

January 20/21, 2005

*For This Purpose I Live*

**Grace Giving**  
**2 Corinthians 9:6-15**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

Stewardship is a core discipleship issue; that's why we believe it needs to get into the DNA of the LifeGroups. So especially if you are a LifeGroup leader, we need to ask you as soon as possible to get trained in the Crown Ministry curriculum. Then sometime in the next two years (you determine the timing that's best for your group) we ask you to walk your group through the Crown study and think of it as a core discipleship issue. Also in your bulletin there's a flyer about electronic giving. A lot of people have asked about automatic withdrawal. We do offer that, and if you're interested in that, most of your questions will be answered on that flyer.

The bottom line is that giving, like everything in our Christian faith, demands steps of faith. Last January we talked about this, and many families and many singles took significant steps of faith. Let's listen to the story of Rick and Shari. **(Video)**

I want to dial in on what Rick said right at the end of the video: "It has been life changing; I will never go back." I've heard that dozens of times this past year. I've had people stop me in the hall and express appreciation for last year's stewardship messages and say, "It has been life changing. We would never go back to the way it was." The question is: Why is that? When people take this step of faith and experience life in essence on the other side, why is it that they say, "We would never go back"?

Well, the answer is in what I call the *law of the harvest*. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 9. Paul begins this discussion in chapter 8, when he's encouraging the Corinthian believers to give a gift to some other churches. He really talks about that up through verse 5 of chapter 9. Then he gives the theological reasons why it's so important that they give this gift. And that's where we pick it up.

Verse 6:

**Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.** (2 Cor. 9:6, \*NASB)

This is what I would call the law of the harvest. It's not complicated, but it is extremely profound. Any farmer understands if I'm going to sow a *few* seeds in the spring, then when harvest time comes I can expect a *little* harvest. If I'm going to sow *bountifully*, then come fall I can expect a *bountiful* harvest. That's the law of the harvest.

Can you imagine a farmer going out in the spring and sowing a handful of seeds, running his pivots and working the soil and doing all the farmer stuff, and come fall there's a little row of corn. He gets out his combine, it takes about 10 seconds to run through this row, and he's done. He calls the seed manufacturer and says, "You know, I think we got ripped off. I planted this seed and the harvest was terrible!" And the seed manufacturer says, "Well, how much did you plant?" "Well, I planted 60." "60 acres, 60 bags?" "No, 60 seeds." When the seed manufacturer gets done laughing, he would say, "You know, if you're going to sow with 60 seeds, you can expect a puny harvest. That's the way it works."

Yet, so often in our Christian walk we want to basically live our own agenda. We want to consume our resources on ourselves. We basically keep God in a bottle and pull Him out when we need Him and then we wonder why the harvest in our lives is not what we think it should be. And our tendency

is to blame God: “God, why isn’t my life better than this?” And God is saying, “Hey, you sowed 60 seeds. What did you expect for a harvest?”

It’s not that God needs our money. It *is* that God wants our *heart*. God wants us to trust Him. The only thing that limits God’s pouring out His resources into our lives is our unwillingness to trust Him. And there is nothing that measures that more practically than what we do with our finances.

I do also find it interesting just the language that’s used. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is clear that when we give to God we aren’t giving it away. We just need to get that out of our head. The reality is the Bible talks over and over about the fact that when we give we are investing. When we give we are laying up treasures for ourselves in heaven. When we give we are sowing—which implies a harvest.

Do you suppose a farmer gets up in the spring and says to his wife, “You know, this is terrible. I have to go out this morning and I have to take all this expensive seed and I’m just going to throw it away”? No farmer thinks of it that way. He thinks of it as, *I’m going out to sow. I’m trusting that because I have sowed this seed, it’s an investment—that it will be multiplied many times over in the harvest.*

We need to understand that’s what God is saying. I think sometimes we are so nervous about the prosperity gospel that we swing the pendulum clear to the other side and we’re unwilling to acknowledge that God has said, “You sow bountifully; I will give you a bountiful harvest.” This text will go on to say “in *every* area of your life.” Jesus said, “Give and it will be given unto you.” There’s one reason why Paul put this in here, and that’s because he wants it to be part of our motivation—to understand what God has said.

Verse 7:

**Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

We don’t want you to give one penny more than what you believe God wants you to give—that you can give with a cheerful heart. We don’t want you to feel like you’re under pressure, having your arm twisted. I’ll confess to you that I am passionate about this subject, because I think it goes much deeper than money. It’s about living for that which lasts forever, and the end of your day I know that that’s all that will matter. So I’m passionate about trying to convince you of that. But I don’t want that ever to be taken that we’re trying to twist your arm or force you into something you don’t want to do.

Practically speaking, if my desire was to manipulate you into this, two weeks ago right after we showed the baptism video, I would have gone for your jugular. Because almost everybody in the auditorium and in the upper room had a tear in their eye. That was very moving. And at that moment, I could have gone after you and played on your emotions. But what we said was just the opposite. What we said that day was, “We don’t want you to do anything except think and pray what God would have you to give.” And we’ve said that now for a couple of weeks. We want you to be thoughtful. We want you to be prayerful about what you give.

One of the interesting things that has transpired over the last several years, some on radio and a lot on television, is encouraging people to give with their credit card. They do that because they know when they have your emotions engaged they’ve got you to give that moment—before you kind of come back to your senses. And they know that the next program is going to try and wind you up emotionally. So there is an emphasis: “Go to the phone right now...right now. Call in. Make a

pledge.” And it must work, because those programs stay on the air. But Paul is saying, “Don’t give that way. Stop. Think about it. Pray about it. Give out of a cheerful heart.”

Last week in the video, Dave talked about giving of his first fruits. That’s actually an Old Testament term that basically means you give the best that you have. You give off the top; you don’t wait until the end of the month and see what’s left over. But it is the idea of careful, planned, prayed-through giving. That’s the whole concept of first fruits.

Verse 8:

**And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written,**

**“HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.”**

**Now 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; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.** (vs. 8-11)

Verses 8 through 11 are very important. But they’re also difficult to understand, because the translation from Greek to English here makes for a very choppy sentence. So I want to walk through, starting in verse 8:

**And God is able** [*which means He has both the power and the resources*] **to make all grace abound to you...**

Grace is God’s favor, which means He *wants* to do this. His desire is to do this. He has both the power and the resources, and the desire.

**...so that always having all sufficiency in everything...**

You can’t get a more comprehensive statement than that. Look again at the words: “so that *always* having *all* sufficiency in *everything*.” This is talking about the harvest. Always...all sufficiency... in everything. Your material needs, your spiritual needs, your physical needs, your emotional needs—in every area of your life, *always* God wants to be there to provide what you need.

That word “sufficiency” is an interesting Greek word. It was used by the Stoics to refer to being self-sufficient. It was the idea that the Stoics believed that within themselves they had everything they needed. They didn’t need *anyone* else; they didn’t need *anything* else. Everything they needed to be sufficient was within them.

Paul captures this term several times in the New Testament, but just redefines it as a *Christ*-sufficiency—that in Christ we have everything we need for everything in our lives all of the time. It is to understand we don’t need *anyone* else, *anything* else, but ultimately our sufficiency is in Christ. God has unlimited resources and the power. God has the desire. He has the sufficiency to take care of us. As a matter of fact, it goes on to say that you may have an abundance for every good deed. It means that not only does God want to give us what we need, but He wants to give us an *abundance*, so that we turn around and have it to give to others—to sow. God wants to give more than we need, that we might give it away.

Then he quotes from Psalm 112. He talks about the righteous man. It’s a great psalm, and this particular verse has to do with the idea that God gave the righteous man an abundance that he might turn around and sow it among the poor—that he might give it away.

Verse 10:

**Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food** [*talking about God who literally supplies the seed and the food for life*] **will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness...**

God will take your seed and not only resupply that, but multiply it to bring about a harvest of righteousness—that you might become like Jesus as you reorient your value system and sow your seed for God.

Verse 11:

**...you will be enriched in everything** [*you will be enriched in everything!*] **for all liberality...**

That word “liberality” is a Greek word that literally means singlemindedness, which may be a better translation here. Paul is talking about this harvest of righteousness—this supply from God—and says we are singleminded in our decision to take that and resow it into the kingdom.

**...you will be enriched in everything** [*with this singlemindedness*] **which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.**

In essence what Paul is saying is that God has the power, God has the resources, God has the desire to give you everything you need for everything in your life all the time. And He longs to do that if you will have this singleminded focus when He multiplies your seed—to take it and resow it into the eternal kingdom of God.

Now this is where we separate ourselves from the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel really believes that you sow this seed for God, God brings back in abundance, and you use that abundance to consume it upon yourself—to indulge yourself in the value system of the world. It’s really just the opposite of what is being said here. What Paul is saying is that when you sow your seed, God wants to multiply it back so that you will have this singleminded focus to take the multiplied seed and resow it into the eternal kingdom of God. In other words, what God wants is that we are channels, that we are conduits, that we are vehicles for God to pour out His resources into His purpose on earth.

The problem is that we have a tendency, rather than being conduits, to be consumers. We take the multiplied seed and we consume it upon ourselves. When we do that we just become fat, and God has no desire to continue to do that with us. But, if rather than being consumers we will be conduits, He multiplies the seed and we just keep sowing the seed. God has unlimited resources to channel through our lives.

There’s a very interesting gift in the New Testament church that isn’t really talked about very much. It’s called the gift of giving. This is probably the primary text to understand that gift. There are some of you here this morning in the auditorium, some of you in the upper room, and God has created you, wired you, gifted you to be successful out in the marketplace.

Do you remember the movie “Chariots of Fire” when Eric Liddell talked about the fact that he feels the pleasure of God when he runs? There are some of you here this morning who feel the pleasure of God when you do your thing out in the marketplace. You say, “This just feels like this is what God made me for. This is how God has wired me.” But sometimes you fail to understand how that connects with the body of Christ. How is that my area of service?

Well, let’s just imagine this morning that you determined that you would set a salary for yourself, which is a reasonable salary that you and your family can live on. And then you determine before

God, *God, anything you provide over and above that, You can have.* One of the things that the gift of giving has to break away from is this idea of ten percent. If you get a million dollars and you give God ten percent, that's a great deal for you; it's a little deal for God. You reach a point where nobody needs that much money to live. But you need to understand what it is that you reasonably need and then say, "God, beyond that, I'll just sow that seed into your eternal purposes." What might God do? How would that change your sense of purpose and focus every day to know that you could go out in the marketplace and be doing exactly what God wired you to do, but the purpose for that would have to do with that which is eternal? It could absolutely change your life.

About a year ago Brad went out to visit a man by the name of Stanley Tam. Stanley Tam is a bit of a radical; he has a *radical faith*. Years ago when he was a struggling businessman, he understood this concept and he decided to make God a business partner. And God has done remarkable things. Listen to his story. (**Video**)

It's important to recognize that when Stanley Tam made that decision [to turn his business over to the Lord] it was not after he had become successful. It was when he was struggling to survive. If you know the story of R. G. LeTourneau, it's almost exactly the same. When he was struggling to keep his business afloat, he made God his business partner. And over the years, both LeTourneau and Stanley Tam have given millions and millions and millions of dollars to God's kingdom, because they believed if we would just become a conduit God could pour out amazing resources—and just keep sowing the seed.

But it's also interesting that those people that I have known in my life that I believe have the gift of giving, all of them have something else in common. Every single one of them has the heart of an evangelist. They have a passion to see people come to know Jesus as Savior. That is why it's interesting that's exactly where Paul goes in this passage. There is something still more to the story.

Verse 12:

**For the ministry of this service ...**

Don't miss the language there. What is he talking about? He is saying that those people who have the gift of giving, that have the singleminded focus, this is a ministry of service in the church.

**...the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints,**

In other words, the obvious—that money goes to build buildings, that money goes to support missionaries, that money goes to fund ministry—we understand that. But he's saying there's more to it than that.

**...but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. Because of the proof given by this ministry [in other words, when you do that you prove something], they will glorify God [whatever it is you're proving, it causes people's view of God to go up] for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!** (vs. 12-15)

What Paul is saying is that when a person learns this law of the harvest and chooses to live that way, it provides proof that this person actually believes in the radical message of the grace of the gospel. In other words, if I truly believe what I say I believe—that I have received this indescribable gift of God's grace and on the basis of that He has given me life now and forever—then I am never more like Christ than when I give. That is the natural outflow of that belief. And if I so believe in this

radical message of grace, it would only make sense that I would give, and that would provide proof to the people around me that I really do believe what I say I believe.

We have a saying in our culture: Money talks. And the reality is, it does. Money talks. That's exactly what Paul is saying—that if we choose to understand this law of the harvest and live by it, that our money will talk. And money will speak in a language that other people in the marketplace understand. What that will say is, "I do believe with all my heart in this magnificent, indescribable gift of God's saving grace."

Those of you that are in the marketplace, you need to understand that you have the potential to reach people I could never reach. People in the marketplace do not believe I'm a real person. They're convinced I have no idea what it's like to live in the real world—that I float around in a cloud and I glow in the dark. But they believe *you* understand real life in the trenches. And they respect you. When they see what you are doing with what God has given you, it will cause them to believe in their hearts that this message must really be true—because they see that you clearly believe in this indescribable gift of grace. Some of you need to understand that is your service to the body—if you would just understand that and live it.

Two weeks ago we talked about the State of the Church. It's really our unfolding of what God is doing among us and where we're headed. In a sense, that was our way of saying, "This is what we're asking you to invest in. This is where we're asking you to sow the seed. Last week we talked about the fact that God owns it all: riches and honor—they all belong to God. And life on this earth is short; it's but a shadow. So it's critically important that in these few days that we have on this earth that we pour our lives into that which lasts forever. This morning we've talked about the law of the harvest—to understand if I want an abundant harvest of God in every area of my life, I have to be willing to sow abundantly.

So now we come down to the moment of decision: What do we do with this? Again, I'd like to ask you to prayerfully consider what God would have you to give. Those of you who are unfamiliar with the pledge card and what we do with that, it's very important that you understand that this information is completely confidential. Nobody will see your card except the recording secretary. We will never track your giving to see whether or not you have fulfilled your pledge. That's between you and God. We will never call you or knock on your door and say, "You're behind in your pledge." No one will know that.

The reason you need to fill out a pledge card is two-fold. First, it is a tool to encourage you to prayerfully consider what God would have you to do. We don't want you to give one penny more than you believe God wants you to give. We need the card back because the recording secretary totals them up, and we need to know what together we are trusting God for, in order that we might make wise decisions. Many of you last year filled out cards. You've made your pledge. I trust the last two weeks have just been affirming and encouraging to you, to know that you're doing the right thing and that you're on track. All you need to do is stay on that. You don't need to turn in anything else. If you choose to up your pledge, all that we need from you is whatever the difference is. If you were giving \$100 a month and you want to go \$150, just fill out a card for \$50. Just let us know what the increase is.

Some of you filled out a pledge for three years and God has already fulfilled that in the first year. I would encourage you to think about the law of the harvest and what God is saying. You have sowed that seed faithfully; God is wanting to channel more. I would ask you to prayerfully consider what God would have you to do *this* year.

Some of you in the last year are new to Lincoln Berean. You're finding out who we are, what we're about, what we're doing. And I trust that God is moving you to be a part of what's happening here.

Some of you last year just weren't there. You just weren't able to process this and to take that step of faith. But this year you've seen what God is doing. God is moving in your heart and you're saying, "You know, we want to do this—to take that step of faith." And I would encourage you to do that.

Some of you here this morning, you're just not there. You're in the seeking process; this isn't where you're at yet. I understand that and that's okay. Next week we go back to our study in the Gospel of Mark and we invite you to come back. We'll just continue to talk about who Jesus is and how we respond to Him and continue to grow in our Christian walk.

If you are turning in a card, we'd like to have it back by the end of January. You can put it in the offering. You can leave it at the Stewardship Booth or the Information Center, or you can do it online—whatever is most convenient for you. But I would say this: I believe with all my heart that God doesn't want anyone to stand on the sidelines and watch. God has the desire, God has the resources to pour into your life if *you* are willing to take a step of faith and to trust Him—that you might experience the law of the harvest.

*Our Father, we're thankful that You have unlimited resources. But not only that, You have this desire to pour those resources into our lives that we might have everything we need for all of our life for all of the time, if we're willing to trust You. Lord, I pray for each of us that you would speak clearly to us that we might have the courage to be obedient, that we might be able to give joyfully, knowing that we are sowing the seed that will bring forth an eternal harvest. Lord, we commit these things to you in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## Study Questions

*For This Purpose I Live*

### Grace Giving

**2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

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### Opening Discussion

1. Discuss the law of sowing and reaping. How does what we sow impact what we reap in all areas of life?
2. Is it possible to reap a bountiful spiritual harvest with God without sowing financial seeds with God? Why or why not?
3. In what practical ways does your giving affect your spiritual growth? Compare your Christian walk before and after your decision to give. What difference has your giving made to your relationship with Christ?

### Bible Study

1. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.
2. What does Paul say about sowing and reaping as it relates to our giving? Compare Jesus' words in Luke 6:33.

Practically speaking, what are Jesus and Paul trying to tell us? Is it wrong to be motivated to give by the law of the harvest? Why did Jesus and Paul tell us this if it wasn't to motivate us to be cheerful givers?

What is the difference between what Paul is saying and the "health, wealth and prosperity gospel" that is so popular today?

3. What is the reward of being a cheerful giver according to 2 Corinthians 9:8-10?
4. Read Psalm 112 which Paul quotes in 2 Corinthians 9:9. Summarize the lifestyle of the righteous person according to this psalm.

Can a person live a righteous lifestyle without giving generously to God? Why or why not?

5. Paul makes the case in 2 Corinthians 9:13-19 that our cheerful and generous giving lends "proof" that we truly confess the indescribable gospel of grace, thus enhancing God's reputation. Why is that?

In what way is our giving a natural outflow of our confession of the gospel of grace?

## Application

1. According to Paul what is necessary to experience a spiritual harvest?

What does that mean for you personally?

2. Consider your giving to be a measurement of what you really believe about the gospel of grace. Is your lifestyle (especially your money management) consistent with what you say you believe about the gospel of grace? If not, what specific areas do you need to address?
3. For those who have been financially involved in the *Purpose* campaign this past year, share how your step of faith has impacted your life spiritually.
4. For those not yet involved in the campaign, prayerfully consider sowing cheerfully and bountifully to experience God's harvest.