

Cultivating Generosity

Text: 2 Corinthians 9:11

Intro:

What would you think of a preacher who at offering time stood by the offering plate and carefully examined how much each person was giving? Suppose I stood up here as we were bringing our offerings and took each check—opened it up—looked at it and passed a judgment about the gift right here in public?

That's pretty close to what Jesus did in Mark 12:41-44 (Read)

- **Mark 12:41-44** Jesus went over to the collection box in the Temple and sat and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. ⁴²Then a poor widow came and dropped in two pennies. ⁴³He called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. ⁴⁴For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has."

Someone has said, "God measures our giving not so much by what we give as by what we keep." Here was a person who didn't have much to give but gave it all. Jesus commended her—not for her poverty, but for her willingness to give sacrificially.

It is amazing how direct Jesus was in his teachings about money. It was Jesus who said, "You can not serve God and Money." Matt.6:24

Life is full of decisions about God verses Money:

- Little decisions of honesty in our daily business.
- Sometimes big decisions when we come to a fork in the road of life. We come to a fork in the road—one sign says this way to "Money" other sign says this way to "God"

We have to choose in order to proceed in life.

According to Jesus, our attitude toward money has great Spiritual Significance. Jesus gave 38 parables and 16 deal with money. There is more discussion in the New Testament about money than heaven & hell combined. You'll find 5 times more discussion on money than prayer. There are a little over 500 verses on prayer and faith and over 2000 verses on money & possessions.

Money is where the "rubber meets the road" in our daily lives. The way we handle our money is a good indicator of where heart really is. Jesus said, "... where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matt. 6:21

Even the world knows: "Talk is cheap" Their motto is "Put your money where your mouth is." And in a way that's what Jesus had to say about money.

Anybody can say, "I love God & I love my brothers and sister in Christ." But how we use our money is the acid test. Does my CHECKBOOK say "I love God...brothers & sister ..." or does it say "I love pleasure & things"?

The greatest battle any of us face is the battle with own selfishness. On the one hand, we love God—do want to serve Him—we do want to please Him. On other hand, it just seems we don't quite ever have enough for ourselves.

- There are things we would like to do that cost money.
- There are things we would like to have that cost money.

So, the stewardship of finances can be a real struggle at times.

I come to this subject today with TWO ASSUMPTIONS:

1. God wants each and every one of us to discover and live in the joy of generosity.
2. We really do have a desire for that even though there are struggles we all have to deal with.

Now, a generous spirit will not just manifest itself in finances. It will manifest in every aspect of our lives. It will manifest in the way we use and invest our time. It will manifest in our demands toward other people. It will manifest in our service toward other people. But, none of those substitutes for the way we use our money!

Regardless of what's going on in these other areas, the stewardship of money will express either a "Stingy" heart or a "Generous" heart.

How can we as God's People Cultivate a Generous spirit?

Let's look at 2 Cor. 9:11 for part of the answer to that question. In this chapter Paul is talking specifically about financial giving and in verse 11 he says,

"Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out in thanksgiving to God."

How can we cultivate a generous spirit in our hearts? I want to suggest it is by understanding & appreciating the:

I. The Reality of God's Blessing

Are you and I blessed? Have we received from the goodness of God's heart toward us? God reminds us of that with these words from our text "you will be enriched..."

It is God who has made us/ not we ourselves. We didn't get what we have today on our own. It's not ours because we're particularly smart or deserving. What we have we have because God has entrusted that to us.

- It may have come thru an inheritance—but who gave us that family?
- It may have come thru outstanding talents & abilities—but who gave us those abilities?
- It may have come thru hard work—but who gave us the strength to do that hard work?

Everything we have comes to us from God.

- **Acts 17:28** For in him we live and move and exist...

Our very breath is a gift from God.

ILL: How many seen classic movie "Shanendoah" starring Jimmy Stewart? It is about a farmer and his family during Civil War. Outstanding movie! There is one scene where they are praying at dinner table. Jimmy Stewart is father and all sons are sitting with him at dinner table. This is the way the father prays:

"Lord, we planted this seed, we watered the plants, we picked the food and we cooked it, we did it all ourselves, we worked dog bone hard for this, but, we thank you just the same. Amen"

How many would say that farmer's perception of how he got so blessed was just a little bit distorted? By the end of the movie you get the feeling he might have learned something about all that.

But the truth is, It is God who gives us power to get wealth! If you are blessed this morning, it is because you have a good God—

- Not because you are such a great manager
- Not because you are so talented and smart—

ILL: I like what T.D. Jakes said about that. He said, "Honey, there are people smarter than you sleeping under a bridge"

In Deut. 8 God warns His people to not forget His loving care for them:

- **Deut 8:17-19** He did it so you would never think that it was your own strength and energy that made you wealthy. ¹⁸Always remember that it is the LORD your God who gives you power to become rich, and he does it to fulfill the covenant he made with your ancestors. ¹⁹“But I assure you of this: If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods, worshiping and bowing down to them, you will certainly be destroyed.

The moment we take Credit for our blessing, then in our minds it is all ours and we can do with it as we please. When we forget where it came from, we forget how to use it! The first lesson in generosity is “Thankfulness”—gratitude to the Lord for His provision—viewing the Lord as our SOURCE!

Ps 103:1-5 ¹ *Praise the LORD, I tell myself; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.* ² *Praise the LORD, I tell myself, and never forget the good things he does for me.* ³ *He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.* ⁴ *He ransoms me from death and surrounds me with love and tender mercies.* ⁵ *He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle’s!*

We come here this morning to count our blessings to acknowledge in our hearts all that we are/have from God’s bountiful hand. Do you see God as a giver in your life? That is a powerful inspiration to be a giver.

John 3:16 “*For God so loved the world that He...what? gave what? God is not a stingy giver. Gives out of rich abundance and with great liberality.*

I like Greek word in our text: “pas”. It means always, in every manner, totally, wholly. Wiess’ paraphrase says “...in every way...”.

Because of God’s generosity we are blessed spiritually. We are given as a free gift eternal life. We are blessed in every way. We are taken care of in the physical realm as well—more than the birds of the air. God is watching over us—more than the lilies of the fields God is clothing us and taking care of us.

2 Pet. 1:3 says “*As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive his own glory and goodness!*”

So, first we cultivate generosity by remembering our source – by seeing the reality of God’s blessings in our lives and where it comes from.

II. The Reason for God’s Blessings in our lives.

- **2 Cor. 9:11** “...so that you can give even more generously.”

That says to me—God doesn’t give it so we can just consume it upon ourselves.

- He doesn’t give it so we can wallow in self indulgence.
- He gives it so that we can do to others what He has done to us.
- He gives it so that we can be empowered to be givers—so that we can be generous!

How many know what the worst cult in America is—the movement that hinders the spreading of the gospel more than anything else—the one “ism” that is more damaging than Mormonism, Unitarianism, Spiritism or any other “ism”? “ME-ism” is the big problem.

There is a huge plumbing problem in the American church. The pipes are stopped up with “Me-ism”. People are blessed with resources from God but are confused about why He gave them those resources. Perhaps it is so I can have a bigger car, a longer vacation, a nicer house. God’s not against us having those things and enjoying them unless we are no longer seeking first the kingdom of God—and are simply using God for our own selfish purposes. What are our priorities? They are measured by what we do with our money.

God wants to give us the high and holy Privilege of being instruments of His blessings to people. “Freely you have received. Freely give.”

God knows what it is like to be a generous giver. He wants us to enter into that with Him.

God loves a “cheerful giver.” What is a “cheerful giver”?—a person who gives because he wants to. Something has happened in the heart that motivates the person toward giving.

That happened to the nation of Israel in Exodus 36.

- **Ex 36:2-7** *So Moses told Bezalel and Oholiab to begin the work, along with all those who were specially gifted by the LORD. ³Moses gave them the materials donated by the people for the completion of the sanctuary. Additional gifts were brought each morning. ⁴But finally the craftsmen left their work to meet with Moses. ⁵“We have more than enough materials on hand now to complete the job the LORD has given us to do!” they exclaimed. ⁶So Moses gave the command, and this message was sent throughout the camp: “Bring no more materials! You have already given more than enough.” So the people stopped bringing their offerings. ⁷Their contributions were more than enough to complete the whole project.*

God’s people were building a sanctuary for worship. They got so excited about that—they gave and gave generously. It was overwhelming. Do you think that pleased God? I believe God was very pleased with that.

Later in their history they lost their zeal for the house of the Lord. It was quite a contrast.

- **Haggai 1:2-11** *“This is what the LORD Almighty says: The people are saying, ‘the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house—the Temple.’” ³So the LORD sent this message through the prophet Haggai: ⁴“Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? ⁵This is what the LORD Almighty says: Consider how things are going for you! ⁶You have planted much but harvested little. You have food to eat, but not enough to fill you up. You have wine to drink, but not enough to satisfy your thirst. You have clothing to wear, but not enough to keep you warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes! ⁷“This is what the LORD Almighty says: Consider how things are going for you! ⁸Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD. ⁹You hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the LORD Almighty, while you are all busy building your own fine houses. ¹⁰That is why the heavens have withheld the dew and the earth has withheld its crops. ¹¹I have called for a drought on your fields and hills—a drought to wither the grain and grapes and olives and all your other crops, a drought to starve both you and your cattle and to ruin everything you have worked so hard to get.”*

This was God’s correction of priorities. This was God’s calling to His people back from selfishness to generosity. What is generosity? It is a natural response of gratitude and trust.

ILL: Sir Henry Taylor said, “He who gives what he would as readily thrown away, gives without generosity; for the essence of generosity is in self-sacrifice.”

That was the generosity of the widow in Mark 12 that Jesus commended. If I only give what I won’t miss I come short of generosity.

David said

- **I Chron. 21:24** *“...I will not offer burnt offerings that costs me nothing.”*

David understood something about giving to the Lord. Giving without personal sacrifice is really just cleaning out the attic. There's nothing generous about it and the joy of generosity is lost!

III. The Results of Sharing God's Blessings with others.

- **2 Cor. 9:11** "...when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out in thanksgiving to God."

Those whose needs are met are thankful. The result in others who receive through us is they Give glory to God! Sometimes one kind act can have a powerful influence in a person's life.

ILL: The woman in this story found that out in a wonderful way. This poor boy was selling goods from door to door to pay his way through school. One day without money and extremely hungry he decided to ask for a meal at the next house he tried to sell something to. However, he lost his nerve when a lovely young woman opened the door. Instead of a meal he asked for a drink of water. She thought he looked hungry so she brought him a large glass of milk. He drank it slowly, and then asked, "How much do I owe you?" "You don't owe me anything," she replied. "Mother has taught us never to accept pay for a kindness." He said... "Then I thank you from my heart." As Howard Kelly left that house, he not only felt stronger physically, but his faith in God and man was renewed. He had been ready to give up and quit school but because of what that woman did he changed his mind. Year's later that young woman became critically ill. The local Doctors could not handle her case and referred her to a big clinic where they called in specialists to study her rare disease. Dr. Howard Kelly was called in for the consultation. When he heard the name of the town she came from, a strange light filled his eyes. Immediately he rose and went down the hall of the hospital to her room. Dressed in his doctor's gown he went in to see her. He recognized her at once and went back to the consultation room determined to do his best to save her life. From that day he gave special attention to her. After a long struggle, the battle was won. Dr. Kelly requested the business office to pass the final bill to him for approval. He looked at it, and then wrote something on the edge and the bill was sent to her room. She feared to open it, for she was sure it would take the rest of her life to pay for it all. Finally she looked, and something caught her attention on the side of the bill. She read these words "paid in full with one glass of milk". Dr. Howard Kelly.

God has marvelous ways of bringing our generosity back around so that everyone involved is abundantly blessed. "What goes around comes around" and sometimes it comes with overflowing blessing.

What are the Results of generosity in our own lives?

We have the joy of full obedience. Doesn't it feel good to know you are fully obeying God and withholding nothing from Him?

We are protected from greed. I Timothy 6 talks about the destructiveness greed. It's not that God doesn't want us to have money and things. It's just that He doesn't want money and things to have us.

Sometimes when it's the hardest to give, it's also the most needful time to give. Systematic giving provides a continual gauge on the condition of our hearts.

- When we find ourselves struggling with giving—that may be a warning sign.
- When we find ourselves reacting to God's call to generosity that may be a warning sign.
- When we find ourselves making excuse or making ourselves the exception, that may be a warning sign.

It's a wonderful experience to give when we feel like it. But sometimes it is a needful thing to give when we don't feel like it.

Our generosity also gives us an opportunity to make a difference—to impact lives in the now and to leave a godly legacy for the future. I fully expect people to be using this building years after I'm dead and gone should the Lord tarry. They may or may not appreciate the sacrifices we are making to provide it for them. But it will be there for them to use for the glory of God. It will be there for our children. It will be there for others children.

When you're dead and gone what kind of legacy do you want to leave behind? I don't want to leave a bar behind. I don't want to leave a secular country behind. I want to leave a church behind and a heritage of the gospel.

Our generosity will open the way for God to show Himself strong in our behalf. Abraham gave and God kept increasing him.

Peter needed tax money and found it a fish's mouth. God has all kinds of ways to meet our needs. But in it all we Get to Know God. We learn to trust Him. We learn to obey Him. We get to participate in what He is doing. And we open the door for God to give us even more.

ILL: He was driving home one evening, on a two-lane country road. This small mid-western community was almost as slow as his beat-up Pontiac. But he never quit looking. Ever since the factory closed, he'd been unemployed, and with winter raging on, the chill had finally hit home. It was a lonely road. Not very many people had a reason to be on it, unless they were leaving. Most of his friends had already left. They had families to feed and dreams to fulfill. But he stayed on. After all, this was where he buried his mother and father. He was born here and knew the country. He could go down this road blind, and tell you what was on either side, and with his headlights not working, that came in handy. It was starting to get dark and light snow flurries were coming down. He'd better get a move on. You know, he almost didn't see the old lady, stranded on the side of the road. But even in the dim light of day, he could see she needed help. So he pulled up in front of her Mercedes and got out. His Pontiac was still sputtering when he approached her. Even with the smile on his face, she was worried. No one had stopped to help for the last hour or so. Was he going to hurt her? He didn't look safe, he looked poor and hungry. He could see that she was frightened, standing out there in the cold. He knew how she felt. It was that chill that only fear can put in you. He said, "I'm here to help you ma'am. Why don't you wait in the car where it's warm. By the way, my name is Joe."

Well, all she had was a flat tire, but for an old lady, that was bad enough. Joe crawled under the car looking for a place to put the jack, skinning his knuckles a time or two. Soon he was able to change the tire. But he had to get dirty and his hands hurt. As he was tightening up the lug nuts, she rolled down her window and began to talk to him. She told him that she was from St. Louis and was only just passing through. She couldn't thank him enough for coming to her aid. Joe just smiled as he closed her trunk. She asked him how much she owed him. Any amount would have been all right with her. She had already imagined all the awful things that could have happened had he not stopped. Joe never thought twice about the money. This was not a job to him. This was helping someone in need, and God knows there were plenty who had given him a hand in the past. He had lived his whole life that way, and it never occurred to him to act any other way. He told her that if she really wanted to pay him back, the next time she saw someone who needed help, she could give that person the assistance that they needed, and Joe added "...and think of me." He waited until she started her car and drove off.

It had been a cold and depressing day, but he felt good as he headed for home, disappearing into the twilight. A few miles down the road the lady saw a small cafe. She went in to grab a bite to eat, and take the chill off before she made the last leg of her trip home. It was a dingy looking restaurant. Outside were two old gas pumps. The whole

scene was unfamiliar to her. The cash register was like the telephone of an out of work actor - it didn't ring much. Her waitress came over and brought a clean towel to wipe her wet hair. She had a sweet smile, one that even being on her feet for the whole day couldn't erase. The lady noticed that the waitress was nearly eight months pregnant, but she never let the strain and aches change her attitude. The old lady wondered how someone who had so little could be so giving to a stranger. Then she remembered Joe. After the lady finished her meal, and the waitress went to get her change from a hundred-dollar bill, the lady slipped right out the door. She was gone by the time the waitress came back. She wondered where the lady could be, then she noticed something written on a napkin. There were tears in her eyes, when she read what the lady wrote. It said, "You don't owe me a thing; I've been there too. Someone once helped me out, the way I'm helping you. If you really want to pay me back, here's what you do. Don't let the chain of love end with you."

Well, there were tables to clear, sugar bowls to fill, and people to serve, but the waitress made it through the rest of the shift. That night when she got home from work and climbed into bed, she was thinking about the money and what the lady had written. How could she have known how much she and her husband needed it? With the baby due next month, it was going to be hard. She knew how worried her husband was, and as he lay sleeping next to her, she gave him a soft kiss and whispered soft and low, "Everything's gonna be all right; I love you, Joe."

Lets bow our heads and pray.

Lord, we thank you for the reality of your blessing in our lives. We acknowledge you as the giver of every good gift. We ask you to make us generous the way you are generous. Use us as an instrument of Your generosity. Give us Your heart toward the needs of other.