

There is a phrase I like that gets thrown around from time to time: Don't look at it as a "have to" but a "get to". We use it in the context of serving our spouse in our marriage, exercise for the sake of getting healthy, or spiritual disciplines. I've even tried it with my kids and their chores, but that doesn't go over very well. It is a phrase that says if we truly understand the outcome of doing something, we'll joyfully and eagerly do whatever is necessary.

That is especially true when it comes to giving. When we are all confronted by the command to give in God's Word, it is very easy to see that as a "have to". Our money is important to us, it satisfies our needs and wants, and our heart is tethered to it whether we like it or not. So, the request to part with some of it may feel like it's something we're just obligated to do. **But giving doesn't have to feel like a "have to".**

In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul uses the picture of a farmer to illustrate this idea. A farmer could see planting some seed, instead of eating it all, as a "have to". But a wise farmer sees it as a "get to" because he knows it will produce a harvest. He doesn't count not eating that seed as loss. He plants it knowing it will bring blessing. When we recognize our giving will produce a harvest, our attitude towards giving, and our experience in it, will change.

So, this morning we continue in our series called *Joyful Generosity*, and we are going to consider what happens when we give. What is the fruit of our generosity? **If we understand the blessing generosity produces, the "have to" of giving will give way to the "get to" of giving.**

[2 Corinthians 9:6-15] ⁶ 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. ⁹ As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.

Paul lays out the purpose of giving, God's role in it, and what our attitude is to be. But woven throughout the passage is what happens when we give. I want to look at the three blessings of our generosity.

When you give, others get. When we give, our money doesn't just go into some void. It goes to bless others or fund the work of the Kingdom. V12 refers to the Corinthians' gift "supplying the needs of the saints". Paul is taking up a collection for the church in Jerusalem.

We are all needy people. We have needs that need to be met and are all utterly dependent on God to provide for us. He does that through the blessing of our labor and does it through the

generosity of others. God has asked every one of us to participate in providing for those needs. I thought fondly of those who have rallied around us when babies came, illness set in, times were tight. Our needs were met by the generosity of others, and it was a tremendous blessing.

Every week we talk about giving and invite you to do so. We often talk of budget numbers, but that is so inadequate. Yes, you need to know where we stand and we want to be transparent with the church's finances, but who wants to give to simply meet a number? So we are going to change the way we talk about our needs because what we need are resources to do things God has called us to do.

I want you to see and understand what your giving goes to. Your giving meets the deep needs of our neighbors. That could be Boxes of Hope for refugee families who are showing up here simply to escape oppression but have no clue what to do next. It meets the needs of those who need food for their family. Even our current OCC drive is intended to bless those who are without at Christmas. Your giving fills the gap of those who would have to learn to do without, without us.

Your giving also funds the work of the Gospel globally. This is our strategic partner in Germany, Dirk Ahrendt. Dirk is a church planter who has joined an organization responsible for evangelizing the entire nation of Germany. Currently, the birthplace of the Reformation has less than 1% of its people attending an evangelical church. It is spiritually desolate and desperate place, and your giving is used to proclaim the Gospel there. Dirk will be here next week. Come hear what God is up to in the ministry you are helping to support.

And I think you know these people. I gathered as much of our staff as I could last week to take this pic. We can look at a budget and see a bunch of overhead, keeping the lights on, buying coffee. All that is necessary to give to because it doesn't happen without it. But there is a line in our budget that is anything but overhead: Salaries and Wages. Your giving supports the lives of our staff. You are providing homes for us to live among our church, putting food on our tables, taking care of single moms, providing health care, helping send our kids to college. On behalf of the entire Fellowship staff, I want to say thank you. We couldn't do what we do without you. Like Paul says in v14, we long for and pray for you because of how you provide for us. When you give, others get.

When you give, God gets. In the beginning we were made in God's image and commanded to fill the earth with his glory. We fulfill that mandate when we give. Vv11-12 say when we give out of submission to our confession of the gospel, our faith in Christ, our giving causes the recipients to thank and glorify God. Your obedience leads to the praise of God.

I have a friend who comes from a wealthy family and, once a year, he and his siblings receive distributions from the family trust and hand out scholarships at the local high schools. My friend and his siblings were not responsible for creating that wealth. Their father is the cause of that. But their dad gives them checks each year and lets them deliver it to these students in need. And while they get the joy of giving out those checks, it's their dad who deserves and gets the credit. That's the way it is with our Heavenly Father. He's set up a family trust and he gives you and me distributions from it and the privilege of passing it on. But he's the one who deserves and gets

the credit. We get to show off our God when we are generous! And when you show God as provider, you may get an opportunity to share him as Savior.

When you give, you get. When we give it's right to expect nothing in return. Otherwise, it negates our giving. But in God's grace and economy, our generosity comes back to us in blessing.

Paul refers to the harvest of our righteousness. Now, our righteousness is our right standing before God, imputed to us from Jesus and his righteousness. But righteousness is also faithful works done out of that right relationship. For it to be a righteous act, it must be the right thing done the right way for the right reasons. When we give out of a generous heart, that's righteous and we reap a harvest. And like v6 tells us, the more seed a farmer sows, the greater the harvest. The more we give the greater the harvest. So then what is that harvest?

It is a spiritual harvest. First, we are sanctified through our giving. We often don't think of giving as a spiritual discipline, but it is. Giving is worship, just like praise and prayer, an offering of ourselves to God. Giving lays down of our life for the sake of Christ and follows the example of Christ. When we act like Jesus, we become more like Jesus.

Our giving also impacts our eternity. **[Revelation 22:12] "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.** While our salvation is free and based on God's grace and our faith in Christ, there is coming a day where our works will be judged, and we will receive a reward for our righteous acts. Until then, it's like waiting for Christmas morning. We get the blessing of hope and anticipation now while we wait to receive those rewards in heaven.

But now, maybe the most surprising part of this series, the reason why giving can be a "get to" is found in v7: God loves a cheerful giver. Anyone want to have more cheerfulness in their lives? We are about to enter the season of cheer, but this has nothing to do with eggnog. Paul uses a word where we get our word "hilarious". God loves a hilarious giver. What an amazing thought! Imagine if, every time you gave, you belly laughed and laughed in pure joy and happiness, absolutely thrilled with what you were able to do. Do you think that's possible? It is. God loves a cheerful giver because God is a cheerful giver and when we give cheerfully, we're acting just like him. When we give, we are full of cheer, full of joy because we get the awesome privilege of helping someone in need, of propelling the Gospel worldwide, of making our God famous to those we help. Our giving is not the separating of us from our money but supplying for the needs of the world. And the result is hilarious joy!

Don't believe me? Think of the contrast. We'll soon be watching *A Christmas Carol* (George C Scott is the best!) Would you say Scrooge is a cheerful giver? Clearly no. Why? Because the root word of "miserable" is "miser". When we hold on so tight to our money we let it own us. Our quest for the preservation of our stuff leads us down the path of misery. But giving breaks us from that bondage. My freedom from insecurity around money occurred when I started giving it away. And when we get to the end of the movie? The miser has turned giver, and joy follows.

I want you to think of the most generous person you know. I'd be willing to bet they are usually pretty happy if not completely joyful. Why? Because **it's impossible to be generous and unhappy at the same time.**

What is your joy meter, your cheer meter, reading these days? If it needs a boost, give. It helps others, glorifies God, and changes your heart. And joy is sure to follow. When you and I see the blessing of our generosity, "have to" gives way to "get to", and giving becomes a foundational, cheerful practice of our spiritual lives. That can be true of all of us.