



The Giving Life

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 | Austin Becton | June 22, 2014

Welcome to the Giving Life

This morning, we are concluding *The Good Life* series with discussing *The Giving Life*. *What does giving really have to do with the good life?* As Americans we are born and bred on a version of the good life. Or “The America Dream” as many refer to it. Wal-Mart says, “Save Money, Live Better,” suggesting the more money you have and save the better your life will be. Adidas advertises, “Impossible is nothing,” communicating that there is nothing we cannot achieve if we through enough time, energy, and money at it. We daydream of getting the new startup venture we’ve been financing off the ground, getting paid the big bucks to do what we love, finding that “perfect” home to raise a family, or saving up a huge nest egg so we feel safe and secure – financially at least. We are told if we just seize the day, work hard, be smart with our finances, and clutch to the “land of opportunity” we can be whoever and own whatever our hearts desire. **But, is this truly the “good life?”** *Do we not more frequently hear the stories of feeling stressed out, over worked, being in debt, or simply being discontent?*

If this pressure is experienced in broader America, how much more are these aspirations amplified here in Austin? Forbes calls Austin a “recession-proof” city. As of August, according to the Austin Chamber, we have the lowest unemployment rate in the United States, and according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Austin is the fourth fastest growing economy in the US. Austin is filled with and thrives off of opportunity, success, wealth, and pleasures beyond what can feasibly be consumed. But, “there’s nothing wrong with me wanting to invest in a small business is there? There’s nothing wrong with me desiring save for a purchase or the future? Or grabbing ahold of a few good opportunities?” Not necessarily. **But, that’s NOT the right question for us to be asking ourselves.** That’s like the teenager asking about sex, “how far is too far?” Rather, we should be asking, “What is the implication of being “in Christ” while living “in” a city of great comfort and wealth? What does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus in a city filled with more incredible live music than can be listened to, more quality breweries and restaurants than can be enjoyed... a city that encourages you to reach for the stars and grab your dreams and desires? A city calling us to consume?” *Or maybe we need to be asking,* “What does it mean to be generous in the midst of piles of bills and debt, or limited income? It is my prayer this morning that the Holy Spirit will free us, individually and as a church, from the bondage of materialism and wealth accumulation into selfless giving, (not because of our selves but) because of God’s infinite selfless generosity towards us! It’s my prayer that we feel the pinch of God’s call to be a generous people!

We will be 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 where Paul, to the believers in Corinth, commends the church of Macedonia for their generous collection and calls the Corinthians to share in God’s grace through their generosity towards the Christians in Jerusalem. Corinth was completely destroyed in 146 BC by Rome. At the time its art and wealth were said to have been some of the grandest in the land. However, the city laid in ruins until 44 BC when Julius Caesar made it a center for the Roman the empire. Almost instantly it resumed its former prominence as one of the richest and most powerful cities of the



region, once again being known for its commerce and arts. But, why is this important? Much like we see in our great city of Austin, Corinth was an urban center of the region. It thrived off of a strong, flourishing economy and the peoples' enjoyment of its pleasures. Corinth was modern, booming, and trendy. Opportunity and the hope for the "good life" filled the air and people inhaled the gratifications of this prosperous city, as such Paul challenged the Corinthians' default view of wealth, status, and their definition of the "good life." In 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, we pick up where Paul shifts from exhortation to the theological underpinnings of generosity.

A Call to Cheerful Giving

Paul in verse 6 shares a familiar old farming principle **"...whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."** You see, farmers aren't stingy with the seeds they sow, because they know their harvest will continue to produce seed for further planting. They understand that the more seed that is cast the greater the yield will be. So, for a farmer sowing a lot of seed is not considered a loss, but rather gain. Paul is not preaching a prosperity gospel to the Corinthians. Some use this as a "proof text" without looking to Paul's further words, and so we believe, "I give, I get." "Give more, get more." This view demeans the very core of Paul's exhortation of the Corinthians. *It appeals to a selfish, materialistic theology rather than a theology of sacrificial, selfless generosity.* This mode of belief can lead us into thinking of **God as God the Negotiator.** "Well, God I gave you 5% more last month where is my raise, where is the job you were suppose to give me, what about helping me pay this tax bill I just received from the IRS?" Have you ever prayed and found yourself in negotiations with God, "God I'll do this if you do that"? When I was around 15 I prayed to God that if He would make me a "wealthy man" I would give 75% of everything that I had. When I graduated college, I was immediately blessed with one of the best opportunities one can get in the accounting industry. I secured a job with a Big 4 accounting firm. Off the bat, I made 2-3x what most of my peers were making...but as happens, I didn't consider myself wealthy and so I gave a tiny fraction of what I had naively promised at 15. **The point is, when we see God as God the Negotiator we move the focus from God to ourselves.** We become more concerned with what we have received (or haven't received) versus what we have given. And, we miss the tremendous generosity and provisions that have already been graciously handed down to us. **Paul is not providing the Corinthians a shrewd investment strategy for them to accumulate wealth nor is he teaching the key to negotiating and getting what you want from God. NO, Paul reveals that through their willing generosity they are participating in God's generosity and provision throughout all of creation bringing glory to God – the source of all grace.** He says in v.11-12, **"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God."** God lets us to participate in his grace! God could easily provide everyone's needs without us, but he chooses to bring us along so we learn generosity. He provides for our needs, and then he "enriches" us for the sake of generosity. And if we remain generous he will continue to enrich us so that there will be much fruit from our giving. This is what Paul means when he says, "whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully!"



Note that Paul goes out of his way to avoid giving the impression that he is trying to force them to give. In verse 7 Paul says, **“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart...”** What the Corinthians are to do as believers is clear in Paul’s mind, but he does not explicitly command them. This means that if they comply with his exhortation, they will do so out of an obedience and love towards Christ and not out of obedience to Paul. Now, this doesn’t mean that we just pick and choose when, what amount, and if we give, but rather the implication is that we give willingly, thoughtfully, and cheerfully.

C.S. Lewis makes this observation, *“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusement, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our giving does not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say it is too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot because our commitment to giving excludes them.”* When did you last say “no” to something because of your commitment to generosity? **How often do we sit down, prayerful consider, and discussed our giving (or lack of) and if we are being “pinched” by our generosity?** We should be doing this regularly. We should prayerful determine what the Holy Spirit is calling us to give.

Spouses, this needs to be done together as a family. Parents, include your kids. This is an incredible opportunity to let your children see true generosity...let them see you being “pinched” by your commitment in God to be generous. Ask God to pinch your idea of comfort and security. Pray for your church, your city, world missions, church planting residents...ask the Holy Spirit to lay opportunities for generosity on your heart. Also, **I dare you to share this with your Fight Club or City Group.** Ask them to challenge your heart and even your giving. Share your fears or complacencies about giving. Let the Holy Spirit break down the money barrier. Often we do not talk about money because we all lean towards spending more on ourselves rather than others and God. Let the Gospel in to work on your heart. **This is a gospel issue! The Gospel should transform your views of spending, saving, and giving.** It’s not about the amount you give, but it is about the condition of your heart in which you give it. *It’s a heart issue.* Are you giving out of joy or pressure? Do you not giving so that you remain comfortable/secure or are you willing to be pinched by your generosity?

Paul continues, **“...not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”** When we give with a begrudging heart or merely out of pressure or necessity, you sow sparingly, unwillingly, and joylessly! Your gifts no longer come from a cheerful, hopeful heart for the mission of God, but rather a self-centered, self-worshipping heart that says **it’s about me and my rights.** “I’m a hard worker...I’m good with money...I save...I give what I’m supposed to give...am I not owed a little to buy the things I want. After all, I did work for it!” Paul says in v.10, **“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.** “Now, wait a second, I went and bought the seed myself, and it was my hands that knead the dough.” We forgot that what we have is not owed to us, but rather was the righteous provision and generosity of God. Moms, when was the last time that you were making lunch for your kids as they are screaming in your ear and thought, “God, thank you for blessing us with this food and provisions?” Who often to we thank God for the job that we have or the recent bonus or raise we received? Miroslav



Volf in his book *Free of Charge* gives the illustration of an interaction between a little boy and his father: “*Daaad! Where’s my milk?*” Screams the little boy. He’s bothered that the glass of milk is not in his hand the moment he asked for it. No need for “please” or “thank you,” because that is why dads and moms exist – to serve him – at least in his little mind. The boy has yet to learn that much of what his mom and dad do for him is out of their generosity. They don’t “owe” it to him. I’m sure many parents can relate to this. But, like the little boy, the Dad too often makes the same mistake. He forgets that his money, job, every provision, even the demanding little boy are not somehow “owed” to him. They are God’s generosity and provision. Like the Dad, we all too easily forget that EVERYTHING we have are God’s gifts. Or perhaps you find yourself on the other side... “Things are tight right now financially so I can’t be generous... God, as soon as you bless me with more money I feel comfortable to pay my bills and I’ll start giving.” You give of your last fruits – your leftovers – that is, assuming there are leftovers. You functionally say, “Me, me, me... my enjoyment of life, my sense of financial peace/security... okay God, here’s what I have left this month... or I can’t give this month because you didn’t provide enough for me to be generous.” There are several specific individuals here at City Life I can think of who, though they have lost their jobs, or are working numerous jobs to make ends meet, remain faithful in their generosity and giving of their first fruits. Their generosity is squeezing tightly, but they look to a God of generosity and provision. Giving cheerfully of your first fruits acknowledges that God is generous and your sole source of provision. David Garland, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, says, “*Reluctance to sow generously, then, reflects a refusal to trust that God is all sufficient and all gracious. It also assumes that we can only give when we are prospering and have something extra that we will not need for ourselves. Paul says that at all times God provides us with all that we need so there is never any time when we cannot be generous.*”

Now the tendency in some right now is to feel... A little confused because thinking amount money freaks you out... or may you are feeling unsettled or uncomfortable. First, City Life wants to help you. Whether its simple budgeting, debt advice, etc. we are happy to meet with you 1-on-1. Also, we are hoping to offer a class on finances in the fall. Second, if you feel unsettled or uncomfortable. **THIS IS A GOOD THING! God is calling you out of your place of comfort and into faith! From materialism, wealth accumulation, and trying to satisfy your own needs INTO faith and His perfect generosity!** Through our giving he’s provided an opportunity to enter into and share in his generosity! **The point here is this – God loves a cheerful giver because he, himself, is THE CHEERFUL GIVER!**

God the Cheerful Giver

So, how do we not give from out last fruits, but cheerfully and willing, with hopeful anticipation? Paul says (v.8), “*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.*” How can we be generous when we are inundated with numerous bills and debt, and we’re not sure how all our needs will be meet... or knowing we have to plan for the future – the reality of retirement, college for our kids, or support for parents? Paul’s answer? “GOD!” He’s saying, “God loves cheerful givers, AND God makes it possible for you to be a



cheerful giver!” Why? Because God is the Cheerful Giver! This doesn’t mean wait until you are ecstatic to give. It means repent of finding too much comfort in your financial security rather than the comfort of God’s generosity. **We can turn in cheerful repentant obedience to God because he’s given THE GREATEST GIFT EVER GIVEN! Jesus!** God did not have to redeem us, restore creation, and bring us into his eternal generosity, **“but he so loved the world, that he gave his only Son”** because he *is* THE CHEERFUL GIVER! **God the Father brings us into his perfect generosity through Jesus!** Paul had just said in 2 Corinthians 8:9, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”** How often do you consider yourself rich? How often do we wake up acknowledging our wealth? Or do we wake wanting more or feeling discontent? People who, in faith, are pinched by their generosity...it’s not because they are merely obligated, **it’s because their faith is in Jesus who was pinched, squeezed, and crushed so that we would be lavished by his generous grace!** And what’s more is in 2 Corinthians 9:13 read that when we are pinched by the generosity of God’s grace it shines the glory of God in Christ! [*By the evidence of this service*], **“they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ.”** God the Negotiator says, “You need to give in order to get.” BUT God the Cheerful Giver says, “I’ve given you provision for your EVERY need – spiritually, physically, financially simply because I love to give. This may even include giving you less financially in order to give you more spiritually, to truly enrich you so that you may abound in good works!” Verse 15 says, **“Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”** Paul doesn’t offer thanks to the Corinthians for being supportive to Paul’s exhortation and opening their wallets to one another. Rather, he appropriately directs it to God in Christ, the giver of all perfect gifts, who was pinched, squeezed, and crushed so that we could enter, share, and participate in his generosity! You want to be a part of God’s work and mission, be generous! You want God to use you and multiple you in good works, cheerfully and freely give. Let your comfort be pinched by God’s generosity. If you want a small, concise summary, walk away with this...

We give because God first gave!