“Fourth, Give with Joy and Thanksgiving”
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2 Corinthians 9:7-15

Let’s review our journey through 2 Corinthians 8 & 9: The four principles of Christian giving.

First, give your heart to Christ!
Second, give according to what you have!
Third, sow generosity!
Fourth, give with joy and thanksgiving!

I don’t know about you, but my wife and I want to know what the scriptures say about life and death as a Christian. That’s why these two chapters have been so important for us.

In today’s scripture passage – the last part of chapter 9 - there are multiple principles, but we will concentrate on principles about giving with joy and thanksgiving. Let’s listen to the entire passage. I’ll make a few comments as we go.

2 Corinthians 9:7-15 NIV

7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

What is it that brings about a cheerful giver? I count four reasons.

1. Make sure to make a decision about giving and let it be done first in your heart. Giving is an individual matter (a family matter). It is just between you and the Lord. Giving is a private matter, a heart decision and not a public matter.
2. Make sure to not make a reluctant decision. Reluctant means you are unwilling or hesitant or resistant or cautious. Instead, be willing, eager, and certain. The Greek word for decision really means “purposed.” Paul uses it only once; it means deliberate giving.
3. Make sure to not allow compulsion to be a factor in your decision to give. You don’t want to feel like someone is forcing you or constraining you. Instead, give knowing that you have chosen for yourself.
4. God loves the cheerful giver. The emphasis is on God’s love. It is not that God hates all other givers. No, God loves everyone equally. Here’s my view: God likes it when we give with joy. Give so that it makes you smile. God loves that smile. So give with good cheer. Give with joy.
8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Notice Paul’s use of the word “all.” He likes to stress the truth in all things, all times, in all circumstances, having all we need. He likes to use the words all, any, and everything.

The meaning of verse 8 is this: When we give from the heart, deciding to do so with full freedom and complete joy, God blesses us with abundance.

9 As it is written:
“<br>They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;<br>their righteousness endures forever.”

This is Psalm 112:9. Paul quotes it exactly which means he was probably using the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

I like Paul’s use of the farmer analogy. It’s actually a practical application of verse 6 that we looked at last Sunday, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

If we give with generosity, God will be generous with us, and God will supply more seed and a greater harvest.

11 You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Paul continues with the idea of receiving a blessing from God. Our generous giving will result in thanksgiving to God. I love that word thanksgiving and I will speak more about it later in the sermon.

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.
Generosity has many good consequences. The giver is blessed. The receiver is blessed. And others are blessed as well.

In the case of the Corinthians, here’s a list of those who will be blessed by their generosity: the Corinthians themselves, the church in Jerusalem, the Macedonians, and Christians through history who read this letter to the Corinthians.

14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

You see, it’s all about grace. Paul calls it “surpassing grace.” The Greek word for surpassing is “huperballo.” “Huper” means “beyond.” “Ballo” means “to throw.” “Huperballo” literally means “to throw beyond.”

JB Phillips has: “a generous measure of the grace of God.” Living Bible has: “wonderful grace.” KJV has: “exceeding grace.” Eugene Peterson uses the word “extravagant.”

Here’s my translation! God gives us grace that is beyond anything you can imagine. We don’t deserve it. We don’t merit it. We don’t earn it. Grace surpasses anything we can think about on our own. God throws us grace that goes beyond our belief.

Then verse 15 refers to God’s indescribable gift. Some think this gift is the Corinthian gift Paul is urging them to give, but I think they are wrong. The Greek states clearly it is God’s gift to us.

What gift to us is indescribable? Eugene Peterson says that language cannot describe it. Another translator (NCT) puts it this way: “Thanks be to God for his gift that is too wonderful for words.”

What is that gift? Paul must be referring to the surpassing grace of God.

If language cannot describe it, then how can it be shown?
It is the cross of Christ that goes beyond our imagination, beyond our description, beyond anything we can figure out. The cross is the indescribable gift!

Look at Paul’s description in Romans.

Romans 5:8
8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The surpassing grace of God is the gift of Christ on the cross. In response to that surpassing grace, we give with joy and thanksgiving. Joy and thanksgiving!

These two words are quite important in the New Testament, and are interrelated to other strong Christian words. I’m going to put up the English word and the Greek word next to it. Notice the basic Greek root word and then the slight changes.

Joy = chara

Joy = chara
Rejoice = chairo

Joy = chara
Rejoice = chairo
Grace = charis
Joy = chara
Rejoice = chairo
Grace = charis
Gifts = charisma

Joy = chara
Rejoice = chairo
Grace = charis
Gifts = charisma
Thanksgiving = eucharistia

Of course, you know that Eucharist is another name for the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

“Eu” in Greek means good, genuine, or whole. Thus, the Greek word for thanksgiving literally means good grace. Communion is good grace.

Good grace!

Here’s the question I have about joy and thanksgiving. If we are called to give with joy and thanksgiving, where do we get joy and thanksgiving?

Dr. Vernon Berkey and I became good friends when we lived in Pittsburg, Kansas. I believe he was the favorite medical doctor in town. Half way through my 14 years as their pastor, he came on the Session to serve his eleventh term as an elder. Early in the year, we worked on what elders would chair committees, and he selected the worship committee. I trained the elders about how to lead Session committees which included opening and closing each meeting with prayer. “We want to bath each meeting with conversation with God.” I told the chairs to offer one of the prayers themselves, and ask another committee member to do the other prayer.

After the training, Vernon asked for a private meeting and said, “Bob, no pastor has ever asked me to pray. I literally don’t know how to pray. But I think you are serious about this request, so I will do it. I will write my prayers if that is okay, and not pray off the cuff.” He was 85 years old at the time. Honestly, I looked forward to worship committee meetings because I got to hear Vernon’s prayers. They had depth and humor and character and beauty and sensitivity and love and lots of humility.

His wife was in Sunset Manor nursing home at the time with Alzheimer’s disease. He visited her twice a day for seven years. They had three daughters who tried to boss him around when
he reach his 80s and 90s - without success - and a son who died in his 20s when a drunk driver hit him. “I think about my son every day of my life,” Vernon once told me.

Born in 1918, Vernon grew up in Fortuna, Missouri, about 2 hours straight east of here, and at the age of 8, he decided to become a physician. In the 1960s he was an advocate for medical rights for all patients at a time when many hospitals were segregated. Everyone loved Dr. Berkey. They wanted to be around him. He had such joy. And he thanked everyone for everything - with a true humble heart.

I asked him one time about his character, and he replied with four words: “By the grace of God.”

I think that’s the answer to our question: It is by the grace of God that we get to have joy and thanksgiving in our lives. Surpassing grace! The indescribable gift!

There is no other way. We cannot create joy on our own. You cannot pretend to be thankful. Joy and thanksgiving come from God. Grace can only come from the Lord.

All of them - joy, thanksgiving, and grace - are all interrelated, both in the Greek language and in spiritual life.

When I was 12 years old, my dad took me dove hunting in Blythe, California, right next to the Colorado River. He taught me how to use a shotgun, but he used a bow and arrow. For two days, early in the morning, we hunted, and then in the afternoon, we played by the river, including water skiing. It was usually 105 degrees.

My uncle JB, who owned the boat, taught me how to ski and what to do if I was in trouble. “Raise one of your skis to signal that you’re okay,” he said. “And raise your hand if you’re in trouble.”

The first afternoon went great, but on the next day, nobody saw the log in the river. At the last minute, Uncle JB swerved his boat, but I headed for the log. They signaled to me from the boat, but I couldn’t understand. Right before I was due to hit the log, I saw it, pulled on the rope and did a somersault over the log. I hit the water head first, lost my skis, let go of the rope, and went under the water.

And I forgot to hold up my hand.

Later on, my dad and Uncle JB told me they thought I was unconscious, maybe from hitting the log or from plunging into the river so hard.
They circled around and put their hands high in the air - a signal for the lifeguards when a skier is in trouble. They found me with my head bobbing up and down. My older cousin jumped into the river right away to rescue me. And they took me to emergency room for a possible concussion and neck strain.

I forgot to hold up my hand. I was alive, but I was in trouble and I needed help.

Right now, some of us need to hold up our hand to admit we are in trouble. God is always ready to rescue us and give us the grace we need.

Right now, some of us need to hold up our hand to admit we are in trouble. God is prepared to supply the joy you need for each situation and a thankful heart no matter what you circumstance is.

Right now, some of us need to hold up our hand to admit we are in trouble. God loves us dearly and wants us to know unfailing love - love that never ends, love that is not shallow or weak or sentimental, but love that is the greatest, that conquers everything, that holds us together, that provides health for our weary bones.

Right now, some of us need to hold up our hand to admit we are in trouble. In trouble with sin. In trouble with worry. In trouble with fears. In trouble with finances. In trouble with wayward thinking and wayward eyes. In trouble with fretting about sickness. In trouble with our family.

Right now, some of us need to hold up our hand to admit we are in trouble. We truly don’t have the joy and thanksgiving we desire, and we need the strength to admit it, and we need God to take care of it, because only God can supply amazing grace!