

**GRACE FOR THE JOURNEY--GIVING**  
**2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

**Grace For The Journey Message Series**  
**April 12, 2015**  
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There was a young man who one day experienced a very moving and dramatic conversion experience. It was new to both him and his family, and no one really knew what to make of it. He had been a member of a church all his life yet had never been transformed and turned on by the Gospel; he had never committed his entire existence to Jesus Christ.

However on this one day he surrendered and turned his life over to the power of God. With some people this new commitment happens in more of a sudden way; for others it grows and develops over a period of years; both of course are equally legitimate.

So the first thing this young man did was to go to his pastor and tell him about this great change and transformation in him. He told the pastor, "I want to become a completely dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ."

"I want to commit everything I have and everything I am to the Lord and his mission. I would also like to make a covenant with you and with God that from now on I'm going to live as a growing, worshipping, praying, developing, committed disciple of Christ."

"Then as a symbol of this commitment I intend to become a tither—to give 10% of my income to Christ and his mission in this church. I'm only making \$400 a week but that means I'm going to give \$40 per week to God's work."

The pastor and this young man talked a long time about the meaning of this commitment; about how he would need worship, a small group along with a growing understanding of God's promises in the Bible to be able to sustain his Christian life. As they prayed together this covenant was sealed.

It wasn't too long after this time that the pastor took a call to a congregation in a city many miles away. As a result, it wasn't too long before this man and the pastor lost touch with each other.

Meanwhile, however, things were simply taking off for this new disciple of Christ. Now I am not saying that if a person becomes a dedicated believer and becomes a tither that he or she will automatically become successful or blessed financially (unlike some radio/TV preachers).

Yet often when a person does commit their life to Jesus they are even more blessed in their work and life. Perhaps it is because their dedication to God's purposes and principles carry over into their attitude and integrity in their work environment.

Sometimes when a person is striving to live a Christ-like life filled with caring, honesty and joy they are noticed by their superiors as someone who has their priorities together; perhaps that is what happened. At any rate this man's job and income began to accelerate.

His gift of \$40 a week went to \$50, then to \$60, then to \$75. The young man couldn't believe how well he was doing in his job and how much he enjoyed being a steward of God's amazing blessings; yet he wasn't finished.

The \$75 went to \$125 a week and after a number of years he was giving \$300 a week to his local congregation. That's over \$15,000 a year. With a salary and stock options of over \$150,000 a year, he was continuing his tithe of 10%.

However it started to bother him that the numbers had become so large. He began to worry that something might happen that would make it so he couldn't give like this anymore. He began to worry that if his salary, stocks, investments and assets would continue to grow that he might not be able to afford this large commitment.

Therefore he decided to get in touch with this pastor he had known many years before and see if they couldn't talk about some ways he could alter or change this financial covenant he had made many years ago. Finally he tracked down this pastor and drove many miles to visit him.

"Pastor," he said after some catching up conversation, "You remember how I made that covenant with you and my Lord many years ago. I affirmed that I would commit a tithe of all I earned to Christ's mission through my church. I just don't think that I can afford that anymore and I would like your counsel on how I can change that covenant."

"Well," said the pastor, "I really can't do that. You see the covenant really wasn't with me, it was with your creator God. I really am not the one who can tell you to change this covenant even though I know God will be very gracious and understanding if you do. Yet there is something I can do."

"I would be happy to pray with you that God might change your work position and responsibilities. I can pray that God might reduce your income; that he would cause your business to go bankrupt; your stocks to lose their value; your income property and land to become worthless; your house and material things to be downsized; your travel and vacations to be drastically reduced."

"I could pray for these things to happen and perhaps God would answer our prayer. Then you might be able to afford that commitment like you used to. Just think, if you were only making that \$400 a week again it wouldn't be difficult to afford that \$40 a week."

The man replied, "Thanks but no thanks; you've made your point. It is never a matter of what I think I can afford, but how generously God has blessed my life. It is a matter of how thankful I am; how committed I am to God who is the giver and rightful owner of all I have."

These Sundays in our worship together we are focusing on the grace that God gives us in our spiritual journeys through life; this morning we look at the gift of giving. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 12:8, "*if your (gift) is giving, give generously.*"

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 Paul says, "*Remember this; whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 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.”*

Paul continues, *“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all you need, you will abound in every good work.”* Jesus says in Matthew 6:24, *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”*

It is interesting to note that in the Bible the words believe, believer or believing is used 275 times. The word pray, prayer or praying is used 371 times. The word love, lover, loving is used 714 times.

Yet the word giving or give is used 2162 times. Where do you think the Bible puts a lot of emphasis? The Bible is really a book about giving centered in the greatest gift of all—Jesus. It is centered in the truth that to fulfill God’s mission in this world each one of us needs to pray for the Holy Spirit to fill us with the gift of giving.

The key therefore that unlocks this gift is found where Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:5, *“They first gave themselves to the Lord.”* The gift of giving is only a spiritual gift when we first give our hearts to God by faith. True generosity and support only grows in us as we grow in our understanding of God’s grace; his amazing blessings; his call to bring his love to all.

A major problem in the church over the years is that we have often tried to pick fruit from people whose roots are not firmly planted in Jesus Christ and his word. We have often expected people to generously pledge and share from their blessings even though their hearts have not been transformed by the love, vision and call of Jesus to grow his mission.

Therefore my friend, if giving is hard for you and you are struggling with your faith we don’t expect you to give or support Christ’s work at Messiah. God wants to use the spiritual gifts of those who are living and growing in their faith so that our church at Messiah can help each one who comes here to get their roots planted in Jesus and his Word. Our mission is to help each person no matter where you are at in your spiritual journey.

Yet for Messiah to keep moving ahead with the love of Jesus; to keep growing and improving ways we can touch with the Holy Spirit the lives of children, youth, young adults, adults, seniors, couples, singles, and families we need to grow up and strengthen the spiritual gift of giving in our church. God has abundantly blessed this congregation; he wants us to welcome all people with no expectation they need to give at all; he wants us to be a blessing to others.

The key of course, according to the Apostle Paul, is whether you have first given yourselves to God by faith and commitment? Have you allowed God’s love to work in your heart, to change and renew you, to fill you with joy in serving him? Have you prayed that God might help you to be a worshiping, praying, developing, committed disciple of Christ?

God's call to give is a spiritual gift that comes as we are rooted and grounded in Christ. May God bless each of us on this spiritual journey through life; may God bless Messiah in our mission of love and outreach in this community and area.