



Joy of Generosity – Part 4

Practicing Personal Stewardship & Wise Giving

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Let's imagine for a minute that you've been given a business. A business that can do a lot of good for a lot of people. And it's a great gift that you've been given and you are not just going to do some surface good, you're going to do some genuine good for your city, your county, and who knows how far this good may affect people. Now, to reach the full capacity of the good that this business can do with the facility and the budget, you could employ up to 100 people in this business. So there are plenty of ways that you could mess this up. There are two, though, that stand out. Number one, you could be selfish. That's the first way you could mess this up by just saying, well, you know, 100 employees that sounds hard to manage. That would be tough. And so I'm going to play it safe. I don't want all the headaches of all those people. And so I'm going to scale things back and I'm just going to hire like my five best friends. And that'll make work easier and more fun. And, you know, I'm just going to make sure that it's manageable and comfortable and safe. And that's going to be how I'm going to approach this. Now, of course, you're never going to reach the capacity or peak performance that you could reach if you were to maximize this. And so you're going to live without ever reaching your potential and doing the good for all the people that you could do the good for. So you could be selfish.

Or the other mistake you could make is that you could be a kind of person who is careless. You could be careless and reckless by saying, well, I'm going to hire the other 95 people and fill every office in this building and I'm going to make sure I have all the spaces filled. But you go about it in a haphazard way and you just hire anyone and everyone. You just go about it and say, I'm just going to fill every spot. And you don't even have applications to fill out. You don't read any resumés. You don't, you know, call any references. You do nothing to vet anyone and you just carelessly go about adding to the team. Now, it wouldn't take too long, I suppose, if you did that to realize that you'll never reach the potential that you could reach if you were more careful in the hiring process. Okay. You could be reckless or you could be selfish. I mean, those are the two things that would certainly limit your capacity for ultimate effectiveness.

Now think about those two things and relate them to what we've been studying in Second Corinthians Chapter 8. We've been talking about generosity. Now, we've studied 15 verses so far in this chapter, and in the first 15 verses we've been dealing with the first mistake that we can make and that's the most common one. And that's why I think Paul spent so much time on it here. The Holy Spirit who is ultimately writing this for us, has spent so much time using the Apostle Paul to get through to us that we don't want to be selfish, we don't want to play it safe. We don't want to let fear or comfort or anything else get in the way of us being generous Christians. It is a great virtue. There's joy, there's good that can be done if we can be generous. So we need to get past all those things and start to think about being open-handed, generous people, ready to share good works, all the things that the Bible says that generous Christians should be.



Now we shift in verse 16. Matter of fact, we're going to see nine verses, 16 to the end of the chapter, where we're going to start to deal with the less often considered problem and mistake of being reckless, of not being thoughtful, of not being careful about our generosity. Now, this is something we don't think of because some people don't think it's even compatible with the Christian virtue of generosity. And I just want to remind you it certainly is. And we need to talk about this. And I don't find many sermons in Christian pulpits dealing with this the way it ought to be dealt with. So let's buckle up for this one. Are you ready? Let's deal with this, Second Corinthians Chapter 8 verses 16 to the end of the chapter. We're going to deal with what the Apostle Paul is going to do here. And it may be subtle at first glance, but I'll read it with commentary, as I often do, and it will be obvious, I trust, as we read through this. Okay? Are you ready? Let's do it.

Verses 16 through 24, Second Corinthians Chapter 8. Notice, first of all, the editorial translator's heading over this. If you're reading in the English Standard Version, what does it say there? Commendation. That's different than condemnation. Condemnation would not be like a very good thing for Titus, right? Condemnation of Titus, that's not what Paul is doing. Now, Titus, you might remember, he's the one couriating this letter to the Corinthians, and he's the one who is going to pass the bag around and have them put money in it so they can take this money to the famine relief in Jerusalem. Do you remember all that? And that's the guy who is going to take all of this. Now, there's more than him showing up as we'll learn. But it would be good for Paul to say, well, this is a good guy, and that's what he's going to do, he's going to talk about Titus, it's interlaced through this and there are other people he's going to talk about, but he's going to commend Titus. He's a good guy, a trustworthy guy. Verse 16. And he first starts talking about his heart. "But thanks be to God, who put in the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you."

So, Paul, I mean, he's poured out his heart early in the book about what a great concern he has for the Corinthians. And of course, they knew that because Paul had been among them already, he led them to Christ, as he reminded them in the first letter that we have, the extant letter in the canon of Scripture, I'm your father. I've led you guys to Christ. And he says here that Titus loves you, cares for you sincerely, just like I do. And "he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest," very sincere, "he is going to you of his own accord." I didn't even have to force him to go. I didn't have to ask him twice. He was so ready to go there. Now, he's been to you before, but he's ready to go back now. If you remember anything about the book of Acts, the study of the book of Acts, to travel in the ancient, you know, Near East, across the Mediterranean, this is a lot of work. This is risking your life. It's a lot of money, a lot of effort. So for Titus to do this, it's not like hopping on a plane, you know, and flying in business class to get somewhere. This is going to be a lot of effort and he's just saying, look at Titus. He's ready to do this. He cares about you and he's ready to work and he's ready to do this for you.

Verse 18, and "with him," there's another guy we're sending, "we're sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel." So when Titus shows up and he has this bag and he's going to collect this thing we've been talking about now, we started talking about it a year ago, all the famine relief for the Jerusalem Christians in the



Jerusalem church. Now we're going to have this other guy called the brother. We'll call him the famous brother, who's famous for preaching the gospel. Everyone thinks this guy's a great preacher. And by the way, if you're going to get the commendation of the Apostle Paul for preaching the gospel and you've read Galatians Chapter 1 where he's very fastidious about what the gospel is, I mean, that's a pretty good resumé builder that the Apostle Paul thinks you're famous for preaching the gospel. And clearly that's a doctrinal, you know, five-star review. Now he's a good preacher. He's a faithful preacher. He's a doctrinally accurate preacher and he's famous for doing it. A faithful, famous preacher, this brother who is unnamed.

Verse 19, "And not only that, but he's been appointed by the churches to travel with us." Not only is he famous among a lot of churches, but he's been appointed to travel with us. He's not just a good preacher, a good orator of Scripture, a good expositor, but you know what? He's also one who the people thought this guy could take a very, you know, a generous gift and be a good administrator, a good trustee of that. They thought he would be good as someone who would be a good, faithful administrator of a large budget of money. They thought he could be trusted with it. "As we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us." And "us" by the way, think of Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 1, this is Paul and Timothy, right? And now we have a lot more involved. We have Titus, we have the famous brother, and we do it all, it says, "for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our goodwill." So all these first-person plural pronouns, he's saying we all have the right motives, we want to glorify God, and we want to show our goodwill, our love for you. We care about your well-being and we have the right motives. And these guys, I'm holding them up. You can trust them. Good reputation, faithful. They have the right doctrine and they're trustworthy people.

Verse 20, "We take this course." What course? With all these guys who we believe are trustworthy. They have a good track record. "So that no one should blame us about this generous gift that's being administered by us." That's a great sentence. So many things here. Blame us? Why would they blame you? What kind of blame could you have? And I remember they've been in Berea. They've been up there in the Macedonian area, Berea, Thessalonica, Philippi. And I told you when they got down into Achaia, down into where the Corinthians were, as I often say, the Orange County of the ancient world there in Greece, these guys were writing checks with more zeros in them. Right? So there are bigger checks being put in the bag. And so you think about these guys riding off into the sunset as they go to some port to get on a ship to head back to Jerusalem, you're thinking they're taking a good chunk of money from your endeavors in the marketplace and they're going to administer this gift, administer, they're the trustees of this gift. They're going to leave with your money, your hard-earned money. What blame could there be?

Well, maybe they're going to dip into that. Maybe they're shysters. Maybe they're going to run away and just, you know, go on some World Golf Tour or something. Who knows what they're going to do with your money? Maybe there's going to be blame involved here. Well, no, "We aim," verse 21, "at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight," because the Lord knows that we're doing this for the right reasons, for the glory of the Lord, for goodwill, out of love. We're sincere, we're earnest. We're doing it in keeping with good doctrine, the preaching of



the gospel. People have seen this. Not just one person, not a small group, a lot of churches, all this resumé building. We want to do it, "also in the sight of man." And that's why I'm showing you, I'm building this resumé about all these people.

"And with them," I'm talking about another guy, "we're sending our brother," another unnamed guy. This other brother is going to show up there, "whom we've often tested and found earnest in many matters." So there's that word again, sincere, trustworthy. And how do we know he's trustworthy? Because we've tested him. We've put him to the test. We've seen this guy in hard situations and he is faithful, just as Jesus said oftentimes, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much." We've put him in charge of certain things. We've given a budget to do things, maybe like in Acts Chapter 6 as an example at least. Right? He's been in charge of certain things. Going to the marketplace, getting food, serving the widows over here. He may have had a certain amount of money and he did well with that. He's been trusted time and time again. We know he can be trusted even with bigger amounts of money. This guy is trustworthy. He's been found earnest in many matters. But "who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you." Right? Back again to that whole issue of you're not going to let these guys down. We know you're going to give. And he's confident in your giving.

Verse 23, "As for Titus," well that started in verse 16 talking about how great Titus was. He's going to say now I just want you to think about your care for me, the Apostle Paul, "he's my partner and fellow worker for your benefit." Well, if you have any confidence in me, Paul says, which, of course it may have been cracked a little bit here with all the critics he had. And of course, we're going to get into that in the latter chapters of the book of Second Corinthians. But still he's saying you respect me as the Apostle Paul, I just want to tell you that you ought to respect Titus, because I've invested in him as "my partner," as my "fellow worker." And you've seen the outcome of the benefit that you've gotten through my ministry and he's my right-hand man here in ministering to you, Corinthians. "And as for our brothers," and the two have been named here, the famous brother in preaching the gospel in all those churches and this other brother who has been tested and has been found faithful, well, "they're messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ." Good churches, solid churches, faithful churches. And these guys are emissaries of them. They're messengers of them. It's a great line.

So one final tag here, verse 24, "So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men." You'd better treat them well. Prove that you love them. Do good to them. And not only this big bag of money that you're going to give them and adding to all the money that was given in Berea and Thessalonica and Rome and everywhere else, but maybe you'll give them some money for their trip, give them some extra money for their food. Just treat them well. Treat them well while they're there. Give them some spending money for along the way. Put them on their tasks. Put them on a ship, send them back and let's get this thing done, this generous giving to Jerusalem. Okay.

This is a lot. This is a lot. This is a lot of ink. And I took this all-in-one sermon and that's kind of unique for me, right? Nine verses, not just because I'm trying to hustle my way through the "giving" sermons because they're so uncomfortable for me. Although I could have said that.



But because they really are one section, one telic unit as Jay Adams would say, one unit. Why? Because he's giving resumés of all these people. Why? Because he wants the Corinthians to trust the people showing up and passing the bag. Why? Because it's necessary. Why? Because he doesn't want to just say to them, hey, I'm going to quote you a line from Jesus, Luke Chapter 6, Matthew Chapter 5. He could quote this line. Jesus says give to those who ask of you. Done. Mic drop. Finished. I'm asking of you give to the Jerusalem saints. End of story. Give to those who ask of you. Just give. I say give, give. Right? I'm asking. Give, give. You don't even know about these guys. It's none of your business. Just give. Titus is going to show up. If Titus shows up, I told you to give, give, just give. That's all you need to know. It's what the Bible says, right?

There has to be some context to that. You do understand, of course, and if you don't you should study the Bible more. The Bible is not full of contradictions. Somebody might say that, some, you know, associate professor at Saddleback College, right? Or somebody, who knows, USC, Harvard, Yale, I don't care where you're coming from. If they don't know the Bible and haven't studied the Bible or they're looking for contradictions, a lot of times people find what they're looking for, right? The Bible is a harmonized book. There is one ultimate author of the Bible. All these things have context. When Jesus, even you can go look it up yourself, in Luke Chapter 6 when he is talking about giving to those who ask of you. This is in a passage that starts with the whole issue of blessed are you when they persecute you, revile you, slander you, right? Do all these evil things against you because of my name, because of the Son of Man. And then it gets into the fact of even being hit and then having your stuff, the word really, it's translated often, not all the time, most of the time "ask," but sometimes "demand," which has its parallel over there in the book of Hebrews about having your property confiscated. And the writer of Hebrews is hailing this early church that's being persecuted by the government by saying they joyfully let their property be confiscated by the government knowing they had a greater inheritance on the other side. Okay?

The Bible is saying, even as the early church said, it would be a privilege to suffer for the name of Christ. Right? That's very different than you submitting to some violent criminal. God doesn't call you to do that. Not at all. That's why Jesus said if you have a cloak and you don't have a sword; you better sell your cloak and buy a sword. Why? Because we're supposed to just be subject to violent criminals? No, not at all. That's why you buy a sword. That's what the Bible teaches, clearly. The Bible's very clear about these things that we are supposed to be wise people. I mean, you couldn't be clearer in Scripture about what the Bible says regarding our preparation for the real world. To give to those who ask you if you thought that that's what the Bible teaches without context then the rest of the Bible isn't going to make sense. And you would pray for forgiveness every time you didn't give to the Ethiopian prince, you know, who writes you in your email box, right? (audience laughing) Or the guy who calls you from Microsoft support and tells you to go down the street and get a gift card, you know, to whatever, Best Buy. Anybody?

You realize you're not supposed to give to everyone who asks of you. There's context for that and the rest of the Bible says things like this. You should give to those who you are supposed to understand that there is credibility not only to the request, but to the people who are going



to receive your checks. That's what the Bible clearly is saying just by the very fact that he spills ink in trying to bolster the resumés of these people. So the problem is reckless giving, careless giving. So let's just make the first point as simple as we can. Right? Don't applaud, but this is as simple as it gets. Number one in your outline, "Give wisely." You have to give wisely. You cannot give indiscriminately. You cannot be generous and say, okay, now let's just start giving. Let's just give. Anyone who asks, let's just give. That's not what the Bible teaches. That is not what the Bible teaches.

Okay. Turn with me to Second Peter Chapter 2. We started this whole thing with a kind of a foundational sermon, not a lot of application, but a lot of information about giving vertically and horizontally. Does anyone remember that? Just a smirk would help. A smirk? Eyebrow raised? A smile? Okay. At the beginning of this series four weeks ago, whatever it was, we started by saying, okay, in the Old Testament, we had this tithing thing required, several tithes, we had freewill offerings, we had all this stuff. We had to sort all that out. Some of you built charts or I tried to build a chart in your brain at least. And then we said the New Testament is a little different. Do we have any mandatory giving in the New Testament? I said, yes, we do have mandatory giving in the New Testament but there are no percentages connected to that. And the mandatory giving we started initially with vertical giving. You have to give to your church. Right? So we said okay, but how much? It doesn't say how much. So mandatory giving to your church.

Now if we start with mandatory giving to your church and we start to deal with the issues in the first 15 verses of this chapter, which is really about horizontal giving, in this case, special project giving, even though it was called upon by the vertical relationships they had with the leaders in the church. It's still a special project gift, which I was constantly trying to apply with people in your small groups, maybe even your neighbor or someone in your sub-congregation, someone you know on the patio. We're going to give as we see needs, the First John Chapter 3 verses 16 and 17 realities. There's a need and you meet it. That's the horizontal giving. It doesn't go through the church, you know, finance office and all that. Great. But we start with the vertical giving.

Now some of the people are going to really like this first point of the sermon. They're going to like it too much, okay? Because they're going to say, I finally have the golden pass. That's why I don't give to this church, because you say I don't really trust what they're going to do with my check. That's why I don't give here. I don't trust those guys. Okay. If you don't trust the leaders of your church to rightly handle your check or your giving, however you give it, are you ready for this? You're at the wrong church. Is that simple enough? Go to a church where you trust the leaders because you're supposed to give, mandatory giving. So you're supposed to give. What's the amount? It doesn't say. But you give to a place, which I hope, even in our passage, there should be enough here for you to say, okay, there should be some requirements. Tested. Right? There's some track record. There's a congregation that says, yeah, they're faithful doctrinally. There are other people who say, these guys are trustworthy. They can administer well, they have a track record of administering well. Now, even more than one congregation that can give an imprimatur on the fact that, yeah, they're trustworthy.



Great. Okay. Then you have to give. If you can't do it here then you have to go somewhere where you can. You have to trust your leaders enough to be able to entrust your gifts to them.

But let's just say you have that wired. You're okay. I'm already giving to my church, and I have the vertical giving in place. But there are other kinds of vertical giving, right? And someone's going to say give in the name of the Lord to my thing. I have a ministry. I have a radio thing, I have a TV thing, I have a missions thing. And a lot of us here give to those things, I do, I give to a handful of them. So what's with that? How do I deal with that? Because there are a million of them. Because once you start a lot of them show up in your mailbox. And so how do I deal with that? Okay. Be careful with that. One of the books on the back of your worksheet and it's not necessarily an evangelical book. It's not. But there are some interesting insights about New Testament giving. But Dr. Bassler she says this about growing up, one of the stories she tells in her book is about being a little girl growing up in her home, and her mother and her grandmother were living in the home, and the grandmother would sit there in her chair as an elderly woman who had no money in dire straits. But she would watch the television. And anytime someone came on the TV asking for money in the name of the Lord, a televangelist or whatever, she would go reach down, grab her purse, pull out a \$10 bill, and she would fill out an envelope with, you know, the address on the screen, and she would put a \$10 bill in it, and she would walk it down the driveway, put it in the mailbox, pull up the flag and she would send it off to the ministry. Or so she thought, because mom would walk out there knowing how the grandmother had no money to give away and she would take the envelope out, open it up, pull the \$10 bill out and sneak it back into the purse of grandma, and it would stay there until another televangelist came on and asked for ten bucks and the cycle would repeat. So the same \$10 bill, she should have checked the, you know, serial number on it, but it's the same \$10 bill that kept making the rounds because you could do that all day long, right? Could you not?

And in the 80s they perfected this. Right? And it seemed like there were so many of these guys on television asking for money. And this was normative. And it got so ridiculous, especially because it became a crowded kind of niche that they had to keep upping the ante. And the way they upped the ante, particularly back in the 80s, was saying, well, now you give to my ministry because I can now promise you, if you give to my ministry, your income will blow up, right? You give your seed faith gift to me. If you give me \$1,000 and God will give you back \$10,000, right? Anybody? Right? You know how this works. And then they kept collecting from all these people. And so it was often preying on these nice old ladies who believed in Christ and they would ask all these things, a lot of leverage in all that. But just know the Bible has predicted this. It said it was going on in the first century, as Paul even addresses it in First Timothy Chapter 6, where people were trying to get in the game because this is the thing about the Bible. It says in First Corinthians Chapter 9 that there were supposed to be monetary gifts given to spiritual teachers. So someone said, well, I want to be a spiritual teacher if I get to pass the plate. And so people got into it for monetary gain. And Paul says that's wrong. You don't get into this for monetary gain. Of course he's definitely saying, yeah, of course, pass the plate. You have to do that. That's mandatory. But he says that's not what this is about.



Then I want to turn you to this passage, Second Peter Chapter 2. This is the warning that's given. It's discerning giving. Here it comes, verse 1. Second Peter Chapter 2 verse 1, "But false prophets also arose among the people." Looking back in the Old Testament there were false prophets saying the wrong things. Peace, peace when there is no peace, to quote the Jeremiah prophets, the false prophets. "Just as there will be false teachers among you." Peter saw it coming, and it certainly came in their day, and it's still around in ours. They'll "secretly bring in destructive heresies," and they'll start twisting the message, particularly as Paul says in Second Timothy Chapter 4, because they want to be heard because the more they're heard, the more they can pass the plate and the more money they can get. So they'll give you what you want to hear. They will give you what your "itching ears" want to hear. That's how they work. And so they have to twist the truth, "even denying the master," now you can put this in quotes, "who bought them." Because that's what they're claiming. I'm in with you. He's my master, too. "Bringing upon themselves swift destruction." Now, I know that's in quotes, because if they bought him, they certainly wouldn't be destroyed. Right? This is an oxymoron, right? Of course not. But they're saying that they were bought by the same master that you're bought by but they're going to be destroyed.

What do they like? Well, they're "following their sensuality," right? They want their private jets or whatever they're trying to buy, their summer homes. "Because of them the way of truth is blasphemed." And if you want to see the product of all the televangelists and all the amusement parks that were built in the name of Christ and all the yachts and all the private jets, some of it's still going on, you can read the books that came out in the 2000s and in the 1990s. "The way of truth was blasphemed." Now here's the key phrase, "in their greed," they did it for money, "they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle," right? Just like in the Old Testament, God destroyed the false prophets. They're not idle now. "Their destruction is not asleep." The train has left the station. Their judgment is coming. So in "their greed they will exploit." So give to whoever asks? No! Not only on your email or your phones, but also on your missionary letters and your TV letters and your radio ministry letters. You don't give to everyone who asks, you don't. Why? Because the warning is here. Wisely discerningly give. So let's start with this: vertical giving in the name of the Lord giving, you don't give to just anyone who asks. Your church you're supposed to give to. Well if you don't trust them then find a different church because you have to give there. But if it's not this one, fine. It doesn't matter. Find one that you trust. Okay.

Horizontal. Let's think horizontally now. Turn with me to Second Thessalonians Chapter 3. Second Thessalonians Chapter 3. It's an interesting construction here, something we call a third-person imperative. An imperative is a command. If I say to you stand up, that's a command, and it's second person. If you were by yourself, that'd be a second-person singular, an imperative second-person singular. If I'm talking to all of you, it's a second-person plural imperative. A third-person imperative, whether it's singular or plural, I'm telling you don't let this person do that. Now, that's one thing if you're the mother of a toddler and I'm saying don't let your kid do that, then that might make more sense. But if I'm talking about a peer, someone in your small group, don't let them do that. It's like, how am I supposed to do that? Am I my brother's keeper? How am I supposed to control this other person? Okay. This is the challenge of third-person imperatives. How do I deal with a third-person imperative? Are you



telling me? Are you commanding me to do something? I can't control that person. Oh, no, you can't control that person but you can't be complicit in that person's sin. That's the key, right? Or as the legal jurisprudence might put it, you are not to aid or abet someone who's doing wrong. Don't be complicit in it. No aiding and abetting someone who's doing the wrong thing. That's what this command is about. And this is one aspect of it. But we'll talk about it. Ready? Here it comes.

Let's start in verse 10. "For even when we were with you, we would give you this command." He's giving this command to whom? The Christians in Thessalonica. We're giving it to you. "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat." Now let him not eat is the command. Who is the command to? The people listening in Thessalonica? Who is it about? A third person, "him," another person. If they're not willing to work then here's my command, don't let him eat. What does that mean? Buy duct tape and start duct taping people's mouths shut? No, no, no, no no. Don't aid and abet someone, don't be complicit in the sin of letting someone eat. You're not going to do something to positively make sure they don't eat, but you're going to passively make sure that you don't let them eat. I wasn't a part of it. Right? That's our responsibility. I'm not going to be a part of it.

So what does that mean? That means that every passage that you read about us caring for the poor is contingent on this command. That it's a command that's not about someone not working because they can't, but because they won't. Look at the next verse. "For we hear that some among you who walk," that means the way of life is, "in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies." They don't want to work. They're just doing their own thing. "Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ," the King, the boss, Jesus the Messiah, "to do their work quietly and to earn their own living." I love that phrase there "quietly" because people who want to eat and not work they're never quiet. Have you noticed that? At least on their cardboard signs they're not quiet. Are you following me, anybody? Is this offending you? (the audience says, no) No. Okay. Thank you. Why? Because they need to say what? Please give, please give, please give. Now, even the Apostle Paul said this. He said, listen, remember the poor as you know I'm willing to do because, as Jesus himself said, "it's more blessed to give than to receive." So the Bible says, "remember the poor." Okay? But he's not saying because he's writing this, he quoted that in the book of Acts but here he's saying, I'm not talking about the people who aren't willing to work.

Remember Joshua Chapter 9. Just remember Joshua Chapter 9. Next time you have an encounter in your own life, because it's a conflict, particularly some of you have the personality where it's a major conflict inside of you. You say, they're asking, they're asking, they seem poor, I need to do something here. Right? I want you to think a little bit about all the other appeals you have for money. Whether it's the guy on TV, the vertical giving, whether it's the prince's son of Ethiopia, or whatever you get in your inbox, whether it's the guy, you know, calling from tech support from Microsoft asking for your credit card number, whatever it is. I just want you to say, okay, well wait a minute. I have to be discerning and wise here, and I have to ask myself the question, is this legitimate?



I have to ask because Joshua Chapter 9 is a good example. Joshua Chapter 9, we're done with the Battle of Jericho. We're done with the battle of Ai, if you know a little bit of your biblical history. Divide and conquer. Jericho. Ai. Another very important battle after things have been messed up. Contraband was taken. So Joshua is there and guys show up who are looking like sojourners. Now, here is a very important principle and command given to Israel. You are to love the sojourners or to put it in modern terms, be nice to the sojourners. Why? Because you were sojourners in Egypt. Just remember you were sojourners in Egypt. You'd better be kind to those sojourners. And so that's Joshua. He's the first generation, you know, disciple of Moses. He knows those verses. He knows them in the book of Numbers. He knows them in the book of Deuteronomy. He could quote them from the book of Deuteronomy which says be kind to the sojourners. So guess who shows up? Sojourners. They're coming in there and they have their poor clothes on. They have their sandals all patched up. They have their bag. They pull out their moldy bread. We're poor sojourners.

So you know what? Joshua and his team, they make a deal with those poor sojourners. We just want peace with you. Oh, yeah, well, okay. They probably felt good about it when it was all done. They felt good I would think. Look at us. We're so virtuous. We've been so generous to the sojourners until they went back and God had something to say about it. God did not say fantastic Joshua, you're so generous. Right? God slaps his forehead so to speak. He says what are you doing? You just got hoodwinked man, what are you doing? These guys are lying to you. You just made a treaty with these guys. Do you know the Gibeonites? They live six or seven miles from the borders. They have a standing army. You just made a deal with them. You have no idea what kind of trouble you just made for yourself. It was worse than them losing a few bucks. This was a problem. Talk about aiding and abetting an enemy. This was not good. They did it with a motive they thought was virtuous. But it ended up being a lack of discernment. If you want to use Jesus' term, they were certainly not as "shrewd as serpents." They were not discerning. They were not wise. They just thought they were being generous and kind. Don't be complicit in sin.

Look at verse 13. Are you still in Second Thessalonians Chapter 3? "As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good." You know when we think about that, we think of that just as a positive command. Like, oh, what's the good thing I can do this week? Well, the good thing you might do this week is not doing something that you think is virtuous, it's withholding something that's hard to withhold because you think, oh, that feels like I'm being mean right now. Do you understand what I mean by that? So sometimes not growing weary in doing good means I'm not going to give in this situation. And it might even be with someone in your small group because, you know, I just don't think, I don't think that's right. Jot these references down real quick. Proverbs Chapter 16 verse 26. One of the greatest plays on words in the book of Proverbs. Are you ready for this? I mean, here's my summary of it. Hunger is God's worker to get people to work. Here's how it's put, "A worker's appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on." If you don't let someone get hungry, then God doesn't get what he wants out of the problem of not working. That's the whole point.

Or how about this one? Proverbs Chapter 6 verses 6 through 11. That's the story of "go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise." Wise up, doesn't have a chief, no one



cracking the whip, "no officer, no ruler," and yet there goes the ant who "prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man." Now if you want to be lazy, God is saying here is my discipline for you. Poverty. Now I don't want to get there and aid and abet the problem of not allowing God to do what he says he's going to do for sloth. Do you understand what I'm saying? If I get in the way of that, I'm not serving God, right? I'm actually working against God because God says here's what I'm trying to do. I don't want to foil the discipline of God. Poverty sometimes is a divine consequence so that someone can learn something. Proverbs Chapter 10 verse 4, "A slack hand causes poverty," but here's what God is trying to teach us, "but the hand of the diligent makes rich." We just need diligence. And if there's ever a generation that hasn't learned that it's ours. The entitlement generation has to learn to work. I know that sounds political. It's not political, guys. It is not political. This is biblical.

Second Thessalonians 3 is all about the responsibility that each of us is supposed to pull our own weight. Are there exceptions? Of course there are exceptions. And when the exceptions are there, First Timothy Chapter 5 verse 8 says the first line of defense is not a stranger in a parking lot. You understand that. The first line of defense is not even a friend at church. The first line of defense is your family, is your extended family. That's the first line of defense. And then there's the line of defense we talked about in the first week of this series. I quoted Deuteronomy Chapter 14. I quoted Deuteronomy Chapter 26. I'm quite sure I did. I should have if I didn't, I know I quoted one of those two, if not both, because they both talk about the fact that Israel was supposed to give a part of their triennial tithe to the nation so the nation could care for the widows and the orphans. You know you pay taxes and those taxes go to those things. You could dial right now on your phone 211, and you could get a list of government programs that people can apply for if they cannot make it and their family cannot provide for them, and they're not even going to check that box. And unfortunately, a lot of tax-funded programs do aid and abet and get in the way of the hunger working as God's worker to get us to work. Nevertheless, that's their responsibility and they'll be accountable for that. But we need to be not complicit in someone else's sins.

Is there a time for us to get involved? Of course there is. Of course there is. But I want you to enjoy meaningful, discerning giving because there's nothing better than to help out when you know it was a legitimate need and I was responsible for stepping in by God's grace with the means to help when it was helpful. That's great and I want you to experience that. We start with the first 15 verses. Be willing to be generous and then get generous but make sure it's in a wise way. Don't let the wisdom stifle the generosity. Make sure the generosity finds the wise outlets. And even if there's only five wise outlets, man, pour it on and be extra generous where you can. All right.

It's not a typo on your worksheet. If you downloaded the worksheet or you have a printed one there, versus 16 through 24 is exactly the same section. I would like us to think through this real briefly here as we relook at this text and think about it from the aspect of Paul and Timothy and Titus and the famous brother and the other brother, okay? These guys were



given the gifts and they were going to ride off into the sunset, go to the port, get on a ship and head to Jerusalem. What would that feel like? Put yourself in Titus' shoes. Right? You've collected a lot. I mean, if you add up everything they have from Rome, from Macedonia, and now they're in Achaia, and Achaia is pretty well off. And now you're getting big checks. That was a lot of money. And let's just say now you have it. Maybe they gave you a little bag so you could eat on the way to Jerusalem. So you have some money and you have a big load of money. You're the Brinks truck now. Okay? How do you feel? Well you feel scared, number one. You bring two swords with you on this journey and you should have a cadre of guys around you. Big guys, I hope, who work out. But how do you feel knowing that these guys gave that money in the name of the Lord? How do you feel? I hope you feel like, whoa, I need to be careful with this.

Even the words in our text, if you go back to Second Corinthians Chapter 8, I hope you have all the things that Paul is calling out. Look at verse 16, a "heart of ... earnest care." I hope there's a willingness to manage this and to be a part of it. I hope that you sense the honor of verse 19 of being appointed to be on that ship. I hope that you feel like you're ministering, that means serving, bottom of verse 19. I hope you're doing it, at the very bottom of verse 19, "for the glory of the Lord." And I hope you're doing it to show goodwill to those people in Jerusalem. I do hope that no one can blame you for not handling it accurately and faithfully. Verse 21, I hope you "aim at what's honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man." I hope, verse 22, that you're going to be tested in this major thing now that you have this big pile of money. I hope all of this makes you sense that responsibility and that you do this super carefully, that you're circumspect about the whole process.

Now, you may not be someone who handles the sacred offerings, but everything you have comes from God. And in that sense I warned you that it would be coming in this series and now that we're in the 16th to 24th verse, we finally hit the subject that many people thought would come at the beginning of this series. But now it's appropriate for me to drop the word "stewardship" into our minds and to think about it. But it really is about managing. So let's put it this way. A very simple outline. Number two, we need to "Manage Honorably." That's the word Paul uses here, at least the English translation of it, to manage honorably. You are to manage the things that God has given us financially, to manage them honorably. Now think the word "stewardship," because that's what I mean. A good steward manages honorably. You're a trustee. You're a supervisor, you're an administrator. That's one of the English translated words here. You're given a responsibility. It's someone else's.

Now jot these references down because I think they're powerful, because this is certainly how Titus felt. It's how Timothy felt. It's how the famous brother and the other brother felt. Numbers Chapter 18 verse 8. Numbers Chapter 18 verse 8. Remember in our Old Testament reading and even in the first sermon in this series, we talked about the eleven tribes giving to the twelfth tribe, the tribe of Levi, and they were gifts given to God but the twelfth tribes got to use those. And even among what they received, they had to give a tithe of the tithe. So they were giving too. No one was exempt from giving. Verse 8 it says, Number Chapter 18, "Then" Yahweh "the Lord spoke to Aaron, 'Behold, I have given you the charge of the contributions made to me, all the consecrated things,' all the things set apart, "all the consecrated things of



the people of Israel. I have given them to you as a portion and to your sons as a perpetual due." But they're consecrated things, they're my things.

Here's another one, Numbers Chapter 5 verses 9 and 10. "Every contribution, all the holy donations of the people of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his." Oh, wait a minute. But they're holy donations. Verse 10, "Each one shall keep his holy donations: whatever anyone gives to the priest shall be his." But it's a holy donation. You're leaving with things that are God's things. That just ups your sense of stewardship. So I want us to think like a steward with all that you have. Because even if you're not managing the gifts of offerings given to a church because you're not a church CFO or a pastor, you certainly are a Christian that has to say, James Chapter 1, that every good thing comes from God, or as it says in John Chapter 3, which is a great line, verse 27, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given to him from heaven." So every dime you have in your Fidelity account, your Schwab account, your Chase account, whatever you have in terms of finances has been given to you from God. Or as it says in a great verse you should quote often in First Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 7, "What do you have that you did not receive?"

These are principles of stewardship. And stewardship simply means you don't own it. Now, I know I'm all about ownership, the Grammys notwithstanding, I'm all about ownership. Nobody? I'm all about ownership, but ownership with a small "o." Because just like righteousness, Noah was a righteous man. Right? Daniel was a righteous man, right? Job was a righteous man. Now, we mean that in a relative sense because the only one who is righteous is God. Absolutely. We're all owners, I believe in that, the Bible teaches that. But we're not owners in an absolute sense, and we're all like stewards. Right? Just like everyone is a sinner, right? But there's relative righteousness among humans. And we're owners, right? You can't come steal what I have because I own it. But when it comes to us as people we know ultimately we're just stewards. That means we don't own it. God owns everything. Psalm 50. He owns "the cattle on a thousand hills." Even if all these different ranchers call it their cattle. No, but God owns it all. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Everything in it is God's. So that makes us stewards.

So every dime in your Fidelity account. Let's just think about this, right? Every dime of it is God's. And here's how I'll prove it. The minute after you're dead none of it is yours. None of it. Every dime you have, you will not have then. All of it's left behind. So it's not yours because you can't keep it. And things that are yours, really yours, you should be able to keep. Now here's the thing. Eternal, temporary. And that's the way we need to start thinking, things that are eternal and things that are temporary. Now, with that in view, let's turn to Luke Chapter 16 real quick, Luke Chapter 16, an often-misunderstood text. It's the parable that Jesus tells in Luke Chapter 16 about this dishonest manager. Some people struggle with this because Jesus is holding up a dishonest person as an exemplar of how we ought to act, not in the dishonest part, but in the shrewd part. This whole sermon really is about being shrewd and that's the part that people struggle with. So he's not telling us to be dishonest, but he is telling us to be thoughtful and shrewd and discerning. And this manager, when he knew he was going to be fired, goes around to his master's debtors and he said, okay, you owe \$1,000,



mark it down to \$500. And that's going to make every person in debt to the master very happy. Right?

What is your mortgage? Do you own a home? What is your mortgage? Just cut it in half. Let's just say the bank comes to you and says I want to change this, cut it in half. That would make my day. I'd be super happy about that. Okay? So all these people were really happy and they had one guy to thank for it, the dishonest manager. And so when he was fired, guess how many couches were available for him to sleep on? A lot. Everyone had their debt marked down in half, a lot of people. A lot of free meals in a lot of places. Why? Because he cared about people in a dishonest but shrewd way by doing something for them that mattered. Where did it matter? For them it mattered in the pocketbook. After all of that it says this in verse 8, "The master," when he found this out, "commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness." Right? And you know how that is. Sometimes someone might say, even if they're ripped off, particularly a very rich person, wow, that was really shrewd how he ripped me off. And that's what the master is saying, really shrewd, well really smart.

Now here's Jesus, "for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." What could you be getting at? I'm glad you asked. Verse 9, "And I tell you," hey, Christians, "make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails," and for you it'll fail the minute you die. Not a single dime goes with you. "When it fails they may receive you," not to sleep on the couch in some dirtbag place, or even in some nice house, but "into the eternal dwellings." Well, wait a minute. I'm going to heaven, right? I'm going to be in a New Jerusalem one day. What kind of friends am I making? Well, I can think about Christian friends. That's true. But I can also think about non-Christians whom I know, I can build bridges by showing that I care more about non-Christians than I care about my money. And I can even make friends with my money with Christians. I can show that people matter more to me than my money. I just want us to know that that's a part of recognizing that I am a manager of God's stuff. And I know this about God for sure. He cares more about people whose souls will traverse the threshold of this mortal life. The mortal will put on immortality, but the unrighteous mammon is not going to cross the threshold. So I know this about God. He cares a lot more about every soul in this room and every soul in your neighborhood than he cares about any dime you have in your bank account.

So he's saying, why don't you make some friends for yourselves with all that money. And this is the priority. Can you care more about people than you do about the money? And that means what? Generous. Foolishly, recklessly, carelessly? No, no, no, of course not. But I want to manage in a way that shows that I'm honorable. And honorable means I care about the important things. The important things are I'm rich toward God, and being rich toward God means I'm spending money on things that matter to God. What matters to God is not frivolity, but people. You need to do good with your money. You need to seek to prioritize the people whom God loves so much. Even in First Corinthians Chapter 9, when Paul quotes Deuteronomy Chapter 25, when it says don't muzzle the ox while he's threshing. Which is an interesting thing, right? Let the ox eat a little bit of the grain, because you should care more about the ox than you do about the grain, even though you have the ox there, threshing out



the grain so you can make your bread and sell your grain. And I know that's important, but without the ox, you wouldn't be able to do this. So you should care about the ox.

That's kind of like running a business caring more about the personnel than you do about the equipment. And that's my point, right? That's exactly what God is trying to say when he gets down to the bottom of the passage, which is you should care more about your pastor than you do about your offering. That's exactly where he's going, right? Spiritual feeding versus material giving. And he uses all these illustrations about taxes to pay for the soldiers so the soldiers can protect the country, and grapes being eaten by the farmer so the farmer can be full, so he can go farm the field and sell his grapes, and the goat and the milk and all the rest. The whole point is it's the person above the thing and he starts with an ox. And then he says does God care about oxen? It's not written for oxen. Even though it is written for oxen, it's written for us. I want us to care more about the general principle of people over things.

Honorable management. There's so much to this. We'll talk more about it in Second Corinthians Chapter 9. But he doesn't give you money for the satisfaction of counting it. He's giving you money, according to First Timothy Chapter 6, so that you will be "rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share." I know he gives it to you to enjoy. That's true. Enjoy it. But the enjoyment of it you'll find is also in making friends by it, by investing in your relationships and the people around you, both non-Christians to build bridges for the gospel and your Christian brothers and sisters. Wisely. Wisely. But no one should be a hoarder, as we should have learned very clearly in Luke Chapter 12. Building more silos is not a wise thing.

It's a good time for us to end this one with the Lord's Supper, because the whole series ends with the very last verse of Second Corinthians Chapter 9. And remember, I told you this whole series uses the word "grace" ten times, ten times in two chapters. And the ultimate expression of grace is the last verse and that is "thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift." It's not even named but we all know what it is. Thanks be to God for his indescribable, his inexpressible gift. After all this giving we're talking about, and so many lessons we learn from what Paul is telling us here, what the Holy Spirit is writing to us about giving. I mean, it's like he just says just remember this. He's already said it to us in our passage and we know that from the text. Do you remember when we read that, "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." That's the Lord's Supper. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

But I want you to start before we ever think about being stewards, we need to start by thinking like I am grateful to be a recipient of the answer to my problem as a sinner. That's the starting point. We need a savior and we are not even, I mean, all these issues matter nothing. They matter not at all if our sins aren't dealt with. We need our sins obliterated. We need to have a relationship with God where we can say Romans Chapter 8 verse 1, "there is therefore now no condemnation" for me. Well, the only way to do that is to read the whole verse, "for those who are in Christ Jesus," there's no condemnation. I don't want to be condemned. I want to cross from this life to the next and have God's blessing. The only way to do that is to know



you're in Christ. And the only way to be in Christ is to embrace by faith what he did for us. This legal exchange, the substitution that the Father would be willing to punish the Son instead of us. But you have to embrace that. You have to say yes, that's where my only hope is in the finished work of Christ.

I'd always like you to leave church encouraged. That would be great. But especially when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. And I think of Colossians Chapter 2 verse 2, when it talks about having our hearts encouraged. That's how the verse starts. But at the end of the verse it talks about riches, "the riches of full assurance." That's a great line. And I want you to be encouraged, hopefully, by having the "riches of full assurance." I don't know what your bank account looks like. And certainly a set of sermons on giving, I mean, the forecast is you're going to have less as you give before God resupplies you. But what you should have more of as you think about the Lord's Supper is "the riches of full assurance" that you know where you stand with God. That's the ultimate encouragement. Some people think their riches are a mighty fortress as the Old Testament says, it's their security. But our security is knowing that "if God is for us, who can be against us?" That the day you die the fear of facing a Christless eternity is not in your forecast, that you'll never hear "I never knew you; depart from me." I want you to have your heart encouraged by "the riches of full assurance."

And it's not complicated but so many people miss it. And if you sit here today like so many people do, even as people said at the National Prayer Breakfast this week, just like it's all about being good enough. I hope I'm good enough. It's not about that. You know that, right? The message of the gospel of grace is that you understand what it is to know that is not about your resumé, it's not about doing enough, it's about you trusting fully in what Christ has done. That's what it's about. You could be the worst person in the world and right now put your trust in Christ and then get killed in a car accident on the way home from church and be ushered right into the presence of God and have the advocate, Jesus Christ, standing there right beside you, pleading your case, fully accepted, no condemnation. It's about your trust in Christ. And that's why we celebrate the fact that Christ died. He spilled his blood. His body hung on a cross, and that scene was the culmination of him paying the penalty that we deserved.

Pray with me, please. God, we are in great need of having "the riches of full assurance." What a great line and we want that. We want to be, even as it says there in Luke Chapter 12, rich toward God, rich toward you. Make us that way. We know it's about more than generosity but it certainly includes that. We want to have a rich faith. We want to have generosity and a rich set of good works. Be quick to share and be the kind of people who truly care about other people. We don't want to let our discernment or our caution or our care to foil a real heart of liberal giving and generosity. But God we want to make sure that we are pleasing to you. We don't want to miss opportunities that you put before us, and we don't want to rush headlong into things that aren't your will for us. So help us to be often in prayer, seeking to find what's pleasing to you. And I pray you'd give us more and more insight into your will day by day, as we seek you and read your Word and meditate on it, and give thought to what you have clearly written in your Word and given us as a guide "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."



In Jesus' name. Amen.