreciation? Often, we will give something to them, a card, a gift, a card with money in it. Why? Because we love them, because we appreciate them. We do that because giving a gift is the most practical way to express appreciation.

When we give to God, we express our appreciation to God. We're saying, "God, I love You. I care about You. I'm grateful for all you've done."

Notice in Chapter 8:8 Paul says, "*I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love.*" This teaches us our giving tangibly demonstrates our love. Giving puts our gratitude into action. Doesn't matter what we say...what we do with our money tells what we really value in life. God says, put your money where your mouth is.

[Transition] - The first reason we give is not because we're under pressure but simply because we want to express gratitude for God's faithfulness to us. The second main reason we are to give is because... giving keeps us aligned with God in the present.

2. Giving keeps us aligned with God in the present.

Giving enables me to keep my values aligned with God's. It helps me look beyond my own needs, beyond my own self. By nature, man is basically self-centered. We have a tendency to only think, "What's in it for me?" And we have a tendency to get into the "I, Me, My" syndrome. I, me, my... my barns, my crops, my everything.

Giving helps us examine that motivation. Giving is an occasion for a values checkup. I need to look at my motives and my values and my

priorities and ask: Am I just living for myself or is there somebody else, or something else that I'm living for?

When you sit down and write out your giving check or put your numbers into the online giving portal... that serves as a reminder to you. A reminder to you that, 1) God's the source of it all. And 2) You are just a manager of it. It's a constant reminder. Giving helps you express appreciation for God's faithfulness in your past, but more than that; it helps you keep your priorities and values aligned with God's.

In effect, the Bible says the second reason we give is to prevent selfishness and self-centeredness from settling into our lives. It helps us keep our priorities in balance. In fact, Deuteronomy 14:23 teaches the purpose of tithing is, *"To teach us to always put God first in our lives."* Matthew makes a similar point in 6:33 says, *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* Giving serves to put and keep your priorities in alignment with God. Remember, God doesn't need you to give, YOU need you to give.

Notice this is Paul's very comment as he brags on the giving patterns of the Macedonian churches in 8:5 he says they gave in the right way. *"They exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us."* First, they gave themselves, their lives, to God. Then they gave their offering to help out other people. That's the priority.

God says, "Don't worry about giving me your money if I don't have your life. I don't need your money." We don't give because God needs it, but because we need to give. Because of what it does to us. It keeps us from being selfish. It keeps us from being scrooges, it keeps us from being self-centered and thinking we're our own God and the whole world revolves around us.

[Transition] – Let's review what I've said so far: Why do we give? Because of guilt? No. Because of pressure? No. Because of sob stories? No. Because, 1) We express appreciation for past blessings. And 2) We align

our priorities with God's purposes in the present. Finally number 3,) we give because giving demonstrates our trust in God's faithfulness for tomorrow.

3. Giving demonstrates our trust in God's faithfulness for tomorrow.

Here's what we're seeing today: Giving is a three-directional act of faith. It looks back with gratitude, keeps us aligned with God in the present, and demonstrates our trust in God for tomorrow.

Now, look at Chapter 9:6 Paul says, *"Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will also reap generously."* He's using the analogy of a farmer. Just like a farmer who goes out and scatters a whole bunch of seeds, he's going to get a big crop. If you go out and throw a few little corn seeds in a field, what will you get? Maybe a few little corn stalks. But, if you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully.

This is a principle taught all through scriptures. It says in Galatians, *"You reap what you sow."* Here it says you reap in proportion to what you sow. If you sow sparingly, you reap sparingly.

Is it possible that giving is the number one way we demonstrate trust in God's ability to be faithful? Think about our exercise earlier. I asked you to think about the contents of your wallet and who made it possible for you to have that and then I asked if you really believed that God would provide for you in the future the way he has in the past? Then I had you give your wallet over to someone else.

For most of us that triggered a little anxiety. Here's the thing...Giving is less anxiety producing if you're trusting in the faithfulness of God to provide in the future. I know this is a tough truth to face. We all have some room to grow, I'm sure. But the truth is, giving is a revealing audit of our trust in God's faithfulness.

God says giving is like planting seeds. It's like a deposit. No deposit, no return. It's planting seeds. The farmer or gardener plants seeds because they are confident that the mechanics of the universe will produce a crop. Proper soil, proper sun, proper water, proper tending will result in a crop. There is eager expectation of the future...about what God is going to do.

[Illustration] – A few weeks ago I ripped out part of my summer garden and started my winter crop of varieties of lettuce and spinach and snap peas. Before the seeds were planted do you think I went out each morning and carefully looked over the dirt expecting lettuce to come up? Of course not, no expectation there!

Now, after I went out and spread all my seed packets then what? Whole different ballgame. If you've ever sown grass seed or any other seed, you know what this is like. After a few days, every morning...look it over, check it out...filled with eager expectation. Wait! Is that a lettuce sprout? Is that a sprout of grass?

Giving demonstrates our trust in God for the future...eager expectation of what God is free to do in and through our lives. What's he going to do...what's he going to do? If you're bored in your life, start giving or giving more boldly and see what happens. Giving demonstrates our trust in God's faithfulness in the future.

In Matthew 6 Jesus teaches; don't just store up treasures here on earth. Lay-up treasures in heaven. Invest for the future. How do you invest for the future? Simple. God says every time I give cheerfully, I'm investing in the future. That's why in Proverbs 19:17 it says, (Living Bible) *"When you give to the poor it's like lending to the Lord and He repays wonderful interest on your loan."* God says, "I see your giving not just as gratitude for the past and not just as helping you align your priorities and values with mine in the present. But I see it as an investment for the future."

The Bible says everything will be rewarded. Even if you give a cup of cold water in His name, it will be rewarded. That's how you lay up treasures in

heaven. And no bank pays better interest. You cannot out give God. He is a much bigger giver than you are.

The more we give to him, the more we're blessed. Paul refers to this truth in our passage for today. Look at Chapter 9, verse 10, *"Now he who supplies the 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."*

Here's how the prophet Malachi speaks about this principle, *"In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."* (Malachi 3:9-10).

God says, "I dare you! I dare you to try and see if you can out give me. The more you give back, the more I bless your life. I will bless you in return."

These passages teach what 2 Cor. 9:6 is teaching, *"Whoever sows sparingly, will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows generously will also reap generously."* This indicates your giving determines what God can do in your life. That is a fundamental principle of stewardship. God says we reap what we sow. Our giving determines what he is able to do in our life.

- What are you expecting God to do in your life?
- How much do you want God to bless your life?
- How much are you expecting God to act?
- How eager are you for what God will do in your life over this next season?

If you want the answer to that question, if you want to know how much God is able to do in your life in this next season, if you want to know how

eagerly expectant you can be for God's activity in your life just look at your giving. The Bible says we reap what we sow.

Now please understand, God is good. God is gracious. He's going to be faithful to those who believe in him. But I don't know about you... I want to live my life in such a way that there are no roadblocks in my life that would block any of what God wants to do in me and through me.

God is a rich God...He owns it all. I don't want everything God has but, I do want all that he has for me...nothing more, nothing less. That is abundant living. I don't want to stand in the way of what God wants to do in my life or through my life; I don't want to miss anything.

Abundant living begins with abundant giving. God says:

- You don't give because somebody manipulates your emotions.
- You don't give because you feel guilty.
- You don't give because you're under pressure.

You give as an act of gratitude, as an act of keeping your priorities in order, and as a statement of faith saying, "I believe God will provide all I need. In one way or another, he will bless me and I want everything he has in mind for me, so I will give to Him." It's a statement of faith.

That's why so many of the greatest promises in the Bible have to do with giving. Luke 6:38 *"Give and it will be given to you."* Who's talking here? Some guy on TV, some preacher? No. God. God is saying, *"Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over."*

God says you give me a little; just see what kind of results you get back. *"... it will be poured into your lap for with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."* God says, "You cannot out give me." That's why, when you make a giving commitment, it's an act of faith. It involves risks. What if you can't fulfill it? That's where the faith comes in. There's where the faith takes over.

It's interesting how inconsistent we can be about commitments. We make commitments in all areas of life. We make commitments in school, in marriage, at work, in our careers. Yet when it comes to making a commitment to God, we say, "I don't believe in tying myself down."

We make financial commitments in every other area but we say, "I couldn't make a giving commitment to God because the economy is too unstable" and then we go out and refinance our home and make a fifteen- or thirty-year commitment on our house, a three-year financial commitment on our car, a month-to-month commitment on our credit card and all other kinds of things. In essence we're saying, "I'm trustworthy enough to make payments on my house and car and other loans but I cannot be expected to keep a commitment to God." Do you see the inconsistency there?

The amount of giving that a person ought to give really is a matter between you and the Lord. I don't have any right to talk to you about that or tell you what you ought to give or vice versa. It's a personal matter. And it ought to be something that's not made on a hasty decision. You ought to pray about it, discuss it, think about it, get the calculator, the pencil, the paper out, make it a matter of prayer.

[Transition] – But, you need to know too, that the Bible doesn't just tell us to give in vague terms...it gets specific as to how we are to give.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 Paul tells us the characteristics that giving ought to have. It's totally different from the way a lot of people think God wants us to give. Our giving should have three characteristics. *"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."* – 1 Cor. 16:1-2 Paul said, I want you to set it aside and then when I get there I'll collect it and take it to the people in Jerusalem who have just had famine and major crisis and we're going to provide disaster relief. Paul says three things here about giving.

1. It ought to be regular. It ought to be systematic. *"On the first day of every week..."* Every Sunday -- that's the first day of the week, once a week -- you set it aside. Make it regular, systematic. Not spasmodic -- where if you feel like giving today then you give, like a tip for God or if the service was especially good or whatever. It is to be regular. *"On the first day of every week..."* once a week.

2. It ought to be planned. Don't just do it based on your emotions. *"... you should set aside a sum of money..."* Think about it. Don't let somebody come in and manipulate your emotions and then you do something impulsively or hastily. It ought to be thought out, planned. You ought to set it aside.

3. It ought to be proportional. *"... in keeping with his income..."* Has God blessed you a lot? Then you ought to give a lot. Has God blessed you little? Then give a little. It ought to be in proportion. It ought to be a percentage.

Deuteronomy 16:17 *"Each of you should bring a gift in proportion to the way God has blessed you."* That's what tithing is all about. Tithing is the starting point -- ten percent I'm giving back to God. If you've never given in a percentage, maybe that's what you ought to consider. Pray about that. But there are others who have been tithing for years and God says, "I want you to grow in the grace of giving." Maybe he wants you to go beyond that?

[Illustration] – R.G. LeTourneau was a big man with a big heart for God; LeTourneau had always done things in a big way. His company designed and built some of the world's most massive machinery—earthmovers, transporters, missile launchers, bridge builders and portable offshore drilling rigs.

For many years, he didn't bother with tithing. Instead, he lived on ten percent of his income and gave away ninety percent to Christian work, especially missionary efforts in Africa and South America. Even when his

business was in financial jeopardy, he continued giving his sacrificial pledges to Christ's work. "The question" he said, "is not how much of my money I give to God, but rather how much of God's money I keep for myself."

Closing:

Let me summarize what I'm saying. Why do we give?

1. Giving expresses gratitude for God's faithfulness in the past.
2. Giving aligns our priorities with God's purposes today.
3. Giving demonstrates our trust in God's faithfulness tomorrow.

Let me encourage you to take the next seven days and consider these questions (I've put them in your notes so you can refer to them):

- How grateful am I for all God's done for me? Does my giving reflect that?
- What does my giving indicate about my priorities?
- What does my giving indicate about my level of trust in God?

Ask God to help you get these matters settled. Ask God to help you set up a Biblical giving habit -- regular, planned, and proportional. Ask God to do it.

- For some of you that may mean starting to give some amount for the first time.
- For others of you it may mean beginning to tithe (10%) for the first time.
- For others it might mean going beyond that. I don't know. It's your decision. God says, "If your attitude isn't right, don't bother, don't worry about it. What I want is not your money. What I want is you and what the money represents—your trust." PRAY