

How many of you read through the whole NT? Congratulations. Why did you do it? Guilt? Peer pressure? My guess is that you read for 8 straight weeks because you believed that reading the Bible would benefit you in some way.

I was working out yesterday and the dominant question in my mind was, "Why am I doing this?" I mean it hurts! I would rather sit on the couch and watch basketball. I was doing it out of the belief that in some way exercise is beneficial to me.

The truth is we make sacrifices to the extent that we anticipate some future benefit. That's not selfish, that's just the way God made you. That is why there are so many promises in the Bible, promises to benefit those who trust God and follow Christ. Why would Jesus enter Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday to keep an appointment with the executioner? What was His motivation? The promise of a future benefit.

Did you know Jesus was cross-eyed? He couldn't take his eyes off the cross. It was always on His mind. The closer it got the more He talked about it. But Jesus was also far-sighted! Farsightedness is a vision condition in which distant objects are seen clearly while close ones lose their focus. Jesus saw beyond the cross into the future. Heb. 12:1-2 reminds us to persevere in our faith by "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who **for the joy that was set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." His sacrifice was made in anticipation of a future benefit, namely joy. Of course the trick is to be convinced of a future benefit. That requires faith.

I once read about an old prospector out in the Mojave Desert who got lost. He wandered around until he ran out of water and, just as he was giving up hope of being rescued, he saw an old water well with a pump handle in the distance. When he got there he found a mason jar full of water holding down an old weathered note someone had written. It read, "This pump will work but you have to use the water in the jar to soak the sucker washer in the handle. If you don't, it will break and the pump won't work. Just pour the water over the washer a few times before you start pumping. Use it all. Have faith. You will get all the water you need." What would you do? Consume the water or invest it in hopes of having more?

Last week we looked at 2 Cor. 8 where Paul offers instructions to the Corinthians about giving. He urged the Corinthians to resist the momentum of their pagan, self-indulgent culture of consumption by giving generously to the needs of the persecuted Christians in Jerusalem. Today I want to look at 2 Cor. 9 and finish up this topic by answering some basic questions about giving - why, where, what, how and when?

Why should I give?

We give because we believe we will be blessed. Jesus said, "Give and it shall be given unto you." 2 Cor. 9:6 is a restatement of the basic law of giving Jesus talked about in Lk. 6:38. It is called "the law of reciprocity." We are conduits of God's grace. He pours out His grace so that we can offer it to others. At least four times in the first seven verses of chapter 8 Paul uses the word "grace" to describe this offering given to the saints in Jerusalem. (vv. 1, 4, 6, 7). Giving is an act of grace.

God will not love you one ounce more if you give or one ounce less if you don't. But giving is indisputable evidence for the reality that God is in control of my life.

Where should I give?

The early church directed contributions to three specific groups:

1. The poor (Benevolence). We have a benevolence fund but today our government takes at least 10% of our income to care for the poor through welfare, food stamps, Medicaid and other programs designed to help low-income Americans.

2. Missionaries (Global and Local Partnerships). Those members of a local church leaving home to take the gospel to a particular people in a particular place.

3. Those who serve within the local body. (General Fund)

Show where contributions go...pie chart...

What should I give?

Giving includes our time, our money, our love, our forgiveness. Our covenant card says "time, talent and treasure." The principle of reciprocity does not just apply to money. It provides the motivation for giving and frees us from fear. We know we can expect a return on our giving. It is a recognition that we cannot out-give God.

I truly believe that much financial trouble stems from an unwillingness to give.

How much should I give?

2 Cor. 9:7 tells us..."as he purposes in his heart." You are the only person on earth who can decide what is the right level of giving. But with this verse comes the attitude behind our giving - "not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a

cheerful (hilarious) giver." Our natural perspective is to give grudgingly but notice the next verse, "God is able..." (9:8).

There are four types of givers:

1. There are the "nones." The "nones" are the fastest growing religion in our country today. The word came about because when you fill out an application that asks what religion you are more people than ever mark "none." But this term can also be applied to giving. If you asked 20% of church attenders how much they gave last year they would reply "none."

2. There are convenience givers. I referred to this group last week when I said that many people pull out their wallet or purse and see what they happen to have in there. If it is more than a one and less than a 50 they put it in the basket.

3. There are systematic givers. These people are often referred to as "tithers." They set aside a percentage of their income to give as a worship offering. The tithe (ten percent) was a requirement under the law. It was a tax and if you didn't tithe you violated the law. There were actually three tithes required under the Law.

- a. The Levitical or sacred tithe to support the priests (Num. 18: 21, 24).
- b. The tithe for the feasts (Deut. 14:22-27).
- c. The tithe for the poor (Deut. 14:28, 29) was given every third year.

The tithe commanded in the O.T. totaled 23% of your income. The tithe was like temple worship and ritual sacrifice. In the N.T., temple worship is impossible, there is no temple. Jesus becomes our high priest and our sacrificial lamb. We no longer observe these rituals because something better has come.

Here at Fellowship we like to point out that the "tithe" is an OT concept that is replaced by grace-giving in the NT. Grace-giving is a response to the grace of God poured out in the heart of a Christ-follower.

Jesus commended the tithe but nowhere commands it. However it seems unreasonable to me that He would suddenly expect less than 10%. But let's say you don't currently give 10% of your income to God's Kingdom work. Then my advice is to start somewhere and give systematically. If you currently give nothing, then start with 1% (it's easy to calculate!) but do it systematically. As your faith grows so will your giving. As your giving grows so will your faith.

4. There are sacrificial givers. God supplies an abundance of seed to those who are abundant sowers. Have you ever thought, "Well, that guy can give because he's got

a lot of money?" Have you ever considered that he has a lot of money because he is a giver? I have a friend who once told me he once decided to give away a large sum of money. He said, "Do you know I have tried to give it away three times now?"

When should I give?

Give your first fruits. "Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come." 1 Cor. 16:1-2.

This is a reminder that God comes first...Mt. 6:33. Develop a "God-first" way of thinking.

Paul drives home God's perspective on the stewardship of His resources by the use of a simple seed...vv. 10-11. The more you sow the more you reap. Sow bountifully - reap bountifully. The more seed you plant the greater the harvest.

How shall we respond? If you are giving, keep giving. Resist the momentum to hoard resources or to just consume them. Invest in kingdom work. If you are not giving, get started. There is hardly anything sadder than a person spending their whole life accumulating what they cannot take with them. John Ortberg tells a poignant story of a valuable lesson his grandmother taught him.

"I learned how to play Monopoly from my grandmother...she was the most ruthless Monopoly player I have ever known in my life. Imagine if Donald Trump had married Leona Helmsley and they'd had a child, and you get some picture of what my grandmother was like when she played Monopoly. She understood that the name of the game was to acquire. When she played and I got my initial money from the bank, I would just try to hold onto it, because I didn't want to lose any of it. She spent everything, bought stuff she landed on as soon as she could, and she'd mortgage it to buy more stuff. And eventually, of course, the way the game goes, eventually she would accumulate everything. She would be the master of the board. She understood that money was how you keep score in that game, that possessions were a matter of survival. And she beat me every time. And at the end of the game she would look at me and she'd say, 'One day you'll learn how to play the game.' She was kind of cocky, my grandmother. 'One day you'll learn how to play the game.'

When I was about ten, I played every day with a kid that lived in our neighborhood, and it dawned on me as we were playing every day all through that summer the only way to beat somebody in Monopoly was a total commitment to acquisition. That summer I learned how to play the game. And by the time fall rolled around, I was more ruthless by far than even my grandmother. I went to play her, and I was willing to do anything to win. I was willing to bend the rules. I played with sweaty palms. Slowly, cunningly I exposed the soft underbelly of my grandmother's weakness. Relentlessly, inexorably I drove her off the board. The game does strange things to you. I can still remember it like yesterday. It happened at Marvin's Gardens. I looked at my grandmother. This is the person who taught me how to play. She was an old woman by now. She was a widow. She had raised my mother. She loved me. And I took everything she had. I destroyed her financially and psychologically. I watched her give her last dollar and quit in utter defeat. This is the greatest moment of my life.

And then she had one more thing to teach me, my grandmother. She said to me, 'And now it all goes back in the box. All of the houses and hotels, Boardwalk and Park Place, all of those railroads and utilities, all of that wonderful money, it all goes back in the box,' she said. I didn't want it to go back in the box. I wanted to leave the board out permanently--bronze it maybe, as a memorial to what I had achieved. See, when she said, 'It all goes back in the box,' it was kind of a way of saying to me, 'None of it is really yours. It doesn't belong to you. You don't own any of it. You just used it for a little while, and now it all goes back in the box. And next time it'll all go to somebody else. That's the way the game works. So when you play the game, don't forget this one lesson. When the game comes to an end, and the game always comes to an end, the stuff all goes back in the box.'"

Sooner or later, it all goes back in the box. A businessman is jogging and he feels a sudden pain in his chest, and in an instant it all goes back in the box. A teenager's driving in a car and somebody misses a stop sign, and in an instant it all goes back in the box. The doctor says it's malignant, and in a hospital bed, in an instant, it all goes back in the box--houses, cars, titles, clothes, toys, they all go back in the box. Barns full of stuff and bulging portfolios, even your body goes back in the box. So you have to ask yourself, "What is it that matters? What is it that's worth giving your life to?" Seek first the Kingdom of God. Give generously. You can't take it with you but you can send it on ahead.