



The Harvest of Generous Living

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Grace Church | 2.23.20

Good morning church, it's a great joy to be with you this morning and invite you into worship Jesus with us. If you are new, you are welcome here. We are a bunch of normal, unimpressive people who rely on the supernatural grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you are unsure what that means, or are struggling to understand, or questioning whether this faith thing is real, you are welcome here. This is where sinners gather to hear good news. So let's get into some good news by opening up the Word of God.

This is our sixteenth week in the book of 2 Corinthians, can you believe that? In it, we have been discovering the good news of Jesus through what we have called the "paradox of weakness". As we learn to embrace our weakness and break down our pride, the glory of God in Jesus is revealed. We are strongest in Christ when we are weakest in ourselves, that is the paradox. And for the last two weeks, the focus of the text has been on our hearts in generosity. Does the way we live open handed with our resources reflect our embrace of the paradox of the gospel? Are we willing to be made weak through the giving away of our money, in order that we might grow in the strength of gospel ministry? If you remember two weeks ago, we saw the example of Christian generosity, namely that it is sacrificial, and has less to do with the amount and more with the heart. Even if we are not financially prosperous, we give out of our need in response to God's generosity in Christ. And last week Chase did a fantastic job showing us from chapter 8 and 9 the practical outworking of our generosity, namely that it happens in the context of community where we hold one another accountable to give and are willing to expose our budgets and our habits to one another for the sake of faithfulness.

And so now we arrive at the second half of chapter 9 and our theme persists. And now in our third week of the Scripture calling us to generosity, in case you are beginning to feel that generosity is a burden, in our text today we see the remedy. If two weeks ago was the model of generosity, and last week was the practice of generosity, this week is the blessing of generosity. If we are radically generous with what we have, what comes of it?

In **verse 6** we find the central image of our text, and also the main point. Paul even says "the point is this". That is extremely helpful when you are trying to determine the point of the text. Thanks, Paul. So what is the point of our text? In order to get ourselves in the world of the text, we all have to become agrarians today. So before we get to the text, pull out that inner farmer in you. If you are a farmer, that's easy, although I'm not sure we have any farmers in our membership. But reach



down to farming principles for a moment, so that Paul's image can make sense to us, because we see him compare Christian generosity to the act of sowing and harvesting a field. When farmers go out at the time appointed for them to sow, and what they want most is a huge and bountiful harvest, what is their primary strategy? If they want a large harvest, they must sow a lot of seed. Imagine a farmer with thousands of cotton seeds, for example. When the time comes to sow, instead of spreading all of his seeds, he keeps some behind. He only sows a few hundred. Well, he cannot logically expect to harvest more than he has sown! In order to harvest plenty, he has to sow plenty. That's just how it works. The more he throws out, the more comes in.

This is our main point this morning. If you hold back and give sparingly, you are missing out on the bountiful harvest of generous living. But if you are willing to truly give generously, you will receive a harvest of blessing in return. This is principle of the harvest of generosity: the more we give away, the more blessing we receive. And this in itself is paradox, a paradox of weakness: in order to gain, we must be willing to give. In order to be strong, we must be willing to be weak.

The harvest of generous living brings at least two blessings: 1) an abundance of sufficiently and opportunity, and 2) an overflow of thanksgiving and glory for God. We see both of these blessings clear in **verse 11**. When we sow our resources generously, the harvest brings enrichment in every way for us, and thanksgiving to God. So this morning we will start with unpacking how we truly get in on this harvest, we will move to examine the two blessings of the harvest of generosity, and we will end with a gospel call to praise God.

The Harvest of Generous Living

We have already introduced the image of the harvest we see in verse 6, but now I want us to consider what Paul might mean by "sowing sparingly" or "sowing generously". The obvious conclusion from this image is that we are called away from stinginess. Imagine the farmer who goes out to sow his field and throws one seed over on the right side, carefully choosing and thinking through all his options, then spends another few hours thinking about where he will sow his next seed. Eventually he chooses a nice spot somewhere on the left. Paul is saying that to give like this, picking and choosing sparingly and with so much intentionality that you actually sow little seed, is foolish. Instead, we should live with open hands, throwing seed *everywhere* we walk. What this means for us is that in order to partake in the harvest of generous living, we give freely. Think of this practically. You are on Waco Drive and you come to a stop light and someone there is obviously poor and asking for money. Now, are there better places to give money? Strictly speaking, sure. You don't know exactly what this man or woman on the street will use your money for. This text is not advising you to throw your tithe out on the street for anyone to grab. We must sometimes be intentional with how much we give and where. But what this text is saying is that if you are so focused on intentionality that you *never* give generously outside of your normal amount and normal plan, in the spur of the moment as the need arises, you are in serious danger of sowing sparingly and missing out on the harvest of blessing. You are in danger of getting into a comfortable rhythm of giving that seems like generosity but really is so *safe* that i has more to do



with your own fear than your generous heart. What might this look like practically? It means that in addition to the giving that you regularly plan for, you should also set aside money for random needs. You should be willing to be inconvenienced, to sow all over the field, always ready to give more than you expect, always ready to give in different ways and in different places.

But notice that the call to “sow generously” is linked not only to the action of sowing, but again to the heart of the sower, the motivations of the sower. We see this in **verse 7**. We are called to sow, or to give, *generously*, and that generosity, as we have already seen in previous weeks, has far less to do with the actual amount of “seed” sown, and more to do with the attitude and heart. Paul links the bountiful sowing of generosity to a willing sowing, a cheerful gift. The word “cheerful” here is hard to interpret, because it is the only time it is used in the Bible, but the sense of the word is not just happy, but the opposite of reluctant. Willing, ready, expectant, cheerful. A farmer can go and sow all the seed he has, in a variety of ways and places. But he can do all that with a reluctant, dead heart, out of duty and not delight. This is not the kind of farmer that can ever really expect to get a part in a bountiful harvest, because his duty will only carry him so far. If there is no joy in the work, the will eventually gives up. And so it is with Christian generosity. The sowing of your financial resources for the good of the church and for those in need is not like paying your taxes. It’s tax season, so we can maybe make that comparison. Maybe Paul is saying, the more we give, it acts kind of like a spiritual write off, and so we get a bigger break and tax return in God’s kingdom. So make sure to give generously, because you want to take advantage of the potential refunds. But that’s not it at all. Christian generosity is not like taxes, because no one ever gives his taxes *cheerfully*. It’s demanded, required, exacted. If you don’t give it, the government will make you one way or another. Oftentimes our lack of giving is not because of greed, but because of fear. We are fearful that if we give, nothing will come of it. So we do not give cheerfully. This is not Christian giving. Christian giving is cheerful giving, because Christian giving has *faith* that when God says he will bring a harvest, he will. Instead of being fearful that we might waste our resources through bountiful generosity, we expect God to do great things through our open-handedness. Christian giving is cheerful, because you know that whatever you give out will increase when the harvest comes!

Think of it like this. Farmers can come in two types. First, you can simply be a hired hand. You are the one tasked to go sow the field, but whether you sow bountifully and fully or not, you still get paid the same wage. Your job is just to sow, that’s it, on behalf of someone else. But you must do it, otherwise you won’t get paid and you won’t eat. So you do it, but not cheerfully. There is no potential in it for you. But there is another type of farmer, the one who has a stake in the land he farms, who has been tasked with its welfare as its keeper. If the sowing goes well, he knows how much blessing he will receive. It’s directly correlated. He sees every single seed as full of potential, full of life, just waiting to sprout up. So he sows with expectant cheerfulness. In his mind’s eye he imagines the great harvest to come.

We are called to be like that sower, the one with skin in the game. You see, we are not just God’s hired hands in creation, we are his viceroys, his representatives. He has given us dominion over the earth, and has blessed us with financial resources, which are our seeds.



Everytime a dollar comes out of our pocket to benefit someone else other than us, we can either see it as a necessary and begrudging exercise, or we can see it as a cheerful investment in the kingdom of God.

And look what happens when we embrace the potential of our giving and give cheerfully and willingly. It pleases God. He *loves* a cheerful giver. That is no small thing: God smiles on his children when they give cheerfully, because it showcases that they receive joy in trusting him. Why? Because it is his nature. God is not stingy with his grace, but gives Christ freely to all who come humbly to repent and believe. He does not do under compulsion, but we remember Hebrews 12 tells us that Jesus went to the cross full of expectant joy. As his blood fell to the ground, he experienced pain and separation from God, but his nature was cheerful, non-reluctant, because he expected that as he gave *everything*, as he sowed the seed of his own life, a harvest of life was coming for all who believe.

This is what it means to partake in the harvest of generosity: giving bountifully, not sparingly and with a cheerful heart, not in reluctant apathy or fear. Let's move now to see the blessings of this kind of giving.

Blessing 1: An Abundance of Sufficiency and Opportunity

Take a look at **verses 8-11**. What we see in this text is that sowing generously produces a blessing of abundant enrichment of grace for the giver. Surely, there is immediate benefit in giving to the one who receives the gift. As a vocational pastor, I provide for my own family based on our generosity. The Bible commends this practice in 1 Timothy 1 Timothy 5:18. But that is not what this passage is about. This is a passage primarily about the blessing of generosity not for the one who gets, but for the one who gives.

I don't know about you, but I was taught early on the importance of saving. Saving is the king of financial virtues, because of that one magical word that we are taught to worship and revere as the highest blessing of economics: interest. Saving and investing is king, because if you start saving from an early age, then you will accrue more and more compounding interest. I remember being told in high school that basically if I saved and then invested a couple of hundred dollars now and added some every year, I could be a millionaire by the time I was thirty five or something like that. Now, I don't know the validity of that advice, and I am assuming it is based on a whole lot of other factors, but I was taught that as if it was the height of moral virtue. If generous giving was ever mentioned, it was only to be done *after* I saved and invested and accrued interest. In other words, while saving and investing gets you more money, giving is a zero-sum game. You can't give large amounts of money away and expect to get "ahead". Surely the best way to make an impact is to save up for a while until you have enough to give away.

But this strategy is inherently unbiblical. Saving is wise, investing is also wise. But giving is better. And giving is not just better because it is morally better than saving, like it's better to be poor and



happy than rich and miserable. It's better because it is *worth* more. What we see in our text is that generous giving produces *more fruit* than compounding interest, not less. If you want to put your money to work in the free market, save and invest. You'll get some return, But if you want to put your money to work in the kingdom market, where the returns are eternal, then give it away.

The first return for the giver is an abundance of grace that produces *sufficiency*. **Verse 8** speaks to this. I was always taught that the best way to provide for your needs is to save. Again, saving is good and wise, and you should save some of your money. But this text is teaching us the way to provision is primarily through giving, not saving. Here is where I must note that this text is not teaching a prosperity gospel. Any teacher who says that by giving you are "sowing a seed" for future financial prosperity is simply a huckster with a few Bible verses who is selling you a false gospel. This text does not promise financial wealth and prosperity when you give generously. It promises something much better, it says God's "grace" will abound to you. And here is the thing about God's grace: he knows what you need. This is why Paul frames God's grace as "sufficiency in all things at all times". When you give generously, you receive an abundance of sufficient provision, not needless provision. When you give generously, you receive exactly what you need, exactly what is sufficient for your needs, in all things at all times. He provides for you. Here is a lie that we have to squash now. Excess is not better than sufficiency. Having more is not the secret sauce, having what you need is the secret sauce. And that is what God promises: nothing more, nothing less. What you need. For some, that is more, for some that is less. We must learn to give generously, trusting that we will receive the blessing of sufficiency and God will keep us from both excess and need. If you are poor, trust God has grace to provide for you, and give generously according to what you have. If you are wealthy, trust God will provide what you need and give generously according to what you have. Learning to see sufficient provision as a blessing has a result too. The end of verse 8 says it is so that we may "abound in every good work." Receiving the blessing of sufficient provision keeps us from greed and worry, pulling our hearts to abundance of God-pleasing faith.

This promise of God's sufficient provision is backed up by Paul calling on the faithful character of God in **verse 9**. Here he is quoting from Psalm 111, and I believe he has God as the subject when he says "He". This promise points back to remember the work of the gospel. In the sending of both his son Jesus to die for our salvation, and also in his free gift of the Holy Spirit to seal our salvation, God has distributed freely. We are the "poor", destitute in sin and spiritual paupers. And this grace that is freely distributed by God in the gospel is exactly what we need, because it is a provision that endures forever. It is a provision not just of financial resources or food or shelter, but a provision of righteousness. Money and food and material wealth fades and burns, but righteousness lasts forever. The good news of Jesus we can rejoice in this morning is that God has already given us all sufficiency in Christ, who is our righteousness. We stand before God, if we stand in Christ, completely right and in need of nothing. Generosity in this life then is simply a way to enjoy and walk in that abounding grace of God, the key that unlocks our enjoyment of the eternal blessing of righteousness. As we experience God provide exactly what we need in this life, we remember that he was generally provide exactly what we need in Christ



for eternal life. The blessing of generosity is that we receive the sufficiency of God in Christ not only in this life but in the one to come.

The second personal blessing we receive in the harvest of generous living is *opportunity*. I have always been taught that the best way to have more opportunities for more giving is to save and invest. If you save now, you can send your kids to a great school that will really have a lasting impact on them. If you save now, you can get to pay off all your debt and instead of wasting money on interest rates, you can give more away. And while there is some truth to this, our text teaches us that the *best* way to increase opportunity for impact in the kingdom of God is not to save, but to give. **Look at verse 10.** Paul is saying here that if you sow generously, God will increase your seed for sowing, and therefore multiply what he calls the “harvest of your righteousness”. This is a simple concept: if you sow plenty of seed, every harvest you will have more seed to sow. Over time, you are sowing and reaping more and more and more fruit, because every year you sow more seed. The same is true of the Christian: the more we give away, the more opportunity God gives us to give. We don’t give just to receive more to store up. That is the prosperity gospel: “give this and you will get more to keep”. The true gospel is “give this so that you will get more to give!” This reciprocal circle of opportunity ultimately is so that we would produce a harvest of righteousness. In other words, giving makes you holy. The harvest of righteousness here is not the righteousness you have in union with Christ but rather the *fruit* of the righteousness you have. Think of the language Paul uses in Galatians. He says the *fruit* of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. This is the harvest of righteousness that comes out of those walking in the Spirit. And here the idea is similar. If you want to produce fruit for the kingdom of God--if you want to see more churches planted, more people come to faith, more missionaries sent, more zeal and love for God in your life, more humility for your family, more unity in this church, justice for the hurting in our city, opportunity and spiritual health for the poor--if you want to see the harvest of Christ’s righteousness on earth, it starts with giving. **Verse 11** reinforces this.

What happens when you get your check on payday? Or say, when you get your tax return this year? Do you see rejoice to see it as an opportunity to keep sowing, or do you see it only as an opportunity to build a bigger barn to store all you’ve got? The point of God’s generosity to us is not that we would continue to get and get and get. The point is that as soon as we get, we turn right back and give. This is why I would encourage you to set aside a portion of your income, 10% is a fine starting point, but I would go higher, and give *before* anything else. Don’t give after you’ve saved and after you’ve spent. Give first thing. Because the best way to have opportunity for the gospel going out and the kingdom of God advancing is not to save, but to give. After all, when God did not spare his Son but gave him up for us all, his generosity produced the opportunity for sinners to turn into saints.

So let me again say something that I think needs to be said. I do not want you to walk away from today thinking that I am advocating for thoughtlessness and carelessness with our finances, as if we simply start giving more we also do not need to be wise with our spending and giving and investing. I am not saying that. In my life, I can proudly say my parents are a prime



example of this. They have been wise with the money they have, an example for me to follow. They spend wisely, invest, save, and put their money to work. This is what good stewardship means. It's wisdom. Wisdom is just echoing God, being Christlike. But here is where this can fall apart: if we forget that generosity is our first priority, and we regulate it to the second or third or fourth priority, then we have failed to live wisely. We are no longer good stewards. God will not bless you with what you need if you are too greedy or too afraid to trust him with what you have been given. If you save all your money, you might be wealthy, but you will not be holy. If you save so that you can "give at a future undisclosed time", you may be wealthy, but you will not be holy. You may have all you need materially, but you will not have what you need spiritually. You may have every opportunity afforded to you in this life, but you will not be afforded eternal opportunities. Because here is the thing church: you will never regret your decision to be generous. You may have worldly grief sure, but not godly sorrow. In the end, when your barns burn and your body decays and you meet God, you will not wish you gave less to the work of the kingdom. When you survey the harvest you sowed into, you will not lament that you spread too many seeds. So if you want the blessing of having just what you need, and the blessing of more opportunities to increase your harvest in the coming kingdom, then give generously.

Blessing 2: An Overflow of Thanksgiving and Glory for God

In Isaiah 43, God is speaking to his people Israel, reminding them that is in their creator and the sustainer of their life. And in verse 7 he mentions one small hill of a phrase that has mountains of significance. He says his people that he has created are "created for my glory". Out of his good pleasure, he created us. He did it so that he might be praised and glorified. Let's get one thing straight: if the benefits of your generosity were only pointed to you, that would not be great. If your generosity was only meant to serve and bless you, it would be almost impossible to give from a pure heart or motive. We would give just to get. But God hasn't set it up that way. Not only does your generosity bless you personally, it also allows you to live out the very purpose for what you were created: to glorify God. This means that living generously with your resources helps you to find joy in fulfilling your God-given purpose.

Take a look at verse 12. We won't be long on this point, because I think the great part of it is self-explanatory. When we give, you think you are doing one thing, but really we are doing so much more. Maybe we think: I am providing for the needs of the saints, but what you don't realize is that your gift is like an avalanche, an overflow, of thanksgiving and praise and glory to God. And the reason that generosity is an overflow is because it spreads to others. **Look at verse 13.** Christian generosity gives us the benefit of not only meeting physical needs, but spiritual ones too. When we give, we open up the floodgates for our brothers and sisters to fulfill their purpose to glorify God. We give them the opportunity to say: "look what God has done!". Paul says the generosity of the Corinthians is a "confession of the Gospel". We preach the gospel through every check we write.



I love this, because it's a blessing we get that we forget we need. Two weeks ago we asked you to plan and prepare to give to the Cliftons, members of our church who are in need in East Asia. Well, our small church has been very generous and has already raised over \$8,000 dollars to help meet their need. I don't say that so that you are wowed by the number. I say that because the Cliftons know the financial state of our church. They know many of us are students, that we have had a lot of member turnover, that we don't have a lot of wealthy members. But when we give a gift like that, they know it is generous. They know it is sacrificial. And what happens? Do they praise us? No, not at all. They are provided with the opportunity to glorify God. And that friends, is the best gift we could ever give. I know they are feeling the truth of **verse 14**, singing and praying for us as we do for them. And this gift, this mutual blessing of glorifying God, is ready and available for you and for your brothers and sisters. All you have to do is be generous.

Here is where I want to end this morning. It's obvious that this text is charged with a call to response. We respond to this truth by giving generously. I want you to do that, as more needs continue to arise in our church. After communion you will hear of a need to give to the Bixlers, as they joyfully have heard news of a match for their adoption. Adoption is incredibly expensive and can often be crippling for families. We want to love them and their soon to be daughter well by helping to provide for them, and you will have that opportunity.

But beyond that, I want us to remember another exhortation built into this text. After spilling significant amounts of ink teaching and admonishing the Corinthians to give generously in chapters 8 and 9, Paul is so worked up with joy that he cannot help but burst out in praise in **verse 15**. This exclamation of praise is significant and intentional. Paul closes his exhortation on generosity with the same word he opens it. In 8:1 he says that the Corinthians should be aware of the "grace of God that has been given" to the churches in Macedonia. That word translated "grace" in 8:1 is *charis*, and is the same word translated as "thanks" in 9:15. So Paul starts and ends this section of his letter with grace. Grace be to God for his inexpressible gift! What is this inexpressible gift? Well, it's the same thing given to the Macedonians in chapter 8. It's their generosity. The very generosity we have is a gift of God's grace meant to drive us towards thanksgiving and praise.

So this morning, my last endeavor is to plead with you to praise the gracious giver. Praise him because he is not stingy with his grace. Praise him because he is the fulness of all generosity. Praise him because he created you to. Praise him because he did not count the glory of triune communion in heaven something to be grasped, but humbled himself all the way to the dust of the earth and to a criminal's death. Praise him because his generous and undeserved love in the gospel is the only reason those who trust in him will not live forever in spiritual poverty but will walk forever in the kingdom where the Son of God is like the very Sun in the sky. But praise him most of all, because he has melted your hard heart of stone and turned you from a pharisee to a disciple. Praise him for transforming you from a rotten Scrooge and jealous slave into a gentle and generous son of the King. Praise him because although you aren't fully generous yet, one day you will be. Praise him because even at this very moment he is preparing your imperfect praise to echo for eternity with all the saints of every tribe and tongue in a perfect chorus of glory. The gift of God is totally



inexpressible, friends. Let's pray for hearts that our generous with our praise, for his glory and our good.

