

The Blessings of Stewardship  
2 Corinthians 9:6-15  
November 18, 2012

*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

Grace, mercy, and peace from the One who blesses our stewardship of his gifts, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus say: *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full* (Jn 10:10 NIV). God's plan for his people covers more than eternal life. It's God's plan for us that we should also live an abundant life on earth. One of the primary causes of God's abundance in our lives is our stewardship of his gifts.

A statement like that can spark some questions. "If we give of ourselves and our resources, should we expect God to reward us?" The answer is yes. Paul states that quite clearly in our Epistle reading. Another question is, "If God rewards us, what kind of rewards should we be looking for?" That is the real substance of today's message. We will consider two types of rewards that God gives to his faithful stewards – temporal and eternal, or earthly and heavenly.

Before we start our discussion on the blessings of stewardship, we need to cover the age old question of how much should you give. To put it in Shakespearian terms, "To tithe or not to tithe - that is the question." When you give to God, whether it is from your time, your talents, or your money, keep this in mind. Your giving should never be a matter of how much of your blessings you should give to God, but how much of God's blessings you should keep for yourself.

There are definite blessings that accompany our proper handling of the resources that God has entrusted to us. These blessings come as tangibles and intangibles.

Our tangible blessings begin with God's supply of our daily needs. The Lord's Prayer

asks: *Give us today our daily bread* (Matt 6:11 NIV). The concept of daily bread applies to more than just food. Daily bread includes all the things it takes to sustain life; food, shelter, clothing, love, companionship, and the like. I pray that all of us here today have access to these blessings. I further hope that our access to these basics of life inspire a daily thanksgiving to God for his abundant provisions.

In today's reading, Paul tells the giving Corinthians: *He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness* (2 Cor 9:10 NIV). In other words, Paul is promising that God will not turn his back on his people's generosity. God will see to it that those who share their gifts and blessings will be given more than they give.

That brings us to the next earthly blessing of enrichment. Paul tells these Christians that their giving would bring enrichment in every area. Listen to the beginning of verse 11: *You will be made rich in every way*. That's quite a promise. However, before someone starts thinking, "God will give me \$10 for every \$1 I give and I'll be rich," let's do some explaining.

God will indeed bless his generous people, but that doesn't mean you'll be the next Bill Gates. God's blessings are always given from his wisdom. Your enrichment may be large or it may be small, but you will be enriched. There is no question about whether or not God's enrichment will happen. It's a done deal.

Some of you might be asking, "How can the pastor make a promise like that?" I can say that because it's not my promise – it's God's promise. Listen to what God promised in today's Old Testament reading: *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."*

(Mal 3:10 NIV).

So, as good Christian stewards, we are going to be generous and God is going to enrich us. However, before any of you dash out to pick out your new SUV and put a deposit on your new house, let's look at why God is enriching your life. We looked at the first part of verse 11, but now let's consider the whole verse: *You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God*.

God is going to enrich your life so you will have more resources so you are able to be even more generous. God enriches his people to increase their giving potential. Maybe that doesn't sound like a good deal to you, but it is.

The things of this world are only temporary. Our real treasure is securely tucked away in the heaven. A cheerful giver praises God for increased blessings because that means he or she is able to give more back to God and to give more to others in need. Increased giving results in increased thanksgiving to God.

The key to confident giving is unwavering trust in the opening verse of our Epistle, *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously* (2 Cor 9:6 NIV). If you give as God wants you to give, he promises not to leave you out in the cold.

Now we shift from the earthly blessings to the heavenly blessings, from the temporal blessings to the eternal blessings.

One of the intangible blessings of giving is an increased level of faith. It takes faith to seriously give as God wants us to give. It demands that we exercise our faith. Faith is like a muscle. The more we exercise it the stronger it becomes. The stronger a Christian's faith, the more confident the Christian's life. When you have enough faith in God to give away the things he has given you, you will find that same faith gives you the strength to face whatever problems come your way.

Furthermore, there is a treasure you are storing up for yourself. I said that God blesses you more so you might bless others more, and that's true. But there is something in this for you. You are building up your treasure trove. Listen to Jesus: *If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven* (Matt 19:21 NIV). Jesus also said, *Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys* (Luke 12:33 NIV).

Another intangible blessing, which has eternal impact, is the praise people give to God when they see your faith in action. Praise for God will spring from your generosity. Paul writes: *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else* (2 Cor 9:12-13 NIV).

I want to draw your attention to one particular part of that reading. There is a similarity between what Paul just said and what James has to say. Paul said: *Men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ.* James makes a similar point from the negative: *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead* (James 2:17 NIV).

The last blessing, the one which every Christian should treasure more than any other, is the blessing which comes from doing what God wants. God tells us to be faithful stewards. God tells us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. God tells us to share what we have been given in order to witness to his love for people. The most valuable blessing of all comes when we hear these words: *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!* (Matt 25:21 NIV).

In the last two weeks, you have been challenged to consider and pray about the

promise you will make to our Father for the coming year. Only you know how richly God has blessed you, and only you can decide how you will handle those blessings. I pray that the Holy Spirit has moved each of us to act in accordance with God's will.