



Joy of Generosity – Part 5

Giving's Role in Christian Maturity

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Impulse buying. Do you know what that is? Impulse buying. Yeah, you do. Impulse buying. It's when you go to Costco to buy some paper towels and 45 minutes later you leave with two patio heaters and a kayak. That's impulse buying, right? Or when my wife says go get cherries and like a stack of those large paper plates, that's what we need. And then I leave with some, like AirPod Pros and maybe a Denon, you know, eight-channel receiver, maybe a big screen TV. This hasn't happened or anything, but just in case I were to impulse buy, that maybe is what I would do. I hope you realize that if a dad were to do that you wouldn't say, well, there's a good example of a dad, a quintessential father, providing for his family. That's not what you would say about that. You would say it seems pretty impulsive; it seems pretty irresponsible. It's not what I envision when you see someone doing that, that he's a wise father providing for his family. You would say that seems like a lot of immaturity on display. And you would be right.

Well, when it comes to our topic that we've been studying here in Second Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9, there is a form of generosity that is similar to that. Because it's not as though that dad didn't back his truck into the driveway and pull some things out and provide for his family. I mean, he is providing stuff for his family, right? If he shows up with that Cyber Ai, the massage recliner. Have you seen that? \$6,000? It got my attention. You're putting a piece of furniture in the house and that's some kind of provision. But you would say I sent you for, you know, cucumbers and bananas. That's not what you came back with. So you realize that it's not the kind of provision that you would think makes a lot of sense. And so it is with generosity. There's a kind of generosity, not the kind of foolish generosity we talked about last time, but there is a generosity that's more of an impulse generosity. Sometimes it falls into that category. That's not quintessential generosity. That's not the kind of mature generosity we're talking about or the kind of generosity that, you know, is just the kind of generosity that gets pushed into action when there's a glossy brochure or there's some kind of, you know, video with some really cool mood music in it or, you know, when there's some kind of emotional plea. Or let's just put it this way, some giving is certainly motivated by guilt and some arm-twisting, some persuasion or cajoling by somebody.

And that's the kind of thing that someone might look at and say, well, I've given and they might have even given sacrificially and they can say I'm generous. Look at that. Look, I did that last year. And I responded to that over there. And they can say I'm a giver; I'm a generous person. You talk about the virtue of generosity and I'm a Christian, I'm doing it. Look right there. And I would just say there's a better way and there's a more mature kind of giving, a kind of generosity that God would say, no, no, that's not the kind of giving I'm talking about. There's a better kind, even though I'm not dismissing the, you know, responding to a kind of plea is not entirely useless. There's something to it, but there is something better.

And I think we run into that in the first five verses of Second Corinthians Chapter 9. And I want you to look at this passage with me, and we're going to get into some really just familiar



and good verses that we're going to find in next week's text. And not to make an excuse for the bad sermon you're about to hear now, I'm not saying that, but great texts are coming up. But in this kind of transitional section in Second Corinthians Chapter 9 verses 1 through 5, Paul is saying some things to the Corinthians, and he's already held them up as an example to the Macedonians, these Christians in the cities up north. But he's saying some things that kind of holds them up as an example and an example, even though he says all this stuff I'm saying is not necessary for me to say, what he is saying certainly holds up to us a kind of mature example that I hope that we can kind of tease out of it some principles and say, yeah, that's the kind of generosity God would want from me.

So let's learn if we can from this text, five verses in Second Corinthians Chapter 9, as we continue our series on the Joy of Generosity, let's start in verse 1. I'll read it from the English Standard Version and it says this. Paul writes to the Corinthians, saying, "Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints." Now, if you're new to this and you've just hopped on in the middle of this series, you should know this is the famine relief in Jerusalem and hard times are going on for the church there and Corinth is a wealthy city, by and large, a wealthy city compared to the northern churches up there in Macedonia, Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica. They're not as wealthy. Matter of fact, Paul says at the beginning of Second Corinthians Chapter 8, they've given kind of out of their poverty. Some of them gave beyond their ability, which I know is rhetorically impossible. Right? It's a bit of a hyperboles way to put it.

But they've given and he's saying now if we talk about you guys, you know, here's a wealthy environment and the church has many wealthy people in it, and he's going to talk about their willingness to get involved in this, what he calls here "ministry for the saints," the saints very far away. Look at your maps in the back of your Bible. It's a long way from Corinth to Jerusalem. Second Corinthians Chapter 9 verse 2, "For I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia," all the churches up there, "saying that Achaia," that's the southern part of Greece where Corinth is, "has been ready since last year." Right? And he's talked about this a few times, that this has been something on the table for a year now. "And your zeal," and all that you've said that you were going to do, "has stirred up most of them," which we read about at the beginning of the last chapter. "But I'm sending the brothers," now remember that, that's where we left off last time. Not only is Titus coming ahead of time, but there is that famous brother for preaching the gospel. He's going to come. And then there's that other brother who was not named, and he's going to come and, you know, other people are going to show up in this advance party, and Paul's going to show up later, but they're going to start passing the plate and start to get this gift ready for Paul to collect and for all of them to ship off to Jerusalem.

And he says, so "I'm sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me," and of course he's going to come around, as he often did, first through Macedonia and then down into Achaia, and he would end up in Corinth. And so when I show up I want you to be ready with this gift. It'll already be ready as I said you would be ready. "Otherwise, if some Macedonians come," verse 4, "with me and find that you're not



ready, we would be humiliated -- to say nothing of you -- for being so confident." We were so confident about you giving and you were so confident in what you said, I mean, we would all be humiliated. So here's the plan, verse 5, "so I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction." And no giving should be like that as he'll then lean into starting in verse 6. More on that next week.

All right. This is, I think, what we can learn about mature giving. And it starts with a shift in vocabulary about trying to describe what he's collecting for, this giving to the needs of the church in Jerusalem. We've talked about two kinds of giving throughout this series. Giving to God through our church, I summarized that as "vertical giving." And then there's giving as we see needs "horizontally." First to the church. The first concentric circle is our brothers and sisters in Christ. And then I guess secondly we could just expand that to brothers and sisters in other churches. And then of course, there are non-Christians, right? First to the household of faith, Galatians Chapter 6, and then to anyone as we have opportunity, it could be our neighbors, it could be whoever, some coworker at work. But horizontal giving and vertical giving.

And here he's seeing the Christians in Jerusalem, he calls it here a "ministry for the saints." Now, he did drop that word once. Now it's hidden behind a different translation in the English. But he's going to use this word three times in Second Corinthians Chapter 9 which translates into our English word "ministry." Right? The fourth-to-the last word in the first verse, "ministry." So I'm going to give these guys famine relief. They're struggling financially in Jerusalem. They're Christians there, that church is struggling. So I'm going to send money to them. And when I send money to them I'm engaging in "ministry for the saints," ministry.

Now the word you just need to know is the word translated ministry which is the word that is transliterated into the second tier of leadership in the Church which is transliterated into the English word "deacon." You've heard the word deacon. It comes from the Greek word "Diakonos." Diakonos is the word that's here and it's going to show up three times in Second Corinthians Chapter 9 to describe this project. It's a diakonos. It's you engaging in ministry. Now, we learn this over there at the beginning of it in Second Corinthians Chapter 6 and we started to see this then turn into the second-tier leadership in the Church. Right? You have the pastors also called overseers and elders. That's the top category. It's one office. And then there's the second tier. We call them what we translated ministry leaders at our church because that's what diakonos means. They're ministry ministers and they're leaders because that's what they are. They're exemplary leaders. And sometimes people would say outside the church the pastors or the ministers. Well, that's kind of a crossing of these words because really minister is the word "deacon" and a minister is a second tier and that just means they're involved in serving and they're exemplary servants. So they're ministry leaders. Okay.

This word kind of changes the feel of what we're doing. And it really changes the mindset. And this is the first thing that needs to happen if we're going to mature our view on giving. And it's going to do something about how I view it. Let's go back to the book of Acts in our minds. You don't need to turn there but if you might remember when we first introduced to this class



of people who are going to be set up by the apostles, they were given the task of serving the widows, and the widows were going to need the food and they're all gathered together. They started basically a communal thing there in the book of Acts before, you know, the protraction of Christ not returning there as soon as they thought. And so they were all needing to feed these widows who didn't have husbands to go make a living. And so these guys, including Stephen, were going around and taking responsibility for serving food and making sure they had the food, went into the marketplace to get the food to feed them, and they felt the responsibility for it. If you had on a Tuesday afternoon widows who didn't get fed, well, the apostles would say, did you not feed them, right? It was your responsibility to do that because you were their minister. Right?

So giving, I'm just trying to make this case here, it should be seen as a ministry. And that ministry kind of shifts from like this kind of passive sense of extracurricular work to us seeing ourselves as somewhat obligated to say I'm a minister of this gift. It's the predicate, it's the foundation for me having a mindset from which then the gift comes. I have to think like I'm the minister in this before I ever reach for my wallet or get into your purse, right? Before you ever reach for your purse, you think, okay, I'm ministering here. Okay. And that has to do with responsibility.

Let's write it down and then I'll try to make it clearer than that because by the look on your faces that's not as clear as it should be. Okay. Number one, "Be Mature and Give Because You've Accepted Responsibility." You've accepted responsibility. If I asked you, are you a minister? You'd think I'm not a minister. Right? You, pastor, are the minister. And I said no, no, no, no, right? The minister is someone who has a ministry post. And in our church, of course, everyone should have a ministry post. Well, there are ministry leaders. Those might be in our church someone we would see as someone who has a designated position as someone who's an exemplary. And you look to these guys, these are the ministry leaders, or gals, right? So that I understand you would say, well, I'm not a minister. Well, anyone who gives should see their giving as flowing out of the sense of responsibility, even vertically, that I'm giving as a minister to this church. I'm a minister of the church and I'm giving to the church. Or someone in my small group has a need, or in my sub-congregation, or my circle of friends within the church. I'm ministering to them and therefore I see myself as ministering to them. I have a responsibility. I'm taking responsibility for their needs.

Maybe this will help. Go back in your mind to Genesis Chapter 4. In Genesis Chapter 4 God says to Cain, where's your brother Abel? Do you remember the story? And Cain pops off with a bit of an attitude and he asks the question, a rhetorical question, "Am I my..." Right? Now that was not a good question to ask because he was expecting in the rhetorical question that, of course, the answer in his mind was no. Just like you might call your adult son about his adult brother and he might say the same thing. I'm not in charge of my brother, right? I'm not my "brother's keeper" is in essence this is what Cain is saying.

Now, I know God had on him all the goods and he knew the receipts were you just killed your brother. He knew all that. But I can read the rest of the Bible and know that the rhetorical question you ask should have had a different assumed answer. In other words, you are your



brother's keeper. I mean, there's something very clear about the New Testament from beginning to end that I should look at my brothers in Christ and say, I do have a responsibility to see them as my ministry. I see my church as my ministry. I'm a minister to my church regardless of whether I have a designated exemplary ministry post. This is my church. I'm responsible here. I accept responsibility for the church to make sure the lights stay on, to make sure that the mortgage is paid. And in my friendships, in my connections, in my small group or my sub-congregation, if someone is in need I accept responsibility that I am my brother's keeper. They're not going to live under the underpass. They're not going to live on a park bench at the park. I accept responsibility for them. That is the picture of the predicate, the presupposition in my mind before any giving takes place, I take responsibility.

Maybe some texts will help. Go with me to Philippians Chapter 2. Philippians Chapter 2. Let's just start with the concept. It's such a biblical concept. Now these are some really hard verses. They're familiar and easy to read but they're very hard to live out. Philippians Chapter 2 verse 3. Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit." That's hard enough, right? That's hard because we're hard-wired from birth to do that, selfish ambition and conceit. But we go further, "In humility count others as more significant than yourself." Right? Now that's hard. This should be hanging on the wall on a plaque in every one of our toddler classrooms across the way. And none of them are doing it, you understand. This is very hard for every person to say, okay, I'm supposed to consider others humbly thinking now as more significant than myself. And so then that's my mindset. Out of that, I'm going to not just look out for my own interests, but the interests of others. Okay. That's accepting responsibility to care about your interests. And so in that sense I am saying I am my brother's keeper. I am my sister in Christ's keeper. I do care whether or not they have their needs met. That's how the responsibility is in my mind. It shifts from just we're all free agents and I hope, you know, be warmed and be filled, I hope you do okay this week to no, no, no, no, no. That's immature thinking and immature giving is just occasionally saying, well, oh, I guess if the plea gets desperate enough, I can do something. That's immature giving. Right? And maybe people do give from time to time if the cry is desperate enough. Right? If the problem seems it's a tearjerker story, maybe. No, no, no, no. Do you see the excitement, the urgency, the earnestness, which is the repeated word throughout the New Testament for me to say I'm eager to get involved, the zeal to be involved because I take responsibility, I see this as my responsibility.

So I want to be able to say, okay, this is the challenge. It's not only impossible, by the way, in our toddler classroom, it really is only enabled by the gift of regeneration, right? You have to have a new heart to be able to say, okay, this is the challenge. And now as your North Star, we go to verse 5, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours," it's right there in living color in the pages of Scripture, "in Christ Jesus." Do you want to know what this looks like? It looks like Jesus Christ, right? Christ is the one putting this in flesh, right? The incarnation of Christ puts this on display. And then he goes on to talk about the incarnation in the rest of this section.

Christ is the one showing you, as we've already seen summarized in Second Corinthians Chapter 8, "that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his



poverty you might become rich." Now, I know that's all an analogy because he's talking about money in Second Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9. But the point is, of course, in his glory, in the pre-incarnate Christ, he decided to lay that all aside so that he could live among us, die, and this price of dying in our place so that we could be rich, and no longer have to suffer the pains of my own judgment and be able to be ushered into the New Jerusalem. So we get the riches of eternal blessing and he gets the punishment of my sin. And the greatness of that is, look, he put my interests before his own. He took my problem on himself. And the Bible says that was his mindset.

So I have interests and I have to deal with those. And I understand no one else is going to brush my teeth today. Right? So I have to deal with some things and you have to deal with some things for yourself. You have to look out for your own interests. But I can't just say you have your things, I have my things, let's just go our separate ways between Sundays and I hope it works out for you. I'm my brother's keeper; you're your brother's keeper. And this church, just think about it, it's the shift in pronouns. And I need this to work in your mind. Please. And I don't want this when we see each other at Wahoo's or something and you want to talk about the church, just don't make this mistake with me, okay? Please? Don't ask me a question like hey, are we having Good Friday services at your church? Don't say that. Don't say at your church, right? It's not because I'm trying to be humble about, you know, I'm not the pastor, I'm just a servant. That's not why I'm saying don't say that. I don't want you to say your church. Right? I don't even want you to say the church. You know what I'm aiming at here, right? I want you to say our church. That would be good. Because I want you to accept responsibility for being a part of the church. Right? I wouldn't even be offended if you called it my church. If you say my church. Are we going to have Good Friday services at my church? I would smile at that. I'll give you a dirty look if you call it my church. Right? And I'm going to give you a smile if you start talking about your church, because it is your church, and your church means that you have taken responsibility. This is my church. And people who think that way and even talk that way, they're invested. They're invested in every way, including their generosity, I can assure you. Because that's how it works. This is your church. And when you go to your small group, this is my small group. These are my brothers in Christ. This is my sub-congregation. Right? And that means that they are people who when there are needs you meet those, you're ready, you're eager to meet those needs. You know, the picture of this couldn't be better when it says, "have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."

Turn with me to Matthew Chapter 20. It's a familiar verse to you but I need you to note something about it in Matthew Chapter 20, look at verse 28. It's often quoted off the cuff. And you know, there's nothing wrong with that because it really summarizes well the mindset that was so unique about Jesus during his earthly ministry. So countercultural. Look at Matthew Chapter 20 verse 28. Super helpful. Matthew Chapter 20 verse 28. It says, "Even as the Son of Man," which of course is a great title for Christ, it comes from Daniel Chapter 7, which, by the way, he's supposed to be the one to whom everybody's going to serve, right? All dominion, all power, all glory. Everything's supposed to go to the Son of Man, "even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," a payment for many. Okay.

That verse we quote it all the time offhand and we think, okay, that's the idea. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." He was willing to lay aside his glory as the Son of Man and to come here and live among us, and to give, to serve, to give and to serve. Now that's super important and it's important for us to catch because this is what we're talking about. Matter of fact, that word "serve," circle that word if you can circle it or highlight it, that's the word we're dealing with in our passage. It's the word that he starts to use to describe what we're doing here to the brothers in Jerusalem. It's our word that's transliterated "deacon," in verbal form if we talk about serving someone, to serve them, and it's a ministering to them, he came to minister to us.

All right. Look at the first word in that verse, verse 28, "even," "even as the Son of Man." So we know that we're jumping into the middle of an argument, actually jumping into the end, the crescendo of the argument. It starts in verse 25. So this is the punch line in an argument. It starts in verse 25. "Jesus called them to him," all the disciples, "and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.'" We know how the power structures of the world work, right? The higher you go in the hierarchy in the org chart, everyone then is supposed to bow and serve you and they're just at your beck and call. That's how it works. But "it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your..." Here's our word again, your diakonos, "your servant." So in the category of the great, the great people among you are the diakonos, right? So there are people who are wafting in and out. They don't see themselves as ministers. But the people who do see themselves as ministers, those are the great ones, and the great ones are ready, not just with their generosity financially, but in every other way. They'll stay the extra hour, right? They'll go the extra mile and they'll spend the extra dollar because they take responsibility among the followers of Christ.

It goes even further, "And whoever would be first among you..." Now great is the category but what about among the greats? What about at the top of the heap? What about the org chart? Go to the top, "whoever would be first among you," now the word shifts, he "must be your servant." We've gone from diakonos. Now look at the number. Is there a footnote in the English Standard Version there in the margin? Put your readers on. Can you read the fine print? Do you see what the word is? Does it say bondservant or something like that? This is a word "Doulos" in Greek. This is the word "slave." He is your slave. He is the one that you know that he's the one, whatever, two in the morning, phone call, he's there. Whatever. Talk about going the extra mile. You didn't go the extra ten miles. Spend the extra \$10. Right? Stay the extra ten hours.

So here's the inverted pyramid, and it ends with the cornerstone completely flipped upside down "even the Son of Man." So the greatest and greatest of the greatest, the King of kings and Lord of lords, right? He's the one who gave his life. So we have the cornerstone being the greatest of all who serves, who gives his life as a ransom. And then the leaders of the congregations, those are the "Presbuteros," the "Poimēn," the "Episkopos," the pastors. Right? And they're there to lay down their lives for their congregations. And then you have the great category, the diakonos, those who are going to serve and see themselves as ministers,



which should be everyone who's truly regenerate. And they're ready to be totally bought in. And they're the great ones. Right? And all of them are there to do what? To be like the Gentiles? No, they're not like the Gentiles. They're not like the people lording over people. Right? They're there to meet needs. That's the difference. Now, if you go back in your mind to what we just talked about in Philippians Chapter 2, the rest of the world is all about "selfish ambition and conceit." We're supposed to be about humility and counting others as more significant and that makes me look at their interests and not my own. I have to deal with some of my own, I get that, but my interests are now yours. I am my brother's keeper.

You fly into a neighborhood, maybe you're on business or whatever, and you get your rental car. You go to a hotel and you don't think much about it. You just want to get in. You want to get out. You want to do your business and go. You know, all I'm thinking about is hoping that the parking lot's lit well, and I hope my car doesn't get broken into. I mean, that's all you're thinking about. At least that's all I'm thinking about. But it's different if you were to move into that neighborhood. Then it becomes my neighborhood. If I'm staying in a hotel, it's not my neighborhood. I just want to get in and get out. I hope to be safe. It's all about me when I'm flying into a neighborhood and it's a hotel.

If I'm going to live there it's a little different, then it's my neighborhood. If this is my neighborhood, particularly if there are some threats in the neighborhood. I see some, you know, sketchy people coming around. I see some people lurking around in people's, you know, neighborhood or looking and peering into windows or whatever. Now I'm a, you know, come on. If there's a neighborhood watch then I'm going to sign up for that. Kids running through the neighborhood on their bikes. And I'm thinking, wait, wait a minute. I don't want those kids to be victims of anything, right? Now I care. Those are my neighborhood kids. I want to protect those kids. Right? These neighbors are my neighbors. I mean, I'm ready to care about this neighborhood.

There has to be that shift because there are a lot of people who treat church like a hotel, just consumers, get in and get out. They find one that provides what they want and that's it. You have to be a minister of your church. You have to be a minister in your small group, and you have to see yourself as accepting responsibility. And when you do that it precedes all giving. That's mature giving. If you want a practical way to get this started in your thinking because you think, wow, that sounds hard to do, it may be, but here's a practical pastoral sidebar that may help you. Turn with me really quickly to First Thessalonians Chapter 3. With this, I'll leave this first point alone. First Thessalonians Chapter 3. And just a practical suggestion for you. Some people say I don't know how you get there. Well, here's how you get there. One practical suggestion. Look at First Thessalonians Chapter 3 verse 10. First Thessalonians 3:10. Paul says, "we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith." We want to supply what's lacking in your faith. Now, Paul was good at that. He's the apostle. He's writing the New Testament. If they had a faith question, they had a question about the truth, he's ready, he's ready to answer questions.

Now, we also know from Second Thessalonians Chapter 3, when it comes to the Thessalonians, if there was a financial need Paul said I'm working overtime, I'm building my



tents, I'm doing whatever I have to do. Because if there's a financial need, you know how I work day and night too, because if someone was in need, I was ready to pony up some bucks also to make sure people's needs were met. So if there was a need, if they were lacking in a financial need too he was generous with his money. But the best thing that he could give is to answer Bible questions, to lay out, you know, eschatological truths. Let's talk about soteriology and how people were saved. Try and reconcile things that people were studying in the Old Testament, what they heard as kids in the synagogue, and how to reconcile that with the ministry of Christ. I mean, that was the best thing that he could do.

Now, why was he so anxious to get there and see them face to face and supply whatever was needed? Why was he so earnest about that? Well, I think it's because of First Thessalonians Chapter 3 verses 9 and 10. He was praying earnestly day and night. Verse 9, "What thanksgiving can we return to God for you?" Well, that's called prayer. He's praying and thanking God for them. "For all the joy that we feel for your sake before God, as we pray most earnestly." If you don't pray for your church, I doubt that you will want to supply the needs of your church. I doubt if you pray for all those people in your small group when someone in your small group says, yeah, I just lost my job, right? I doubt there's going to be the kind of response of saying, that's my sister in Christ. That's my brother in Christ, right? I am my brother's keeper. There's not going to be a lot of that to say, well, I want to make sure I can supply whatever's lacking. There's not going to be that automatic, mature response to give if you haven't been praying for them.

How is your prayer life and do you pray specifically? Do you thank God for your church? Do you thank God for the people with whom you interact in your church? You should pray for them. You should pray for your neighbors in your cul-de-sac. You should pray for your coworkers. And when you pray, I'm just telling you, this starts to come and surface in your life and you're going to want to meet needs not only to stay the extra hour to answer questions about the Bible, but also to be able to say, hey, if you need something, I'm ready to open my wallet or my purse to make that happen as well. Maturity stays alert to others' needs. Maturity sees our identity as service. Greatness is about meeting needs and seeing myself that way. And definitely the idea of accepting responsibility is the foundation of it all.

All right, back to our passage. Second Corinthians Chapter 9. Let's look at the very bottom of verse 2 after talking about their readiness and he's boasting about all that Paul says, "And your zeal has stirred up most of them." So all those churches, Berea, Thessalonica, Philippi, those churches up in northern Greece, they had been motivated to give, even though they had a lot less money than Corinth, because of Paul boasting about them. What was he boasting about? That they're zealous to give. Verse 3. Right? Boasting about them, that they were so ready and eager. Verse 4, if you didn't give now, man, I'd be humiliated, and so would you, because he was there touting their reputation as givers. We know you're givers. You're giving, you're generous givers. And you can see how that might motivate people, particularly because the Corinthians were known as a pretty wealthy place. And because of that their reputation preceded them because Paul kept saying they are faithful givers, they're good givers, they're consistent givers, they're reliable givers. And that was the reputation that preceded the Corinthians.



That, by the way, is what happens with mature givers. They build a track record. Number two, "Be Mature and Establish a Reputation of Dependable Generosity." That's what you should do. Establish a reputation of dependable generosity. Not so you can beat your chest and tell everybody how great you are but because that's what it means to be consistent as a Christian who gives. You give and what happens? You keep giving and you get to be known just as the Corinthians were as people who are ready and eager to give. And you say that's okay. It's okay for people to look at my life and to be motivated to follow that example. Paul says hey Corinthians, you're an example to other people. You know what today's church thinks about that? Don't want that. Don't want that. Don't look at me. I'm just one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread. Right? Have you ever heard that one? Don't look at me. Don't look at me. Don't look at me. Don't look too closely. You are going to see how terrible I am as a Christian. Do you understand there's a big, big, glaring error in thinking that way? Not only because it's unbiblical, which I'll show you in a minute, but it also gives us cover for not being generous, for not being loving, for not being obedient, for not being whatever it is that we're supposed to be because we're telling people, don't look at us. And it sounds so pious. Just look at Christ, look at Christ, look at Christ, look at Christ.

What would Christ have Christians do? Well, in First Corinthians Chapter 11 verse 1 Paul says why don't you follow me as I follow Christ? Philipians Chapter 3, why don't you note the things you've seen in me and follow people too who you've seen the pattern in my life? Follow them. Do what they're doing. Paul has no problem saying look at people who do the things that are in the Scriptures and follow their example. Speaking of words that have slid over from Greek, the word "mimic" is the oft-repeated word in the New Testament, "Mimētēs" that is used constantly. Take a good Christian example and mimic it. It's all over the New Testament. Hebrews, your leaders, Hebrews 13, mimic their example. Do what they do, right? Look at the outcome of their faith. Follow their example. Paul says it repeatedly. First Corinthians Chapter 4, I urge you, be a mimic of me. Be an imitator of me. Philipians 4, "What you've learned and received and heard and seen in me -- practice these things." First Thessalonians Chapter 1 verse 6, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord." Why? Because I've asked you to follow me because I'm following Christ. You say, yeah, but he's an apostle. Well, First Thessalonians Chapter 2 verse 14, "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea." The whole point is you follow the example of anyone who is doing the right thing.

So I want you to be one of the examples that can be followed, just like the Corinthians were set up by the Apostle Paul. He's boasting about the Corinthians doing something godly, doing something virtuous. What was it? They're ready to give when there's a need and God has enabled them. They were wealthy in the marketplace. They had better incomes than the people in Philippi had. And he was saying, yeah, look at how God has blessed them and they give. And I just want to tell you I'm so proud of these Corinthians. They're givers. And they're going to give. And now he's saying I have to send Timothy and these brothers and make sure they give because I'd be so embarrassed if they didn't. Is there a little doubt there? I mean he starts with verse 1, "It's superfluous for me to write," this, but then he writes it. So I don't know. There's a little hedging of his bets here. I mean, I hate to read too much humanity into



his words but he is saying the thing he says he doesn't need to say. But the point here is he just wants to make sure you live up to your reputation. I want you to have a reputation of being a giver, and I want you to be able to say, it's okay if people see it.

You know, it started with Jesus, by the way. Matthew Chapter 5 verse 16. I know you've heard this verse, but I want you to hear exactly what it means, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works." Let's just think about that. I know the Pharisees used to do good works so that they might be seen by men. They did it for that reason. Here Jesus says don't be afraid of people using you as an example. Don't be afraid of people seeing you and holding you up as an example. But that's not the problem. Matthew 6:2 will show you the problem of the Pharisees, right? If they were going to give they'd blow a trumpet to make sure everyone sees it. That's different than you building a reputation of dependable generosity. Because when you do give to someone in your small group, I don't want you to bring a tape recorder. A tape recorder? What am I living in, the 80s? (audience laughing) I don't want you to pull your iPhone out and play something. This will play ten years from now on the radio or something. But what? An iPhone, an mp3, what is that? Anyway. Sorry. However you play music in the future. I don't want you to play music, you know, hey, look at me, I'm a generous person. But when you give, it's going to be known, it's going to be known, and you're going to meet a need in your small group and that's okay. Immaturity says don't look at me, because usually that's cover for I'm not doing anything, right? Real Christians say it's okay, it's okay. Let my light shine before men so they can see your good works. It's okay.

I want you to build a reputation for being a generous person. That's a good thing. I don't want you to be a Pharisee, I get it, but I just logged 15 different passages in the New Testament. James 5:10. First Peter 5:3. Hebrews 6:12. Titus Chapter 2 verse 7. Matter of fact, let's turn to that one. That one's so good. Titus Chapter 2 verse 7. And as you get to that passage, scroll up or glance up to verse 16, the last verse of Chapter 1. There are people and you know this, who "profess to know God, but they deny him by their works," by their deeds. Right? Well, what about people like that? "They're detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." Why? Because they just talk the talk, but they don't walk the walk, just to use that phrase. Do you see that in Titus 1:16? "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works."

Now what does he tell Titus to do? Verse 7 Chapter 2. "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity and sound speech that cannot be condemned." When you say stuff teach the truth of God's Word. God says that Christ is our example to have this mindset that Christ had, which is you put other people's interests before your own. You see them as more significant than yourself. If there's a need, you meet it. You love, not in word, not in talk. You do it in deed and in truth. You love people tangibly. And that's how you teach and that's how you act. You're a "model of good works." Why? "So that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us."

Bondservants at work. If you think only about slavery in the Greco-Roman world in the first century as American slavery you've missed the point. Were there people in the fields in the first century? Sure there were, but there are also lawyers and dentists and all kinds of



professionals and so you can think of this as a very broad category. Hey, "bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative," and look at this in verse 10, this is a money word, "not pilfering, but showing all good faith." Now that comes on the heels of pilfering. So you're integrous with money, you have a fiduciary trust and you're good in that, "so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior." Why? Because we care about the Savior being the Savior to more and more people. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." If you don't think we have to make up for the guy with the fish on his truck who rips off your neighbor, do you know what I'm saying? Your neighbors, your non-Christian, you know, coworkers they have a story, don't they, about some Christian that says some hypocritical Christian? We're going to have to work overtime.

As I said last week, talking about how we value people over money, we're going to have to show that we're not in it for the money, we're not pilfering, we're showing good faith. We're recognizing that, as we see in the story of the unrighteous steward, we know our money is going to fail. We can't take it with us. We're generous. We build a reputation of dependable generosity that we're able to have this reputation that adorns the gospel. We're going to have to double time that because there are a lot of people who have a story about some Christian who ripped them off or some Christians who are in it for the money. Right? The televangelists or whatever. Right? The plumber who double-charged them or whatever. But he had the ichthus on his truck. Right? I'm just telling you, you and I have to do double time because we care about their souls and we care about the next life. The next verse, verse 13, "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." And it ends in verse 14, "who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works," which includes generosity among other things. Establish a reputation for dependable generosity. Immaturity just talks. They do love in words and in talk. We need to be about deeds and that needs to be so consistent that everyone can see it and they know it.

This is uncomfortable, and I hate to say it, but if you're going in for surgery this week or you had a slab leak last week or whatever, you have some terrible thing that's happening, a miscarriage or some bad things happened and people at church have been told about it. And so you're in the lobby after the service and people come up to you and they care. They have that caring look on their face and you know who they are. You have four or five people who talk to you. And they all say the same thing at the end of the conversation, as they sit there with that empathetic look on their face and they care, and then they say this. Let me know if you need anything. I'll bet all of us without even thinking hard about it shuffle those people into two categories. Do we not? The two categories are people who we think are just saying the nice thing to say. They're just saying the Christian thing. They are just saying a platitude. I just doubt they mean that.

But then there's the person, and I'd hate to think, but maybe it's one in four, I don't know, maybe it's two in five. Who knows? That you think to yourself I think that person is the person who really means it. And if I'm stuck or if there's a need or there's an issue, I think I could call



that person. And I really think they would be happy to do what I need. I think they would be able to do whatever and willing to do whatever because their reputation precedes them that they are generous people. Maybe with their time, maybe with their money, maybe it's a meal, maybe it's a whatever. But they're the kind of people who go the extra mile, they stay the extra hour and they spend the extra dollar. I just want you to have that reputation. I want you to be the one in four, the two in five, or I'd like this church to be filled with five in five. That every person who says to you, call me if you need anything. That every person can be trusted. That maybe like the book of Acts Chapter 2 and the book of Acts Chapter 4 that everyone was so sincere, maybe not to the last person, because we meet Ananias and Sapphira in Chapter 5, but maybe almost everyone in the congregation is so good and sincere at that, that Luke's commentary on it all is and there wasn't a single need in the whole congregation, right? "There wasn't a needy person among them." Every need was fully met.

I want you to establish a reputation of dependable generosity, it guards our credibility, it guards the message, it guards our reputation as a corporate entity. It highlights your personal integrity and it sets the pace. It's catalytic. It is, as it says at the bottom of verse 2. It stirs up people to love and good deeds. It catches fire. This church is more and more generous the more you are generous.

Back to our passage. One more verse real quickly. Second Corinthians Chapter 9 verse 5. Very simple. "I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead of you and arrange in advance for the gift you've promised." To arrange in advance for the gift you promised. To "arrange in advance for the gift you promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction." Because, you know, when the Apostle Paul rolls into town, I mean, he doesn't have some entourage with him and all that, but still it's the Apostle Paul, and he shows up, of course, I think a lot of onlookers are going to say, of course you reach for your wallet when Paul is here. So maybe if it's already collected and ready it'll be clear that it's willing because you had already put it in the sack, you already put it in the bag, it's already set aside and ready because it was collected in advance. You arranged it all in advance. You planned this financial gift in advance. And your reputation, you delivered on it because you planned in advance.

Now, I understand this is episodic. I get it. It's the famine relief and it's not every day. But here's what I want to do with this simple observation and it has to happen willingly. I'll put that adverb in front of it. But that's what maturity does. Number three, "Be Mature and Willingly Budget," because that's what planning is. Financial planning is budgeting. Willingly budget so that you're ready to give. You're ready to give. Now, there's nothing better than being ready to be generous. And the only way you'll be ready to be generous is to budget. And you're going to say, no, I need a better job to be ready to give. I need a better job Pastor Mike. Then I'll be ready to give. Not true. Not true. You need a better budget not a better job. May God give you a better job. We'll talk about that in the rest of Second Corinthians Chapter 9. But let's start with a better budget because it starts there.

And I will say this from experience, and I know this because I know people and some really generous givers have very small incomes, but they are pretty masterful with their budgets.



They are content, they give joyfully, they give willingly, and they budget in advance. They budget to be generous. And they don't walk out of Costco with kayaks, let's just put it that way. They're careful with how they spend. They make a decision, here's what their budgeting is, to live with less. They gladly live with less so that they can give more. And I know them in this church. Faces are scanning through my mind right now. And God meets all their needs and they're fine and they're happy. But it's funny how they're always ready to give because they've budgeted to give. That's how it all starts.

Back to my premarital counseling office. Think about it. I said the first thing we do is budgeting. In that counseling meeting I want to look right in the eyes of that young man about to marry this gal. And I want to make the clear appeal that when you were driving around as a single man in your little Toyota Corolla or whatever, you knew in your mind, you knew in your mind that if you drive around enough your tires are going to go bald and you're going to need new tires. And you knew those brake pads were going to get thin and you knew all of that. You knew it. And I guess you would have been smart to budget a little bit for that. But I just want to tell you now that you're going to marry that gal. That girl sitting next to you, you're going to marry her, right? I just want you to feel the responsibility. And I'd love for you to build the reputation so that at the end of your marriage or on your 50-year anniversary, she looks at you and says, oh, this husband of mine, he's met every need of mine. I would like that too. But it's all going to start here today because you have to budget, right? You have to budget to meet her needs, and you have to do that ahead of time before they're ever going to happen. Because I don't want you to think the same way about her tires when it starts to rain, or her brake pads the way you thought about yours. Because I think you love her. I want you to love her more than you love yourself.

And even your roommates. Right? You might toss a couple dollars in his guitar case, you know, when he needs some tires and all your roommates pitched in. That's a very godly, virtuous thing to do. But your wife, you don't want her driving around on those tires and you should feel that weight of responsibility. And it starts by you budgeting. That means you're going to live on less. You're not going to buy those AirPods, and you're not going to buy that stereo, and you're going to live on less so that you're ready the minute you start to see that her car is not going to be safe driving in this rain. And you're going to do something and you're going to feel good about it, aren't you? Because you lived on less but now you get to give and meet the need of this person you love because she's your wife, right? That's good stuff. And that's the reality of taking responsibility for a family. And you know what? It's all we're doing in our church life. We're taking responsibility not just for our family, our church family, but even our broader church family and even our neighbors, our lost non-Christian coworkers and saying I do want to take even responsibility there when I can. The mature plan to be generous. That's all I'm trying to say.

The word planning, that is the concept of budgeting when it's in the context of finances. Jot this one down. Proverbs Chapter 21 verse 5. This is a financial context and listen to it. "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty." Listen to it. The plans of the diligent lead to abundance, the plans of the diligent. What does that mean? The financial plans, the budgeting of the diligent leads to abundance.



Right? That's the thing. If you don't budget there's a problem because you will be an impulsive buyer. But you have to be a disciplined budgeter so that you will not be the hasty one. The hasty one doesn't do what Jesus gave in the illustration in Luke Chapter 14. And that is you don't start building the tower unless you first calculate the cost to see if you have enough to buy those two patio heaters, right? You don't do that. You don't start building the towers unless you've calculated the cost to see if you have enough to finish. You have to be able to budget.

And I'll tell you what I know we're in an epidemic problem in our generation because of credit cards and student loans and all the rest. But you parents and grandparents, you'd better teach your kids and grandkids how to do this right. It starts way before premarital counseling. We'd better learn to live on less so that we can avoid being, as the Bible clearly says in Proverbs 22:7, not becoming "the slave to the lender," right? I'm not saying we can always avoid all loans, but I am telling you this we don't want to do what the average non-Christian is doing out there by indebting ourselves. We will never become generous, never, if all we are is enslaved to the lenders. And we have to teach our own subculture to start early in planning, willingly budgeting so that we are ready to give. And that means we're building a margin in very early. Maturity is different than immaturity. Immaturity doesn't budget to do good. They just hope it all works out at the end of the month. Maturity happily plans to give more and live on less. And there's always savings involved. All you have to do is read the Bible. It's full of it. David saved for the temple construction. Nehemiah saved for the reconstruction. Joseph saved for the famine that was coming. The proverbs are so clear on this. Proverbs Chapter 6, I quoted that last time, the ant, take a look at the ant. God programmed the tiny little pea brain of the ant to make sure the little ants are just planning. Make sure that the ant gets to eat. Mature people are going to budget so they can be generous.

God comes first. Always prioritize giving. We plan with diligence, it's not impulsive. We always create margins for generosity. We provide faithfully for our own household. That's key. We submit our plans to God and we trust him. Mature Christians are not waiting for the perfect opportunity to be generous. They don't wait for a deadline. They don't wait for a moving story. They don't wait for a video with the right music. They're not waiting for a glossy brochure. They accept responsibility for their church. They accept responsibility for their brothers and sisters in Christ. And because they always do that, they build a reputation of generosity and they budget accordingly. Immaturity reacts; maturity prepares. So the question is as we wrap this up, let me put it this way. If generosity were never announced again, if it were never preached on again, if no one reminded you about generosity from this point on, if there was never an emotional appeal in any circle in this church or from this platform, would your life still produce generosity? Would your budget reveal it? Would your habits prove that you're a generous Christian? Because that is what God is after in your life. It's what Paul expected from the Corinthians and it's certainly what we should aspire to.

Let's pray. God, help us in our day and I know it's hard to get it, but I pray that we would seek to be the kind of church that does what we ought to when it comes to the kinds of things that will bring us the ultimate joy of generosity. It is more blessed to give than to receive. There's something about that virtue that as we'll see next week it's not only pleasing to you, it's just so



beneficial to us, for us. So press us just a little bit more. Not with guilt, not with arm-twisting, not to cajole us or to try to needle us, but just give us that desire to grow up, to put away childish things and to be mature as it relates to giving and generosity. We want to be the kinds of people who when we say to someone just let me know if you need anything that everyone believes us. They believe us not just because we said it well but because we proved it. God let us be faithful Christians, generous Christians, ones that please you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.