



Pastor Kyle Mercer  
Cheerful Giving

June 30, 2024  
Series: Grace & Grit  
2 Corinthians 9

**BIG IDEA - OUR GENEROSITY SHOULD BE PLANNED, WILLING,  
AND CHEERFUL**

If you are a Christian, Christian community and the local church is not a nicety; it is a necessity, because across your life (this is just good to know) you're going to be needed and needy. Now, it feels good, especially to men, when we feel needed. Yes, you need us to do something. We want to help. It doesn't feel as good to feel needy. In fact, a lot of times when we're needy we don't want anyone to know.

That's the story of Irina. We couldn't help her until we knew, and we couldn't know until she was in one of our Community Groups, which is why we say here (if you're new or you've been coming around, I'm going to say this ad nauseam), "We are not a church *with* Community Groups; we are a church *of* Community Groups." This room is too big to be the place and point of connection and care. That's going to be the Community Group.

To get in a Community Group, you have to go through our Weekender. Our next Weekender is July 19 and 20. Look. I know how this works. We've been doing this for eight years. This time of year, you moved here because you're starting residency or a fellowship or a school or your kids are starting school, and you got a new job, and you just got here. I want to invite you to the Weekender.

The Weekender is how you say, "I'm not just going to settle for showing up. I don't want attendance; I want transformation." Guys, here's what I'm doing with this Weekender. If you're new, I want to invite you personally to get in, to join us. There's something happening this September that I want to tell you about right now, but I'm not going to, even though I want to. It is so exciting. It's like Christmas Eve for me from now until September. I can't wait.

I can't tell you about it yet, but I need you to get in, and the summer is an incredible time to get in before the busyness of fall. One of my plumb lines for my life is the most time wasted is the time getting started. Some of you have been on the sidelines, and you need to move to the front lines. You've been a spectator, and you need to participate. You've been a taker, and you need to be a giver. Now is as good a time as ever.

Also, none of you have said anything so far, but have you noticed my new shirt? "Lexington as it is in heaven." What is that? That is the Lord's Prayer. "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." What we're doing with heading to Lexington this fall is we're praying, "Lord, would your kingdom come and your will be done in Lexington as it is in heaven?" We're building a launch team, and we have our first interest meeting at the 11:00 service

So, if you came today to the 9:00, and you're going to come back after the 11:00, just go get a cup of coffee and come back. We are going to be downstairs right after next service, and we're going to be getting to know each other. I'm going to be there. We're going to be casting some vision, dreaming together, answering some questions, and it's going to be great. Let's pray, and then let's get to work.

Lord, I want to take a moment right now and pray for this Lexington launch team that we believe is going to become a Lexington community gathering that might one day become a Lexington campus. I just thank you for all of the people who have gone ahead of us and been walking the streets of Lexington. Lord, I pray today would be a moment for that core group to show up and say, "We're all in with our time, talent, and treasure." I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

You can turn to or type to or swipe to or scroll to or flip to, if you have one of those real Bibles, 2 Corinthians 9. I don't do this a lot. I figured it would be a great time to catch us all up, because we're two-thirds of the way through this book. It's a long book. So, let me just remind you really quickly, and then I'll meet you in 2 Corinthians 9. It's going to lead to where we're headed today.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians for four reasons. Let me give them to you really quickly. First, he was delayed. Remember that? By the way, Paul was a busy guy. His life was complex and a little bit unpredictable. Could you imagine scheduling coffee for, like, two weeks from now with the apostle Paul?

He's like, "Well, if I'm not in prison, and if my ship doesn't wreck... Currently, there are a bunch of guys fasting, and they said they're not going to eat until they kill me, so we'll see how *that* works out, but all things considered... Yeah, hopefully I'll be there." He writes because he's delayed.

The second reason he writes is he's defending his ministry. Now, Christians are not "Paulians," we're Christians, but Paul is one of the best examples of what it looks like for a normal human being to follow Jesus. Paul was so bold he said, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Where can you say that in your life?

Wherever you're doing well, that would be an area you could say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." A great diagnostic question of where you're *not* doing well is where you could *not* say, "Follow me." Can you say in your marriage, "Follow me as I follow Christ"? Paul in his whole life could say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Anyway, that's the second reason.

The third reason is Paul wanted to restore relationships. In chapter 2, he's like, "Forgive that guy. He has repented. Restore him." Then in the last couple of chapters, Paul was like, "Guys, I love you, and my heart is wide open. I can't wait to see you. Let's be reunited and reconciled. Come on. We all know our life is only as good as the relationships in it."

So, he was delayed, he was defending his ministry, and he wanted to be reconciled. Those are the three big purposes. Then there was a fourth purpose, and it's a purpose of a lot of his letters. He's writing to encourage the church to be generous. Do you know that 13 percent of this book is about generosity, money, and giving? Last week, I preached a whole sermon on generosity and money, and that was chapter 8. In chapter 9, he continues his thought.

You know, I know this. As a preacher and teacher of God's Word, I could have combined chapters 8 and 9. I could have said, "One sermon on generosity," but I knew you wouldn't be satisfied with that. In fact, I know some of you missed last week, and you said, "I heard Kyle talked about money. I hope he talks about it again this week." Well, you're going to get your wish.

If you'll turn to 2 Corinthians, chapter 9, Paul says some different things. It takes the whole Bible to make the whole Christian. So, we'll see, today, what Paul talks about in regard to money and generosity. Verse 1: "**Now it is superfluous...**" What a word. It's a big word. It basically means unnecessary and unneeded.

***"Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints..."***

By the way, the *ministry for the saints* is another way for Paul to talk about the generosity of the church, because generosity is part of your ministry. He says, "It's unnecessary." Why is it unnecessary? You might say, "Paul, it might be unnecessary because you just talked to us about it for a whole chapter."

Paul would say it's unnecessary because every Christian (I think I kind of said this last week) knows they should be giving. This is a neat thing about becoming a

Christian, and we all know this, depending on when we became a Christian and what that looked like. When you become a Christian, the Bible says, God writes his law on your heart and the Holy Spirit comes inside of you.

This is what's really fun about watching someone become a Christian. They start doing what the Bible tells them to do before they know the verses that say to do that. I've seen this before. I've seen people come to faith in Christ, and they start repenting of all of these sins, and they don't even have a verse for it. They start serving, and they start giving.<sup>7</sup>

Actually, Abraham might be the best example of this. Remember Abraham in the Old Testament, the father of the faith? There's this scene... You can Google it. It's a hard name to say. There's this guy he meets called *Melchizedek*. He's also talked about in Hebrews, chapter 7. He's this priest. Abraham meets him, and he's a priest of God.

It's the first time he meets a leader in the Old Testament church, we would say, and he responds by giving to God through Melchizedek 10 percent of everything he has. Here's what's fascinating to me about that. When is the first command in the Bible to tithe? Not until 400 years later. Leviticus, chapter 27, is the first mention of tithing.

So, Paul says, "I don't *need* to write about this, but I *want* to write about this," and he calls it the *ministry for the saints*. I just want you to see that and notice the plural nature of it. By the way, when you hear *saint*, don't think like the Catholics do, like, some special, elite class of dead Christians. In the Bible, the saints are just any and all believers.

He's saying it's the role of Christians to give, and he puts all of us in that category. He doesn't say, "The ministry of the wealthy" or "The ministry of the old." A lot of Christian organizations and nonprofits are very worried about their global missions giving, because the vast majority of people who care and give anything significant to world missions are dying. It's the Builder and Boomer generations.

He calls it the *ministry for the saints*, because generosity is part of your ministry, and the only way you can minister is if you have margin. You can't minister to people unless you have margin in your time, and you can't minister to people unless you have margin in your budget.

Here's one other thing I want you to notice. Just think about this with me for a second. Anything the church (not just *our* church) is going to do for Christ and his glory and his kingdom and his mission... Almost 99 percent of it is going to be supported by Christians. To state the obvious, non-Christians, for the most part, do not support the church.

I'll give you a biblical illustration. Every once in a while, you meet King Artaxerxes. He's not there that often. King Artaxerxes is the guy who gave Nehemiah all the money. It reminds me... I know a guy whose son got type 1 diabetes when he was 16 years old, and afterward he started giving to all this JDRF stuff, and he started going to all of these galas and raising money.

I was talking to him about it, and he said, "If I don't do this, and my son has type 1 diabetes, how can I expect anyone to give?" When you've been affected by something, you're going to be the one to give to it. So, anything that's going to be done for Christ and his kingdom all over the world is going to be supported only, basically, or certainly primarily, by us.

So, Paul has a strategy to encourage the Corinthians to give. I have to show you this. Look at verse 2. He goes, "I don't need to talk about giving," but then he says, "***...for I know...***" Remember, he's writing to the Corinthians. What Paul does here is really neat. "***...for I know your readiness...***" "I know you're ready to give." "***...of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them.***"

Do you see what Paul did there? This is why you have to read the Bible in order. In chapter 8, Paul writes to the Corinthians and goes, "Hey, guys, this Macedonian church is super generous. They don't have as much money as you, and they're suffering, and they're more generous than you. I wonder if you could be as generous as them."

But then do you see what he's doing in *this* verse? He's saying, "Okay. I told the Macedonian church how generous you guys were going to be. I told them about your past generosity, and that's what encouraged them to be as generous as what I just described in the previous chapter."

What is Paul doing? He's trying to create some friendly generosity competition. Isn't that awesome? Actually, it's really interesting if you know the geography. He's pitting the north (the Macedonians) against the south (the Corinthians). The north and the south have been having a competition for a long time.

I love this, because he's basically saying, "Guys, let's play the game of who can give more." Today, (it's okay) people, especially men, love to play the game of who can make more, especially if you get to the upper echelons of society, the Fortune 500 C-suite people. It's like, "How many yachts do you need?" Right? They make a ton of money.

If you talk to those guys, they don't want to be rich; they want to be richer than other men. They want a bigger bonus than last year. They want a bigger bonus than the guy

in the office next to them who does the same thing as them. Paul said, "What if we played a different game and asked who could give more?"

That leads to the first principle I want us to learn today: *generosity is contagious*. I hope you catch it today. It's more contagious than COVID. Watch out. Generosity is contagious (here's the bad news), but so is stinginess. This is why you will almost never meet just one person in a family who's generous, because it's contagious.

My Community Group was meeting this last week and talking about the sermon and talking about money and generosity. Maybe it was everybody, but almost everybody in there was telling the story of how they learned to be generous and how they learned to tithe, and I was amazed that all of the stories were, at least for my small Community Group, basically the same. It was, "I learned to tithe and be generous from my parents."

A lot of them were like, "My parents were lower middle class, and Dad had to get a new job, and Mom stayed at home. It was really tough, but they never missed giving." Or other people said, "When I was a little girl and was doing babysitting, Mom had the envelope system for me. She said, 'If you make \$20 babysitting, \$2 goes to the church, \$2 goes to savings, and \$18 is for you to have fun with.'" Generosity is contagious.

Here's the thing. We need to learn how to talk about our giving, and it can't just happen up *here*. Maybe I'm trying to model a little bit. Westerners are the only people who are uncomfortable talking about money. What if every DNA Group (those are smaller groups of men and women) started talking just a little bit about money?

It's so funny. DNA Groups will talk about the difficulties of their marriage, and they'll talk about sexual temptation, but you bring up money and they're like, "All right. Now you're getting personal. Now you're getting personal." We need an environment where we can spur one another on and encourage one another. Only you know your heart, but encourage one another to be generous.

The first thing Paul tells us is that generosity is contagious, so he's actually trying to encourage each other. Now, let me just say this. I know this is a bold statement, but you only get one life; you might as well aim at something big. We would love to be the most generous church in North Carolina. We're not that far away. Last year, because of your generosity, you guys gave, and then we gave away, \$977,000 through Hold the Rope. I want you to think about that.

That's on top of our budget. We have a section of our budget that we give away and do missions and sending and all that. I'm talking about on top of that. Hopefully you know my heart and hear this charitably. We would love to be the most generous

church, and we would love to challenge other churches to be as generous as they possibly can be. Why not?

The first principle: generosity is contagious. I only have one negative thing to say. You have to see it, though. It shows up in verse 3. Paul only has one negative thing. Everything else is positive about generosity. There's one negative thing, and you have to see this. Here's what he says.

***"But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident."***

Here's the second principle of generosity: *not being generous is embarrassing*. Paul is like, "Guys, if you're not giving, I'm going to be embarrassed, to say nothing of you." In other words, "You should be even more embarrassed."

See, at this time in ancient Greece, when they would do these events (this is part of what Paul is referencing here) and would get these benefactors to commit to giving to build something, if they wouldn't give, if they didn't follow through on what they committed, they would publicly humiliate them by putting their name up as those who didn't fulfill their commitments.

Could you imagine if today...? I will not do this. This would not be Christian, but could you imagine if we were like, "Hey, guys, it took some work, but this week we have compiled a list of people in this church. You know, they show up and smile and raise their hands in worship and drop their kids off at our Kids ministry.

Their daughter is thriving in our Students ministry, and they're in a Community Group, and their marriage has been helped. Oh, and we gave them some money for counseling...all that. Let me show you all of the names of the people in our church who show up and give nothing." Obviously, I'm not going to do that. Put the names up. I'm kidding.

Here's what I want you to think about for a second. This is what Paul is saying. Nobody would be proud to have their name on the screen. There are certain things you're like, "I'm glad I'm not giving to that. Yeah, tell them I don't give to that. That's fine." I don't think any Christian would be proud that they're not giving.

Do you know that, historically, churches have disciplined (I know that's a scary word) members of their church for not giving? I told you this is the only intense thing we're talking about, really. You have to ask, at the end of the day, is not being generous just

kind of unwise or is it, as the Bible calls it, a sin? Is it incompatible with being a Christian?

Let me tell you how this works at our church, just to pull the curtain back for a moment, because I want you to know how we do things around here. Every time someone takes their next step in being a part of leadership, we have a financial conversation with them. It's part of the application to be a Community Group leader.

Now, we're not doing a deep dive. I don't need to know what you make. We ask questions like, "Are you contributing regularly to the ministries of our church?" I mean, how would you feel if you found out your Community Group leader wasn't giving? How would you feel if you found out that one of our staff people, or something, wasn't giving? Paul is saying it's embarrassing to not give.

The third thing he says is in verse 5: *generosity should be planned and willing*. Let me show you this. Verse 5: **"So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers..."** These are those guys he mentioned whose names we don't get, Titus, we think Apollos, and one other guy. He says, **"So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift..."**

What he's talking about is both the church and the Christian need to be ready for the gift. This is why we're an official organization. This is why you get a tax deduction when you give. This is why we pass the bucket. This is why we receive stock. This is why we have online giving. The church's job is to go, "All right. We're removing barriers. We're reducing friction. It's going to be super easy to give."

Then he says, **"...for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction."** An *exaction* is something that's taken by force or done by coercion. He's saying, "I don't want that." So, he's telling them to be ready. I don't normally do this. I want to take us to a couple of other Scriptures that talk about this.

In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul writes to the same church and says this about being planned and ready to give: **"Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia..."** Paul talked about giving to all different churches. **"...so you also are to do."** Here's how you should give. **"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."**

Basically, here's what Paul says. Here's how you plan your giving. It's what's called a *theology of first*. Listen to this. This is very important. So, what are your two greatest assets? Your time and your money. With both your time and your money, God designed a principle of first.



Let's talk about time first, because we've been talking about money. God says, "Give me the first day of your week." That's Sunday. In fact, it's not that you work and then rest. You rest in preparation for work. God basically says, "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to trust me that I could do more with six days than you could do with seven." It's the principle of first. Great. "God, I'm going to give you the first day of my week."

Then he says the exact same thing with giving. Most people who don't tithe, the reason they don't tithe is they don't do it first. Some people say, "I couldn't afford to tithe." Do you know what Randy Alcorn says to that? Randy Alcorn wrote, like, six books on money. Randy Alcorn says here's the test if you could tithe: If you made 10 percent less, would you die? Then you can tithe. Randy Alcorn said that, not me.

This is an important distinction. The tithe in the Bible is not 10 percent; the tithe in the Bible is the *first* 10 percent. This is why the Bible says, "First of your flock and first of your fruit." Now, we don't get this because we don't live in an agrarian society. You know, all of the animals are pregnant, and you finally get the first of the flock. God says, "The first time something is born that you were planning on eating, give it to me."

Do you understand what that does to you emotionally? "Well, then, God, I guess you're going to... There will be more flock. Right?" Yes, there will be. The first time the fruit buds and you grab it and go, "I'd like to eat this..." "No, this is the first, so I have to trust God that more is coming, because I'm going to give him my first." This is why we say, "You give first to honor God, you save second to be wise, and you live off the rest to teach yourself contentment."

Here's what you do every time you give if you think about it. When you give, you say three things. "God, I thank you for the past. God, I honor you in the present. God, I trust you for the future." A lot of times, we don't realize how theological what we're doing is. When you give, you say, "God, thanks for the past. God, I'm going to put you first and honor you in the present, and, God, I'm now going to trust you into the future."

He says it needs to be planned, but it needs to be willing. Let's read it again. Go back to verse 5. I'll read halfway through. **"...for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction."** Just a couple of quick things about giving willingly. You can't give willingly if you don't know two things. You have to know how much you make, and you have to know where everything goes.

You can't come to the end of the month and go, "Where did all of our money go? Did I keep hitting the 'Buy Now' button on Amazon? I mean, what happened?" We've all

had some kind of experience with that. You get to the end of the month, and you're like, "Where did everything go?"

Paul says you can't give willingly if you don't know what you make and where it goes, because you don't know what you have left to give or what you should give first. Then he says you can't give willingly if you don't know what to give *to*. I don't think I've ever talked about this, but I just want to talk for a second about where Christians are to give their money.

Everyone will go, "Oh, yeah. St. Jude hospital is doing a great thing." You can give to that, but I want to talk just for a second... I want you to see from Scripture the primary place Christians are going to give. I remember, years ago... I went to Elon University, and they still... You know, you get this from your alma mater. Twice a year, you get those nice booklets the alumni get, and it's all pictures. What is it really? It's all stories about alumni and how much they gave. Right?

So, I open up this book. This was a couple of years ago. I don't know this family, but there's this whole article about this family and how their daughter went to Elon, and they gave \$20 million to Elon. I'm reading this article, and they said, "We gave \$20 million to Elon University because of our faith in Jesus Christ." I thought, "What a terrible application of your faith in Jesus Christ." I mean, it was not to any Christ-honoring... I went there. That \$20 million is not going to further the kingdom of God.

Let me show you the three places you're supposed to give. I want you to see this from Scripture, not from me. The first place you're supposed to give is to support people who are in full-time ministry. Here's what it says. First Corinthians 9: ***"If we have sown spiritual things..."*** This is Paul writing. He's like, "If I've invested in you spiritually..." ***"...is it too much if we reap material things from you?"*** "Can I get a salary for doing this?"

Then he says, ***"If others share this..."*** Paul is like, "This is what everybody does everywhere." ***"...rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ."*** Paul is like, "But I'll work on the side, because I don't want you saying things about me."

Look here. ***"Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?"*** Paul is like, "Guys, this is ancient. This goes back to the Levitical priesthood." When they would bring the sacrifices to the temple, the Levites were allowed to eat them afterward. That was their food.

Here's what I'm trying to say. Being in bi-vocational ministry, in my opinion, is plan B. If you've ever met somebody who has to be in bi-vocational ministry, it's usually not good for the church, because he's trying to work 25 hours while he's also working at Home Depot for 25 hours. It's not good for the church. They don't get the quality of ministry. It's not good for his family.

What I'm saying is God designed the church so there would be a few people who are able to minister full time to the entire church. They don't work another job, and they're supported by the church. So, I wanted you to know that's the first thing the Bible says we give to. I want to show you the second thing.

The second thing we give to shows up in Philippians 4:14. ***"Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia..."*** Paul is like, "I started a church there. I planted it." ***"...no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica..."***

Paul goes, "When I left, and I was going to this unreached area, and I was planting a new church..." He says, ***"...you sent me help for my needs once and again."*** Here's what I want you to understand. The first place people give is to support the local ministry that's ministering to them. The second place (and part of what you give to the local church does this) is we're to support missionaries on the front lines.

I want to explain this to you, because I want you to know why. It's like, "Why am I giving to this missionary in Africa?" Because the people he or she is ministering to can't support him or her. This is the principle. Here's a great example in America: somebody who goes onto a college campus, someone who goes to Wake Forest University.

They're either ministering to students... Maybe their parents have money, but those students have no money, the Christian students they're trying to disciple. Or they're ministering to non-Christians, trying to share the gospel, and *they're* not going to support them. You have to understand there are certain ministries that will never be self-supporting.

Here's an interesting thing I heard. I didn't get to fact-check this, but I think it's true. Many of us know who the late, great Tim Keller was. He led one of the most influential churches in America in Manhattan. Someone told me that church was never self-sustaining. I mean, it's one of the most expensive cities in the world.

What I mean is other churches and other ministries gave for the last 30 or 40 years to help Redeemer Church in New York City. Why? Because they're in the wealthiest part

of the world, and who did Tim Keller minister to? Seekers and skeptics who were not necessarily giving back to the ministry he was investing in.

There's a third place we give. Let me show you this. First John 3:17: ***"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."***

The third unique place Christians give is to those in need among their congregation, and this happens at so many different levels. I think of two stories right now. There was a single mom (this was years ago) who didn't have much money, and she was starting to have a lot of anxiety. She said to her Community Group... It was winter or something.

She said, "What helps me get rid of my anxiety is exercising, but I don't have money to go to the gym." She tells this whole story. Her DNA Group afterward just goes, "All right." You know, they have the meeting after the meeting. "I think we could solve this problem." They went and bought her a treadmill and an elliptical for her to have. It was like, "Wow! What a powerful thing." That's just meeting the needs in our church.

This week, my oldest son was at Wake Forest basketball camp. So, I'm at this basketball camp, and they have an award ceremony. I go to the award ceremony, and I see a single mom from our church. She said, "I needed to come up here, and I needed to tell you something." She said, "During the Hold the Rope offering..." I don't know if you guys know this.

During the Hold the Rope offering, we were able to give some money to some single moms in our church who were having a hard time. She said, "When I saw you here, I put it together. You guys, at the end of last Christmas with Hold the Rope, gave me some extra money. It's what let me pay for my kid to go to this camp this week." We don't know the thousands of different things that are happening.

So, generosity is contagious, generosity should be willing and planned, and *generosity is how we sow and reap*. I need to show you this. Look at verse 6. Here's a new concept. ***"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."***

Paul is doing what Jesus does. He's like, "Guys, think about it like a farmer." Think about how silly this is if a farmer did this. He says you can sow bountifully (that's generously) or you can sow sparingly (that's stingily). He's saying, "How silly is a farmer who won't let go of his seed." It's like, "No, no. I have all of these tomato seeds, and no one can have them." It's ridiculous. Right?

When we see it from that perspective, we're like, "No, no, no. Dude, you've got to get rid of them. You've got to plant them. You've got to water them. You've got to invest them, and then you're going to have so much more." I want to talk to you... I think this is going to be a moment for many of you in this room right now.

I want to talk to you about sowing and reaping, because it's such a bigger deal than money, but it's part of that. I want to give you three principles of sowing and reaping. As soon as I say them, you're going to know they're true. Ready? *You reap what you sow, not what you want to reap.*

I know what you want to reap. It's the same for all of us. You're like, "I want to reap a good marriage. I want to reap great kids. I want to reap retirement and have enough money. I want to reap health." You're not sowing any of that. You only reap what you *sow*; you don't reap what you *want*. This is the difference between directions and intentions.

There's a more powerful principle than this. This is why sowing and reaping falls apart in our minds: they don't happen at the same time. Here's the second principle: *you reap later than you sow*. Again, we're not in an agrarian society, but think about that. You sow the seed. It's a long time, weeks at best, usually months, and sometimes years, depending on what you sowed. Look at what Paul says in Galatians 6.

***"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."***

I want to tell you the two temptations in sowing and reaping. The first temptation is to be deceived. Did you see? ***"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."*** We tend to be deceived because the reaping comes later than the sowing, so we don't quite yet feel the consequences for the sinful choices and decisions we're making.

This is why people will do an enormous amount of foolish things while they're young and single, and they don't reap all of the consequences of it until they get married or until they have their first kid. The other thing is to get discouraged. So, when you're sowing, you can either be deceived... You think, "Ha, ha, ha! There are no consequences. I'm the exception to the rule. I can do these things and nothing bad happens to me."

No, no, no. You just haven't reaped it yet. God is not mocked. Everything you sow, you reap. No question. The other thing, though, is to get discouraged, to be like, "I am

sowing. I am praying. I am giving. I am loving." Paul says, "Don't be discouraged." That's how he ends. "Continue to do good, for at the right time you will reap a harvest if you don't give up."

Okay. Here's the third principle. These are so simple, but you can take them to the bank. You reap what you sow, you reap *later* than you sow, and (this is easy to remember because it rhymes) *you reap greater than you sow*. It's really amazing. Drop a seed, get a tree. It's unbelievable, and people know this.

Every once in a while, someone is like, "How did I end up in divorce court?" It's a tree. It's like, "Man, let's go back and talk about the ten thousand paper cuts. Let's talk about all of the seeds." See, here's what I know. Some of you in here are in a season right now where you are reaping all of the things you have sown in the past, and it's not going well for you.

You can see. That's the interesting thing about physical health on some people. Right? I was recently at a family reunion thing (it's not worth getting into the detail with), and it was so discouraging to me. Do you ever not see people for 10 or 15 years? You're like, "Dude, you're 10 years older, but you look 30 years older."

That happened again and again and again. I'm like, "Dude, you have been making some horrible decisions for about a decade, and I can just see it looking at you." People reap things they don't want to financially. They reap things in their marriage they don't want to, but you have to go back to you sowed it.

Here's the encouraging word in all that: you can change what you're sowing right now. There's such a humility to the seed, because with a seed you're like, "It's so small. I could drop it anywhere. I could carry a few in my pocket. I can't fit a tree right now, but I can do something with a seed." Paul says you have to understand there's an inescapable principle of sowing and reaping that's connected not just to generosity but to all of life.

That leads to one of the final things Paul says. We are to be *generous as cheerful givers*. Look at this. **"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart..."** Then he tells you two ways not to give and one way to give. Two ways not to give: **"...not reluctantly or under compulsion..."** This is maybe the most famous verse on giving in the New Testament. **"...for God loves a cheerful giver."**

If you've ever heard this preached on before, you probably have heard this. The Greek word is the word we get *hilarious* from. So, literally, to give with laughter. In a lot of African churches, when it's time for the offering, they put all of the buckets up front, they play music, and all of the people dance as they come down to give their offering.

Could you imagine if we did this? We're going to try that this weekend and see how that works.

Could you imagine if, when we take the offering today, everyone is laughing and so joyful? Could you imagine if someone is at the house, and they hear Dad laughing, and they're like, "Dad, are you watching *Dumb and Dumber*?" and he says, "No, I'm giving online"? I mean, could you imagine? That's what he's talking about. We should be so joyful.

Why should we be cheerful givers? Actually, here's the question: Why does God love cheerful givers? God loves cheerful givers because *he's* a cheerful giver. It's not just that God is a giver and a forgiver; it's that he does it cheerfully. The Bible says Jesus, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame. See, God loves a cheerful giver.

We've taught on love here a lot, and I've told you different things about love, but when the Bible talks about God's love toward us, you can think of it in two categories: God delights in us and God loves to do good to us. It basically says here God loves a cheerful giver, and he delights in him (we'll see this in a minute if we have a little bit of time left), and God uniquely loves to bless and do uniquely... Now, God does good to all of his kids, but it's a special type of doing good that's connected to cheerful giving.

Now, why do we give cheerfully? In large part, because we love seeing the difference it makes. When you see 27 baptisms last weekend... When I see that, I'm ready to take my shoe off and put it in the offering. "Just take it all!" Guys, when we send 150 students on a mission trip... Here's what I want you to know. I don't know the exact numbers, so give me a little grace on this. We subsidized every one of those students so the trip was, I think, about half the cost it should be. That was you guys' generosity.

I want you to know this. Some of you think, "I can send my kid on any mission trip. No big deal." It's a big deal for families who are trying to figure out vacation, who are trying to figure out activities and sports. For some of our larger families, it's like, "Okay. I have two middle schoolers and two high schoolers. This is going to be expensive. I don't know that I've got it." We're committed to going, "That's not going to be the issue."

Then what happens? What happens all the time is moms and dads were coming up to me last weekend crying about the impact it had in their kids' lives. Do you know that men's event we had? We had 30 or 40 guys (the ladies weren't here, but I told you about it) who were just standing there who had lost hope in their lives. You guys gave

to that. I can't remember if I told you this story. Basically, when these guys came up here...

I got in the car later that night with Jon Tyson. He said, "Do you know what's going to happen? Fifteen or 20 years from now, some guy is going to look at his son and say, 'Son, I was down and out, but I went to this men's event, and they told me I could be a different man than I was. I turned around, and I saw a thousand men who would support me, and that changed my life.'"

You get to give to that, all of this impact. How about we have 14 more residents (get ready for them) coming to our church to give two years of their lives to figure out and discover whether or not they're called to full-time ministry. You guys help support that.

Paul says here's what happens to a cheerful giver. Let me show you this. ***"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."*** This is the element of trust. I mentioned this a little bit last week, but let's just be honest. Ostensibly (meaning, on the appearance of things), when you give, you have less. It's like, "Thank you, Captain Obvious." That's why people don't give.

You know, some people don't give (these are good categories) because they're stingy; more people don't give because they're scared. He's saying, "Look, guys. I know what it looks like." I know when you make \$50,000 (I'm just picking a number) and you give \$5,000, you only have \$45,000, and I know \$45,000 is a lot less than \$50,000. You're going to have to believe that God is able to make all grace abound.

Here's the thing. Certain churches subscribe to prosperity theology. Let me just describe it for a second. That's the health-and-wealth gospel. That's the "name-it, claim-it," "gab-it, grab-it" gospel, which is false. It basically says there's a direct connection between being wealthy and healthy and God loving you. We don't believe that, and we're not going there, but I think we may have too much gone to the other side where we expect too little of God, that God is not going to show up.

It says, "All grace." Some of you have no idea that through your giving, it deepens your relationships, or through your giving, it gives you meaning and purpose. I don't know how it all works, but God says there's an element of faith that when you give, you have to believe... Look at the language. Let me read it one more time. ***"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."***

I'm running out of time, so I need to skip a couple of verses, but I need to hit a few things with you guys really quickly. I want you to go down to verse 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."***

Basically, Paul says generosity leads to other people being grateful. This is what's so amazing, guys. And I gave you some examples. Through being generous, we get to alleviate unnecessary suffering in the world, and I can't think of many things that are more exciting than that. Paul says this. Look at verse 13. This is where we'll close.

***"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, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you."*** Then he ends with talking about God's gift. He says, ***"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"***

I don't have time to get into all this. Here's what he's saying at the end. By the way, the Corinthian church was a Gentile church, and they were going to give to a Jewish church. If you know your New Testament at all at this time, the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians still struggled to get along, so this is really interesting. I wish I had time to unpack all this.

Paul is saying there's a healing component to generosity. We're going to do that in our city. There are a lot of hurting people in this city. There are a lot of needy places in this city. And this is not reparations, but we are going to willfully, joyfully, voluntarily, and generously give to needy areas of the city, and that's going to be part of the restoration of relationships.

What Paul says here at the very end is, basically, "Guys, you're going to give this gift to the Jewish Christian church back in Jerusalem. I'm going to take it to them, and guess what? They're going to thank God for you." But you know what? Because of travel and everything, the Corinthians probably never get to actually be thanked by the Jerusalem church.

When I was thinking about this message and how he ends, and I was thinking about Andy Davis' message, I thought, "How many of us are going to get to heaven and meet people we didn't even know who were affected by the generosity of our church?" We're going to meet college students who came to faith in Christ. None of us know what happened on that short-term mission trip.

You know, a hundred years from now we're in heaven and meet someone who was in seventh grade on that mission trip and says, "That's where I was called into full-time ministry. I almost didn't go on that trip. Thank you for your generosity." Or we're going to meet some homeless guy, and our giving to Samaritan Ministries transformed and changed his life. Who knows?

Guys, we all have a part to play. I want to end by telling you a story about William Tyndale. You know William Tyndale, right? The Tyndale Bible. He's famous. He's well known. He had a heart in the 1500s... The Bible was locked in Latin. No one could read it, and he had this vision. He said, "I want the plowboy to read the Bible in the English language." That was his vision, but he didn't have a lot of money.

So, he meets a guy you've never heard of. I'm guessing almost no one here has ever heard of Humphrey Monmouth. What a name. Humphrey Monmouth was a wealthy man who owned a business who supported the ministry of William Tyndale and even used his merchant ships to smuggle the first New Testaments into the English-speaking world. Some of you are going to be William Tyndale. Many of us are going to be our own version of Humphrey Monmouth. Let's pray.

Lord, would you build a generous church? Would you make us cheerful, Lord? Would we cheerfully give because you've cheerfully given to us? Would you give hope to people in this room right now who need some hope, that as we talked about sowing and reaping, today, right now, they could begin to sow something different that might affect not just what *they* reap but what their children and grandchildren reap. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.