

# Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **II Corinthians 9:6-16** **“Testimony: The Growth Of A Giver”**

November 13, 2016  
(26<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

**II CORINTHIANS 9:6-15**  
**"THE GROWTH OF A GIVER"**

**A' 9:6-15 WHY THE CORINTHIANS NEED TO GIVE GENEROUSLY.**

**1) vv.6-9 The Principle Of Sowing And Reaping, Input And Output.**

Issue = Special Offering For The Jerusalem Church, Famine

6 a The point is this:  
 sow he (she) who sows sparingly  
 reap will also reap sparingly, //Matthew 7:2  
 sow and he (she) who sows bountifully  
 reap will also reap bountifully. Sowing/ Reaping (2x) (Proverb)

7 b Each one of you must do as he (she) has made up his (her) mind,  
 sow not reluctantly or under compulsion,  
 for God loves a cheerful giver. Comment On Sowing

8 b' And God is able to provide you with *every blessing in abundance*, Comment On Reaping  
 reap so that you may *always have enough of everything*  
 and may provide in *abundance* for every good work. Purpose = The Mission

9 a' As it is written, Paul Quotes Scripture To Seal His Case  
 sow 'He scatters abroad, (sowing) The Person Who Knows God Is Generous  
 he gives to the poor; (giving)  
 reap his righteousness endures for ever.'" (a right relation to God) God's Sowing Into Us (Psalm 112:9)  
 The Righteous Man/ Woman

**2) vv.10-15 How Givers, Receivers, And God Share In The Benefits.**

10 a He who supplies seed to the sower Input //v.6  
 and bread for food Outcome Is. 55:10, Hos. 10:12 (LXX)  
 will supply and multiply your resources (lit. "sowing") Input  
 and increase the harvest of your righteousness. Outcome

11 b You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, //v.8  
 c which through us will produce **thanksgiving to God**;

12 c' for the rendering of this (sacred) service The Poor In Jerusalem  
 not only supplies the wants of the saints Practical Outcome  
 but also overflows in many **thanksgivings to God.** Right Relationship: Praise!

13 b' Under the test of this (sacred) service, Challenge To The Church  
 you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, Origin  
 and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others;  
 14 while they long for you and pray for you, Church Unity Increased  
 because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

15 a' Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! Concluding Doxology To God For Christ

**“Testimony: The Growth Of A Giver”**  
**2 Corinthians 9:6-15**  
**Pastor Phil Thrailkill**

**S**omewhere along the way we all develop a philosophy of one of the most powerful things in life, which is money: what it is, how it works, what it means, what it’s good for. And— like most of the deep issues in life— it’s taught and caught in our early years, in our families. We’re imprinted long before we understand what’s going on. We absorb before we reflect. And when our inherited view of money interacts with the Lord and the Bible and the faith and the church, a long sifting process begins, because if we trust Jesus Christ with the whole of who we are, the financial piece of the pie is included. And every Sunday the offering plate comes down the pew as a reminder of the call to give, and so we stand and sing, “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....” All that is deeply good in life is from above, and gratitude is a Yes to that gift.

Now one of the most enjoyable parts of being a pastor is working with couples in pre-marital counseling. My marriage is a joy, and I want to offer them a good foundation using the best materials, one of which is a sophisticated inventory known as *Prepare-Enrich*,<sup>1</sup> and one of its exercises is titled *The Meaning Of Money*. In a homework project on budgeting, they answer sixteen questions and then score themselves to come up with their dominant philosophy of money in one of four categories: money as *status*, money as *security*, money as *enjoyment*, money as *control*.

It’s always a blend of factors, but one usually dominates, and it leads to some very enlightening discussions. They say things like, “I didn’t know how much my family affected my views till I took this test!” And, when I ask them to compare their savings and credit card debt, it’s very revealing. We learn a lot about each other because money has meaning.

Talking about a common philosophy of money early on strengthens a marriage, and when they do a sample budget, giving to God through the church

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<sup>1</sup> [www.prepare-enrich.com](http://www.prepare-enrich.com).

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is a line item. Do they follow it? I don't know, but we have had the talk about God's blessing on a marriage and how giving is one way to keep your hands open to what comes from above. The goal is to walk with God as you build a life. And when I see new cars and hear of vacations and never see them in church, I know troubles are ahead because the One who gave them strength and smarts and each other is neglected in favor of a shiny version of the good life.

One of the disturbing trends I see among young marrieds is a tendency to maintain a *my money* and *your money* division, even to the point of not knowing what each other earns or saves, but marriage is a bodily and corporate merger, as the old vows used to pledge, "and with all my worldly goods I thee endow," which in our day has morphed into "and with all that I am and all that I have I honor you."<sup>2</sup> To share a bed but not a bank account and a budget is a contradiction of sorts, and I suspect it has to do with lack of trust and a sense of maintaining independence, which is a big identity issue in our day, the idea being my own person at all costs. Marital intimacy is sometimes easier than financial transparency, especially if one or both are deceptive about spending or fearful about money. Strong emotions surround the issue of money.

Money as status: *I am what I own*, money as security: *I am as safe as my bank account is full*, money as enjoyment: *I buy my fun*, money as control: *I'm running things*. Those are the four categories in the profile, and to them I add a fifth: *money as a trust, and the person as steward of God's supply, but more on this later*.

Like you, I absorbed a philosophy of money as a child without knowing it, much as I did the Christian faith, my dad's conservative politics and compassionate ways, a keen sense of patriotism and duty, and an unquestioned loyalty to the Clemson Tigers, later questioned by my choice of another school. Since both my parents came out of Depression homes and modest means—though not poverty, money was just not talked about. I remember them once a month taking out the big official-looking check book and writing the bills with a Shaffer fountain pen that made a scratching sound. It was adult behavior, and

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<sup>2</sup> "A Service of Christian Marriage," *U.M. Hymnal*: 868.

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kids should not be caught snooping!

They'd both taken a step up from their parents in terms of education and profession, my mother as an RN and OB supervisor at McLeod's Infirmary before she was twenty, my Father— after a stint in the Navy and at Clemson— on to MUSC and then to Cheraw as a young doc with nurse Betty and me arriving a month later. She took his name and his church in the process, and so we were Methodists in our local Christian franchise.

It was a good living with a place in the community already built in. A house was built after four years of rental. Boys were added in '53, '55, and '58, and a caboose girl in '64. Debt was a curse, so the house was paid off quickly. Both were modest in their tastes and purchases and thought display vulgar. Best to live below your means, in private and in public. Another stewardship lesson.

We never lacked anything, had excellent free medical care, and from the time I can remember we were given a offering for church each Sunday, at first a quarter, later a whole dollar. That was my first training in giving, to which was added a twice yearly offering for Epworth Children's Home since we had two first cousins who spent a decade there after their mother was committed to the State Hospital for what turned out to be a sixty year stint until she died. Something to the church each Sunday, then something bigger for the orphans.

Trick or treat for UNICEF was another learning I vividly remember. I suspect that my recent work with AIDs orphans in Kenya is traceable to those early adventures of standing at an open door in a Casper the Ghost costume on Halloween night and asking for coins to fill my little orange box for hungry children in foreign lands. And when we all came back to the church and dumped our little boxes out on the table together, I thought it was all the money in town! You really can do more together. Another stewardship lesson.

Those were some of my first lessons in stewardship, and I did not yet know what a privileged setting I grew up in. A mom and dad who loved each other, who gave us love and structure and faith and a keen sense of duty and service to the whole community. We were all in the medical business, taking messages, keeping the confidences we heard, and calling the hospital, 537-

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7881, that someone was on the way. It was very good training in the stewardship of life.

Life was good, everyone knew my parents and kept an eye on us. And I once had the privilege of hand stamping 5,000 brochures for the Chesterfield County Heart Fund at our kitchen table when I was about nine, though at the time I thought it a horrible form of child abuse. I would do it in blocks of fifty, and then get up and walk around for a minute. But when I saw the brochures in stores and the barber shop, I took pride in my contribution to the greater cause, even bragging on myself once or twice, after which I received a pointed parental correction, “Service is the price we pay for community. Do your good in secret.” Another stewardship lesson.

Life was all about compassionate service, and a professional education was not primarily about enrichment. This was made memorable to me when I heard in the 80's that other practitioners in town were moving diagnostic tests like mammograms into their offices. And when I asked dad why he didn't as a new income stream, he sat me down for a mini-lecture on strong social institutions.

“I've been chief of staff for decades,” he said, “and to keep this county hospital going for all the people, we need income because we have so many poor. Son, we need a stronger hospital more than I need another dollar. If you gut the institutions, the hospitals and the schools and the churches, you gut the community. It's a privilege to be a doc, and it's about more the money. Someone has to guard the hospital, and that's me! Son, I'd been in town four years when the hospital first opened in 1957, and what a difference it made. We now had a surgeon in town for wrecks and hard deliveries, and I learned a lot by scrubbing in with him. And if these— and then he used an ugly word in the plural— want to suck it dry and bankrupt it to pay for fancy cars and vacation homes, then they can just go to.... ” Whoa! I was not used to such forceful rhetoric and eyes full of tears. I had no idea. I thought it was a smart business move. But he had a larger view. Another stewardship lesson.

I'll never forget that talk when the one I most admired opened to me, perhaps for the first time, one of his long secret struggles. It was a master class

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in the stewardship of life and in the importance of healthy local institutions. When people no longer say *we* but only *me*, something essential is being lost in our common life.

I don't think I ever heard the word *tithe*— meaning giving ten percent to God through the church— till I spent a Saturday night with a Baptist friend and saw his offering envelope which had a place to mark that you brought both your Bible and your tithe to church. I was impressed! We Methodists talked about giving once a year, just before what was then called *the every member canvas*, and only after that if there was a financial crisis, but the biblical teaching on tithes and offerings was little emphasized. The goal was to meet a budget, not give out of gratitude for what God had done for you in Christ. It was a business model more than a stewardship model, and I suspect that many simply took the budget number, divided it by the number of families, and gave their part, which assumed everyone had the same means— which was not so.

There were just so many things in the town to give to and raise money for: the heart fund, the cancer fund, Boy and Girl Scouts, Little League, Lions Club, a new fire engine, Kiwanis projects, the library fund, IPTAY, band boosters, and on and on. Church was one piece of a larger charitable pie, and it got the largest share but hardly a tithe. But I cannot blame my parents for this lack; it was just not taught at our church. Tithing was something Baptists did, like getting saved at a revival and baptism by immersion and going to Training Union and Prayer Meeting on Sunday evening. Making the budget was our goal, and we were nearly always short and rescued at the end of the year by one or two of our more prosperous, prominent members. It's not good for a church to practice such, but it was our way, and I've heard it was once yours as well. Folks, the church is not a club, and your giving is not dues or fees for services rendered. We give because God has given us so much in Jesus Christ, as Paul wrote, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" Another stewardship lesson.

The American work ethic was a part of our life. Money is to be earned. I started at a grocery store at fourteen, then cutting fairways and greens at the golf course, and for several summers after High School worked with a traveling crew doing textile piping and welding all over the Southeast. The deal was that dad paid the college tuition and board; the rest was up to me. Sleeping in run

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down trailer parks and cheap motels in places like Ogechee, Georgia was a new experience and a great education with a bunch of roughnecks who loved picking at the college kid with the doctor daddy. It was a hard living crowd, and the day I was reconverted— July 5, 1972— I rode back from the Milliken plant in Statesboro with a big Lumbee Indian named Tex Oxendine. He used to be a deputy before they fired him, and he kept the blue light for just such occasions. Put it on the dash of his Hemi Chrysler and make great time on the Interstate! I remember shaking when the needle hit a hundred, but with my NASCAR family connections, I did not want to express my imminent fear of death. The big Indian turned to me and grinned, and I had no idea what awaited me when I returned home that day.

That night all alone in St. David's Episcopal Church, I pulled down a kneeler and wept my way back into the center of the faith after all my awkward wanderings. It was the only church in town that was unlocked, and I will not tell you how I knew or what drove me there. The next day the whole world was different, and so was my heart. The freedom of forgiveness is a wonderful thing, and with my revived faith came a spontaneous new form of generosity. I was eager to give to those in need, and sometimes it meant I didn't eat myself for a day or so, but I did not see it as a sacrifice. Jesus was alive and wanted me on his team. I could not believe it! What a revelation! I was to steward my life under his tutelage and guidance, and there was a lot to learn and unlearn.

Then came Lori, three and a half years of courtship with one six month break up early on, then a year shoveling coal in an R.J. Reynolds power plant in Winston Salem while we waited for her to graduate, celebrate our nuptials, and the start of seminary at Emory. In Atlanta, she worked at Red Lobster, then at Grady Hospital. I sold vacuum cleaners, Cutco knives, then served a church as a youth minister. We gave when paid, but not yet a tithe. Tuition and books and living expenses were up to us with the help of a small scholarship from Trenholm Road UMC. And we finished with no debt.

The day I graduated from Wake, my father took me aside for a clear word, "I'm proud of you, Son. I've given you a good childhood and a great education. The rest is up to you, so never ask me for money." Gulp! And I didn't. It was time to *man up*. Lori and I were to face the world together without artificial

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supports and infusions. And we made it just fine. Healthy. Good families and educations. A shared faith and common calling. I call it a running start at life. Another stewardship lesson. The privileged are always called to serve.

It was somewhere during our first appointment to the four churches of the Fairfield Circuit that the issue of tithing came up, probably since I was expected to preach several stewardship sermons in the Fall. And the challenge came as a question of conscience, “How can I ask others to do what I’m not doing?” I studied the Scriptures, read some books, and talked it over with the family accountant who kept our check book– and still does! We couldn’t make the numbers work, but prayed and did it anyway. And to our surprise it all worked out, and we now had a new sense of marital partnership with God. If we were diligent, God has ways of bridging the gaps when they appeared. And we have never stopped since, and in recent years have grown to give beyond the tithe, not to score points with God or you but to try to keep up with the inflow of the Lord’s provision and give expression to our deep gratitude. We have sown and reaped, and we have proved by experience that God is more than faithful. Verse 8 is our testimony as well as Paul’s:

“And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.”

So wherever you are in your giving, aim to move towards a dedicated tenth, and then– when you reach that marker– don’t quit. The benefits of tithing are many, and here are just a few.

- 1) It’s a visible sign of a whole life partnership with God. Our checkbook is a witness to our faith.
  - 2) It makes you manage the remaining ninety percent with thrift and planning. And the ninety percent with God’s blessing goes further than the hundred percent without it. Prosperity starts with giving.
  - 3) It strengthens the local church and gives a good example to others. Nothing is quite so powerful as a testimony of God’s faithfulness.
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- 4) Having God meet your needs after the tithe is a faith builder, so if an unexpected need or crisis arises— as they do, you can go to God in prayer with confidence. Our welfare is in divine hands.
- 5) It makes April 15 a yearly accountability check. For the last decade or so, I go to Lori when I finish the taxes and say, “Do you know how much we gave this year? Can you guess the percentage?” At some point I want us to be giving a double tithe, and at the reading of my will I want the attorney to say, “Lori, the two of you really believed this stuff, didn’t you?” Then I want her to bawl and say, “He was such a good man!”

But I admit that Lori is the more generous. I give out of a keen sense of duty with some gratitude, but Lori sees it as a privilege. And I will never forget the Sunday about two years ago when she showed me up.

If you walk out the office door and take a right, about twenty feet up the walk is a granite marker in the red brick pavement reads, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it,” a quote from Proverbs 22:6 and signed by Betsy Cureton. And that’s the spot where it happened.

It was a first Sunday of the month, and we’d both written and given our tithes, but that was not the problem. As we walked down the hall and out the door she was still writing checks, and when I asked, “What are you doing?” she said, “Giving.”

And when I asked, “Can we afford all this?” she turned, gave a testimony, and spoke to me in the second person, “We both have good jobs. Where’s your faith, Pastor Phil?”

She had me, and I knew my cheapness was on full display. I quickly repented, “You are right, and thank you for being a generous woman, to me and all the world. I’m so proud of you, as it is written of the righteous woman, ‘She scatters abroad, she gives to the poor; her righteousness endures for ever.’”

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I'm a rich man in every way with a full life and many opportunities. I lack time, but not meaning. I grow weary, but not from boredom. My choices are most often between one good thing and another. I serve a very generous God who's just waiting for you to take the risk and find him faithful as we have.

Givers and tithers and kingdom financers are grown over time. And this is the story and testimony of how we've grown into a life partnership with the Living God. I wish I'd started sooner, but I'm happy to be moving in the right direction, and I invite you to join me. It's a great ride. And one day we will see all that God did with our gifts of time and talent and money and service and our prayers and our witness, and we will all stand amazed.

I don't want something from you; I want something for you, and the only way for you to receive it is to give and find that God is more than trustworthy. It really is experimental and experiential. I could live a much more outwardly impressive life if I cut back giving, but how shallow it would be.

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