

A CHEERFUL GIVER IS PLANTING FOR A FUTURE HARVEST

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2 Corinthians 9:6-11

CENTRAL SERMON THEME – Giving to God's work is planting God's grace for a future harvest.

INTRO. - Steve Goodier writes, "I read about a couple in Canada who stopped to help a motorist who had run out of gasoline. It was a regular occurrence in their part of rural Canada. After they got him on his way, they bought a new fuel can, scratched their initials on it, filled it with gas and stored it in the trunk of their car. A few months later they again stopped to assist a stranded motorist. But this time they gave him their gas can and told him to fill it up, keep it with him and pass it along to the next motorist he sees who has run out of fuel.

"Though they never expected to see their can again, in a couple of years they spotted it being passed along to a grateful motorist on the road. They recognized it several more times over the years, and each time they asked its owner where it had come from. They ascertained that the can had traveled across the continent at least two times! Many motorists have been saved by the generosity of complete strangers who stop to help. Then, each in turn, has taken the container, refilled it, and diligently looked, perhaps for days or weeks, for an opportunity to pass it along." By Steve Goodier © 2004 Life Support Good deeds are seeds that grow into more good deeds.

In August our Olympic relay team set a new record. For the first time since 1912 the relay team did not participate in the final race. Darvis Patton and Tyson Gay misconnected on the final pass in preliminaries of the 400-meter relay, knocking the U.S. team out on contention for a chance to win the gold medal. Things were going smoothly for the United States through the first two legs. But when Patton closed in on Gay and Gay reached backward, they couldn't connect. Patton made a final lunge to get the stick to Gay before he ran out of the passing zone, but as Gay's hand closed, the stick wasn't in it. It bounced off the rain-slickened track, and the crowd gasped. They lost their opportunity to win the gold.

We who are God's people are competing in a great relay marathon as we prepare to pass on the baton of God's Word to the next generation. Will we drop the baton? Will we fumble away the opportunities God is giving us? All of Heaven cheers us onward. God stands ready to help. The people around us need us. How will we do?

Helping stranded motorists with a can of gasoline or passing off the Word of God will require funding. Handing off the Word of God to others is being faithful to God. One of the areas of our faithfulness is sowing the seeds of being cheerful givers. The Bible describes our giving to those in need as seeds planted for a future harvest. The kernel of corn is planted in the soil. Within days this seed begins to germinate. It pushes through the soil and grows into maturity. Eventually the one grain of seed corn produces an ear of corn. Hear Paul's instructions on how the church is to provide the seeds for the harvest.

I. PLANT GENEROUSLY, V. 6

- A. Paul illustrates our giving to God from the law of planting and harvesting.
 - 1. Illus. - The farmer living in the time of Jesus' life kept back a portion of his wheat, barley, and vegetable harvest as seeds for planting. The family ate the remainder of the harvest. No family would eat all their harvest or they would have nothing to plant the next year. Paul teaches giving from a very well known practice of planting and harvesting.
 - 2. Giving is planting seeds of good deeds in people's hearts.
 - 3. How did the farmer increase his yield? Plant more! How do we increase the yield for God? Plant more!

- B. When we give, we imagine a harvest in the future.
 - 1. When the seeds are planted in the ground, the farmer does not say, "We do not expect to ever see that seed again." The farmer plants his crops with the expectations of a harvest.
 - 2. Our giving to God is planting for a future harvest.
 - 3. Ex. - Our logo for *Cheerful Giving* is a picture of a man holding some wheat. Wherever there is a harvest you know someone has planted the seeds.
 - 4. Illus. - In our community farmers have already started planting winter wheat. These small seeds are planted into the soil to grow. The cold weather along with ice and snow do not prevent these seeds from growing into mature plants. Next year the farmers will harvest the crop. That growth is so slow and quiet we sometimes think no growth is taking place.

- C. Applic. - We plant seeds of good deeds every week with our giving. We have seasons when the harvest is more obvious.
 - 1. Ex. - When you witness a person being baptized, that was not an instant decision. A considerable amount of teaching has been done. Personal

- attention to everyone is necessary. Usually obstacles must be overcome. We are planting seeds presently in your hearts waiting for a harvest.
2. Illus. - A couple asked me to teach them how to become a Christian. For a period of four weeks we studied an hour each week. The man seemed somewhat resistant and skeptical about Christianity. After I completed the study I waited a month, two months, and longer. Almost a year later, I received a call from this man who announced he was ready to confess Christ and be baptized. We differ on how long the word of God will need to grow after being planted.
 3. Giving is planting seeds for God for a harvest.
 4. Plant generously.

II. GIVE CHEERFULLY, V. 7

A. These verses teach how not to give.

1. Do not give grudgingly.
 - a. Grudgingly means with regret and grief.
 - b. In the OT God instructs His people to give generously without being grieved. Deut. 15:10 - You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him.
 - c. Paul quotes Jesus in Acts 20:35 - It is more blessed to give than to receive.
 - d. Illus. - When our children were growing up they always asked me for money. I grumbled and complained about how high prices were and how I did not ask for money. At times one of them would say, "Dad, we know the speech well. We are in a hurry. Please give us some money." Now that was enjoyable to give our children money. Giving to God is a joy!
2. Do not give feeling forced to give.
 - a. We may not want to give but we give because we feel forced.
 - b. God is first interested in our attitude about giving.
 - c. Paul did not coerce the Corinthians and neither do we attempt to coerce anyone.

B. These verses teach us how to give.

1. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart meaning we plan our giving.
 - a. Our giving to the church comes from our budget.
 - b. We emphasize now our giving for next year to give us time to plan.

- c. You may come to church thinking you will give as you feel when one Sunday someone says something that upsets you. You decided not to give. On another Sunday, the service is stirring and refreshing and you give your offering plus part of your car payment, grocery money, etc. The Bible teaches us neither approach is good.
 - d. Illus. - In one church, the church treasurer gave the minister's salary check to his wife before the worship service began. On this Sunday the minister preached on giving. He announced the offering would follow his inspiring sermon. On the way home, the minister asked his wife about his sermon. She said, "That was a great sermon! I was so moved I signed your check and put it in the offering plate." The minister realized his weekly income was gone. He responded, "I did not plan for the sermon to be that good!"
2. Give cheerfully.
- a. The Lord loves a cheerful giver - God delights in a cheerful giver.
 - b. Illus. - Both the hummingbird and the buzzard fly over our nation's deserts. All buzzards see is rotting meat, because that is what they look for. They thrive on that diet. But hummingbirds ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead, they look for the colorful blossoms of desert plants. The buzzards live on what was. They live on the past. They fill themselves with what is dead and gone. But hummingbirds live on what is. They seek new life. They fill themselves with freshness and life. Each bird finds what it is looking for. We all do. Steve Goodier, Quote Magazine, in Reader's Digest, May, 1990.
 - c. Our attitude will cause us to find what we are looking for.
 - d. Applic. - You will find what you are looking for in this church. If you are looking for loving dedicated wonderful Christian people, you will find them. If you are looking for people who are struggling in life you will find them. If you are looking for positive encouraging people, we have some of them. If you are looking for critics and negative people, you can find some of them. May I suggest you try to find Christ in people?

III. RECEIVE RICHLY, Vv. 8-10

- A. God is able to make you rich in grace.
 - 1. God will abundantly provide all we need for every good deed.
 - 2. Paul quotes Psalm 112:9 - God has freely given to the poor and His righteousness endures forever.

3. God supplies seed to the sower and bread for food and will supply richly for us to give.
4. Someone has said, "The problem with being tight-fisted is that the closed fist prevents us from receiving anything more from God."

B. Jesus told about a self centered prosperous man with overflowing barns and a bumper crop in Lk. 12

1. This selfish prosperous man decided to tear down his barns and build bigger barns.
2. Illus. - Why would this man tear down his old barns to build bigger ones? Could he not add to his barns? Their barns were built like cisterns or circular storage areas. These farmers removed the dirt and rock from a large circle that extended down for several feet. They constructed a rock wall around the circle of the pit with a set of steps on the wall. To expand this barn, they had to tear down the walls, roof, and floor to make it bigger. Jesus is saying this man could have stored his excess in the mouths of the hungry. He could have stored it by putting it into God's kingdom.
3. Quote - Every good work does not earn grace; grace, already received, generates the good work.

C. If righteousness is sown, a great harvest of righteousness will be given in return.

1. In today's world efforts are made to entice people to believe if they give more money, they will have more money.
2. If we give to God to have more money, we are spiritually poor.
3. One of the reasons God gives us prosperity is to make it possible for His people to be more generous.

IV. THANK FREELY, V. 11

A. We will be enriched in order to share with others.

1. The people in Jerusalem who received the offerings from the Corinthians and the other churches thanked God for His grace and mercy.
2. Illus. - If you ever work with missionaries, you become aware of God's provisions. Alexis and I are board members of a mission college in St Vincent in the Caribbean. The Director of this school needs surgery to repair two spinal discs in his neck. His insurance would pay 75% of the surgery and hospital stay but he could not afford the 25% of the expenses. The Mission Board Chairman sent out a request to help pay

- the medical expenses the insurance would not cover which is \$4,000. In a few weeks that amount was received. God takes care of His people.
3. God provides the funds we need to give.
 4. V. 11 - You will be enriched in everything for all liberality.

B. We will be enriched in order to be content.

1. Ex. - Sheryl Crow sang "Soak Up The Sun." One line says, "It's not having what you want. It's wanting what you've got."
2. We face a critical issue - At what level of having money are we content?
3. If content means "always a little more" then we will never be content.
4. If content means "living on less than I earn" then we can find contentment.
5. Being rich in Christ includes God making us content with what we have.

C. Applic. - How will we support next year's budget and raise money for a building program? We first ask God in prayer. We tell everyone in the church. The first prayer we pray is thanking God for His provisions.

CONCLUSION - Review how we give; Plant Generously, Give Cheerfully, Receive Richly, and Thank God Freely.