

The Blessings of Generous Giving
2 Corinthians 8-9
Northwest Community Church, Todd Havekost, 8/2/2020

Introduction

We will be taking a break today from our sermon series on Philippians to focus on "The Blessings of Generous Giving". But on second thought, it isn't really much of a break at all. As Jeff pointed out in Phil. 1:5, the Philippians shared a special connection ("koinonia") with Paul that came into being because they financially supported his ministry planting churches throughout the region.

Paul had 3 models for providing for his financial support, and he flexed between them depending on the situation.

- (1) When he was planting a new church, he and his missionary team often did ministry part time while working jobs to support themselves. In Acts 18 we find Paul at work making tents (18:3).
- (2) He accepted financial support from a local church while he was ministering to them. That was his normal practice, but he chose not to do that at Corinth. He made that decision to differentiate himself from the many other dishonest "preachers" in Corinth who sought to swindle people out of money, and because there was already so much distrust toward Paul, he did not want to give people any excuse for accusing him of ministering there for personal financial gain (1 Cor 9:12).
- (3) He accepted support from Christians elsewhere, but this was much less common. In fact, in the early stages of Paul's ministry, only the Philippian church had that vision to support Paul as he planted and built up churches elsewhere, as we read in Philippians 4.

"And as you Philippians know, at the beginning of my gospel ministry, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in this matter of giving and receiving except you alone" (Phil. 4:15).

Paul wrote letters to many churches that he founded, but he enjoyed this special partnership with the Philippians, which will continue to be apparent as we study through that book. We will never know how much more the church advanced in the first century, how many more churches were planted, and even how many more letters Paul wrote that made their way into the NT to edify the church throughout the centuries, because the Philippians gave generously so that Paul could devote his attention full-time to ministry.

God has greatly blessed Northwest by entrusting us with more than \$2 million dollars from the Land Sale Proceeds. And I am very thankful that our church is following the wonderful example of the Philippians, choosing to invest a significant portion of those funds in ministries outside of Northwest.

If you are familiar with the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians, you know that the Corinthians were "poster children" for falling far short of how God wanted them to live. Examples included divisiveness within the church, filing lawsuits against one another, and getting drunk when they gathered together to observe the Lord's Supper. I find the Corinthian letters so encouraging, because if despite all their failings, God never gave up on calling them back to live out their high calling in Jesus with loving, grace-filled words, He won't give up on me with all my failings either.

That the Corinthians were on the verge of another failing is the occasion for this morning's passage, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, the most extended teaching on giving in all of Scripture. A collection was being taken among Gentiles to help meet the needs of Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were impoverished due to intense persecution (Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4).¹

¹ Persecution of the early church in Jerusalem is a dominant theme of Acts 3-8, culminating in Stephen's martyrdom (7:60) and the scattering of the church (8:4) that helped propel the fulfillment of Acts 1:8. The far-reaching economic impact of this persecution (e.g., expulsion from families, loss of employment) is also woven through the early chapters of Acts and prompted communal sharing (2:44-45; 4:32-37) and the daily serving of food to widows leading to the selection of deacons (6:1-6).

Many churches were taking offerings to help. We will see one set of churches that served as a wonderful example in the beginning verses of this passage. The Corinthians had been talking a good game for many months. But Paul was concerned because they hadn't yet followed through. He was writing because they still had time to avoid collecting a stingy gift that reflected a church characterized by selfish greed (as Paul describes it in 9:5).

2 Corinthians 8:1

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia (8:1).

Paul begins by sharing the wonderful example of the churches of Macedonia (in northern Greece), several of which are well known to us from elsewhere in the New Testament including the Thessalonians, Bereans, and Philipians.

Note how he refers to their giving:

- He does not say "we want you to know about the money that has been given." In fact, you won't find the word "money" anywhere in this entire passage. Paul uses nine other words to refer to the offering, but not "money."
- But instead he says "we want you to know about the grace of God which has been given."

Grace is one of the most prominent characteristics of God, He showers unmerited favor on His creation and on His children through Jesus. Whenever we give freely to others with no strings attached, such as

- Giving bags of food to people in need through the Food Pantry, or
- Helping people learn through English as a Second Language classes

We are following in the footsteps of our God who abounds in grace, and we are providing a tangible manifestation of God's grace to the recipients and before a watching world, "bringing God's grace to life." So, it is no surprise that in this passage about giving the word that appears most frequently is "grace."²

2 Corinthians 8:2-3

What made the Macedonians such compelling role models?

That in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality (8:2).

This is the first time in this passage (but not the last³) Paul multiplies words to communicate intensity, in this case to ensure we comprehend the severity of the situation the Macedonians found themselves in. They were not just facing affliction, but a "severe trial of affliction."⁴ They were not just poor, they were experiencing "deep poverty." Another good translation here would be "rock bottom poverty."⁵

Yet in the midst of this "severe trial of affliction" their joy abounded.⁶ And though that severe trial resulted in "rock bottom poverty", the riches of their generosity overflowed.

For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord (8:3).

² The Greek word for "grace" (charis) appears ten times in this passage: 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19; 9:8, 14, 15, and is translated in our English Bibles in a variety of ways.

³ Also 2 Cor. 9:8.

⁴ "Ordeal" (dokime) and related dokimos are commonly used for trials that put one to the test, e.g., James 1:12.

⁵ Again, as in Jerusalem, it is highly likely that persecution was a major aspect of this affliction and cause of this poverty. Acts 16:19-17:13 chronicles a series of incidents of persecution in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea; see also 1 Thess. 1:6.

⁶ This uniquely Christian response of joy to affliction is a recurring New Testament theme (Rom. 5:3; James 1:2).

They gave beyond what anyone would expect, even beyond what they could afford to give. And they gave "of their own accord", they were motivated from within, arising out of their personal experience of God's grace.

2 Corinthians 8:4-5

Begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints (8:4).

I imagine that Paul was aware of their deep poverty and so he was not planning to even ask the Macedonians to participate in this offering for the church in Jerusalem. But somehow the Macedonians found out that the offering was being collected, and when they did, they "begged" Paul for the "favor" of participating.⁷ "Favor" here is the word usually translated "grace." They considered it an unmerited privilege to be involved in meeting this need.⁸

We may be inclined to think of giving as something we "ought to" do, as a duty or obligation. But something was going on in the hearts and minds of the Macedonians that they considered it a privilege, something they by all means did not want to miss out on.

And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God (8:5).

This intense desire to give was not some isolated behavior, but rather was one expression of their devotion to God that extended to every area of their lives.

There were several factors making the Macedonians wonderful examples of giving that delighted the heart of God.

- Their giving was an expression of "abundant joy"
- It was sacrificial ("rock bottom poverty", "beyond their ability")
- It reflected "overflowing generosity" ("wealth of liberality")
- It was entirely voluntary ("of their own accord", "begging" to give)
- It originated from a heart devoted ("given") to God

The Macedonians were wonderful examples of giving, as Northwest has been with its wonderful legacy of generous giving, seen again in recent months through fully supporting the General Fund despite the many hindrances presented by Covid-19 to worshipping and fellowshiping together in person.

The Macedonians point us to another very important takeaway, which Jesus reinforced by also choosing someone in poverty to be the recipient of His words of commendation, a poor widow who gave sacrificially (Luke 21:1-4).⁹

If you have ever thought:

- Giving is only significant when it is a large amount (however we define "large")
- Or the blessings of giving are only available to those who are "rich" (however we define "rich")
- Or that giving will become relevant for me at some later phase of life (whenever that occurs)

Please allow these commendations from Jesus and Paul to recalibrate that thinking.

Every one of us

- whether we possess small coins or millions of dollars
- whether we receive an allowance or a six-figure income

⁷ It grabs our attention when we see "begging" refer not to something done by the recipients but by the givers!

⁸ There are other familiar words in this verse that also may not be initially apparent from our English translations. "Participate" is the word normally translated "fellowship" (Gk. koinonia). The Macedonians viewed this giving as a means of deepening their connection with their brethren in Jerusalem. And "support" is the word "service" or "ministry", from which we get the word "deacon." Through these gifts they were serving the saints.

⁹ "The most genuine liberality is frequently displayed by those who have the least to give" (Hughes, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 288).

We are all capable of delighting God and experiencing abundant joy through our giving.

And one other note for any who consider themselves beginners or even spectators when it comes to giving. If you attend Northwest, you are part of a church that as already mentioned God has profoundly blessed with \$2M plus of land sale proceeds. If you haven't already, enter into the dialog of how we can bless those outside our church with your own spirit of generosity.

One way you can be personally involved is through Kingdom Investment Initiatives, which will now be accepted through the end of this year. In recent months, folks at Northwest have expressed their hearts of generosity initiating proposals:

- To invite our local community to believe in Jesus and to equip them with training toward financial security
- To disciple children and youth in NW San Antonio, and
- To provide Bibles and food for orphans in Malawi, Africa.

2 Corinthians 8:12-14

In verses 6 through 11 Paul turns to the situation in Corinth, where Titus had begun working with them earlier to arrange for their gift¹⁰ (v. 6). The Corinthians had expressed good intentions over the past year (v. 10), now Paul encourages them to translate those intentions into action ("finish doing it", v. 11).

For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have (8:12).

If you want to give, it is a good thing. And it is a personal thing, based on what you have, not based on what you don't have, or what someone else has. This personal nature of giving will be emphasized again later.

For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality --- at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality (8:13-14).

In the current situation, the Corinthians had an "abundance" while the believers in Jerusalem had "need", so it was appropriate for the Corinthians to give to help "supply" that need. But it is conceivable that in the future circumstances could change and the roles of giver and receiver could be reversed. The principle is "equality", namely equal relief from burdensome poverty¹¹, as those having abundance assist those in need.

To reinforce this principle, in verse 15 Paul draws on an Old Testament precedent when God introduced manna (Exodus 16).¹²

- Every day God provided manna like dew in the morning and the Jews gathered it.
- "Some gathered much and some little" (Ex. 16:17b).
- Yet at the end of the day, as Paul quotes here "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack" (Ex. 16:18b), despite the fact they gathered differing amounts, miraculously everyone's needs were met.

¹⁰ Literally "this grace."

¹¹ "The end to be accomplished by giving is relieving the necessities of the poor. The equality ... intended is not an equality as to the amount of property, but equal relief from the burden of want" (Hodge, An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 205).

¹² This miraculous provision of manna began one month after God's ultimate deliverance from Pharaoh at the Red Sea in Ex. 14, and continued on a daily basis (except on the Sabbath) uninterrupted for 40 years until their wilderness wanderings were complete and they began eating the produce of the Promised Land (Josh. 5:12).

The logistics of God's rollout of the provision of manna contain an object lesson of His desire that the needs of all His children be met. In Exodus this was achieved through God's miraculous "equalizing." In the church the means is to be those with "abundance" giving to those in "need."¹³

"Abundance" and "need" are relative terms, and how we self-identify on those is likely to depend on the context in which we see ourselves. Unless we have had direct exposure to conditions in developing countries, our perspective may be unknowingly distorted by the affluence of the culture in which we live and the effectiveness of the advertising to which we have been exposed.¹⁴

In many areas of the world today poverty is widespread due to numerous factors. And where it is not prevalent geographically, for Christians it often results from persecution, as was the case for the church in Jerusalem in our passage. Over half of the world's population lives in countries where persecution occurs today, with the result that many Christians face great need due to being physically attacked or forced out of their homes, jobs, or families.

We commonly associate the freedom from persecution we currently enjoy with being free to gather for worship as we please, which is indeed a blessing. But another outcome of not being run out of our houses and jobs by persecution is the ability to preserve and potentially accumulate assets.

The combination of these two factors together

- Living in a society with an extraordinary standard of living relative to the world, and
- Freedom from persecution that inhibits the preservation of wealth

Places Christians in America today in a historically rare situation from the perspective of world and church history.

Does God have a strategic purpose for placing us in this remarkable position? Could it be that He desires to work powerfully through our "abundance" to fund an unprecedented amount of kingdom ministry worldwide meeting great "need" here and especially around the world?¹⁵ Food for thought.¹⁶

2 Corinthians 9:6

From verse 16 through the first 5 verses of the next chapter, Paul returns to the details of collecting the gift in Corinth.

- Paul was sending Titus and two other brothers as a precaution to ensure the Corinthians could have complete confidence that the gift would be handled with integrity (8:16-24).
- And he was sending the brothers in advance to help the Corinthians be prepared as far as completing the collection of their gift (9:1-5).

¹³ "The lesson therefore taught in Exodus and by Paul is that among the people of God the superabundance of one should be employed in relieving the necessities of others" (Hodge, p. 206).

¹⁴ Reports from people who have participated in Northwest Missions trips over the years to places like Mexico, Uruguay, Kenya, Chile and the Philippines have described how those experiences informed their perspectives of "abundance" and "need".

¹⁵ "Suppose God wanted to reach the world for Christ and help an unprecedented number of suffering people. What might you expect Him to put in the hands of His delivery people? Unprecedented wealth to meet all those needs and reach all those people? Well, He's done it, hasn't He? The question is, what are we doing with it?" Alcorn continues to list six reasons to live more simply and give more generously.

- Because heaven is our home
- Because it frees up and shifts our center of gravity
- Because we are God's pipeline
- Because of the reward we will receive in heaven and the joy it will bring us
- Because of the dire spiritual need of the world
- Because of the world's dire physical needs (Alcorn, Money, Possessions & Eternity, pp. 294-6).

¹⁶ As in Esther's day (the subject of our children's Sunday School lesson this morning), I personally believe this is one of those "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14) opportunities that is not likely to last indefinitely.

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (9:6).

I spent my early years on a farm, and my first job involved walking through corn fields, which enabled me to witness first-hand some essential truths about sowing and reaping. Let me mention three.

1. We reap more than we sow. Each kernel of corn planted in the ground produces a corn stalk with one or more ears of corn (depending on the variety). And each ear of corn contains several hundred kernels.
2. We reap in proportion to what we sow. The farmer wants to fully plant all the land he owns so he will maximize his harvest. He doesn't view seed corn as an expense to be minimized but as an investment that will multiply itself several hundred-fold. He wants to sow as much as he can so he will reap as much as possible.
3. We reap in a different season than we sow. The farmers had planted those cornfields months before I walked through them, and the harvest was yet future.

Verse 6 utilizes these universally known laws of the harvest to teach us that when we give generously toward God's work, we are sowing toward a greatly multiplied future harvest of eternal reward. And to be clear, this "bountiful reaping" does not mean earthly riches¹⁷. It only takes a glance at the lives of Jesus and the apostles in the NT to make that apparent. Rather it refers to richness of spirit in this life and richness of reward in the life to come, as will be developed in the verses that follow.

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (9:7).

The first phrase of verse 7 consists of only 5 words in the Greek, literally:

1. "each one"
2. "just as"
3. decide - includes idea of beforehand or in advance, perhaps "pre-determine"
4. the heart (words 4 & 5)

English translations have to supply some words to make that a readable sentence. Between "each one" and "just as" NASB inserts "must do." When I read "must", I think of being required or forced to do something, which is clearly the opposite of the idea here, since the very next phrase says "not under compulsion." So instead I suggest "let each one do just as he has decided in his heart."

That phrase "each one" reflects the uniqueness of every believer that is proclaimed over and over in the New Testament.

- "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another ..." (1 Peter 4:10)
- "One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5).¹⁸

Giving is yet another aspect of the Christian life in which that freedom and individuality is expressed.

Continuing to the rest of the verse, God is delighted when we choose our level of giving

- not "grudgingly", "it pains me to give this amount"
- not "under compulsion", "not as something you feel forced to do" (2 Cor. 9:5d, Net Bible)
- but freely and cheerfully, with great joy.

¹⁷ Contrary to teachings advanced under the heading of "prosperity theology."

¹⁸ "Each one" also appears repeatedly in the familiar 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4 passages that utilize the image of the body and its members to emphasize the essential contribution of every believer to the proper functioning of the church.

I checked with my Dad to see if in all his years in and around farming communities he was ever aware of a situation when the night before it was time to plant, the farmer was so distraught about how many seeds he was “giving up” and placing into the soil, that his family and neighbors had to get together and have an intervention to pry the farmer's fingers from the seed corn he would be planting the next day. That is never the case, farmers are eager for the day to come when the conditions are right to plant because they are focused on the several hundred-fold crop they anticipate harvesting in the coming months.

Recognizing that my giving represents sowing with a view to a bountiful harvest paves the way to being a “cheerful giver” who experiences great blessing in that giving.

2 Corinthians 9:8-9

We may think of giving simply in terms of arithmetic, an expense to be subtracted from an account balance, and miss the connection with dependence on the power of God. But verse 8 tells a very different story. The “vanilla” version of the verse is “God will help you so you will have adequate resources to do good works.” But that doesn't come close to doing the verse justice. Paul stacks up superlatives (words like “all” and “every”), seven in all, to ensure we understand that God is “super-involved” in multiplying the ministry of generous givers.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed (9:8).

- [God does what]: He makes ALL grace ABOUND
- [By what means]: Ensuring we ALWAYS have ALL we need in EVERYTHING
- [For what purpose]: So that we have an ABUNDANCE for EVERY good deed

This point will be repeated in subsequent verses, that God's purpose in supplying resources to the giver is not to raise our standard of living but to increase our capacity for giving.

As it is written, “He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever” (9:9).

This is a quote from Psalm 112, which speaks about the righteous man, with particular emphasis on the attribute of generosity. Typically, in the Psalms (as in the immediately preceding Psalm 111) “his righteousness endures forever” is a statement made about God. But in Psalm 112 it is applied twice to the generous giver. The outcome of his or her generosity will be ministry that has an eternal impact in the lives of its recipients.

2 Corinthians 9:10

Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness (9:10).

The same God who supplies the resources to meet our basic needs also supplies and multiplies our “seed for sowing”, i.e., our resources for giving. Verse 6 encouraged us to sow generously, verses 8-11 encourage us to ask God to increase our capacity to sow generously. Just as we pray for countless other aspects of our lives, here we are encouraged to pray for God to work mightily to increase our personal capacity to give.

God's answers to that prayer can take a myriad of forms.

- He may provide us with skills and opportunity to be hired for jobs that pay more than our basic needs.
- He may bring to our attention opportunities to purchase needed items or services at reduced costs.
- He may extend the useful life of items we own so that we can postpone replacing them, or give us the ability to repair them ourselves.

- He may help us invest our long-term savings wisely, increasing our capacity for giving in the future.
- He may deliver us from the “blindness” of our culture and enable us to establish a standard of living informed by a world-wide perspective.

You may think of many other ways God has answered that prayer in your life. My list of God’s answers to this prayer throughout my life now extends to four single-spaced pages.

Again, verse 10 says that God supplies and multiplies our seed "for sowing". He increases our resources, not so that we will raise our standard of living, but to increase our capacity for giving.

Not only is God involved in the "giving" side of things ("supply and multiply"), He also unleashes His power through what He does with the gift after it is given as He "increases the harvest of your righteousness". A familiar example of this is in John 6, when Jesus multiplied a boy's gift of five loaves and two fish so that it fed thousands of people. We have seen many instances of this in our corporate life at Northwest, including exceptionally low purchase prices for this facility and the blessing and impact of the Land Sale Proceeds.

2 Corinthians 9:11

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion ... (9:11a, NIV).

Verse 11 repeats the theme, God's purpose in prospering us financially is not to raise our standard of living, but to increase our capacity for giving. In the 1730's, John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, embraced this call to be a free-flowing pipeline of funds to God's work.

- Year 1: Income €30 [pounds] - living expenses €28 = giving \$2
- Year 2: Income €60 - living expenses €28 = giving €32
- Year 3: Income €90 - living expenses €28 = giving €62

Later in his life when he was receiving significant royalties from his books, Wesley was earning more than \$1 million per year in today’s dollars. But he continued to maintain this same standard of living, so that he was living on a tiny portion of his income and giving the rest away.¹⁹

Like any good preacher, John Wesley boiled his practical teaching on giving down to 3 points.

1. Gain all you can - work hard to earn what you can
2. Save all you can - be disciplined in your spending, be frugal
3. Give all you can - meet your own and your family's basic needs and give everything else away

As you might imagine, Wesley's lifestyle was so counter-cultural that he drew the scrutiny of the "property tax" police in England. In 1776, the English tax commissioners (who were not having a particularly good year anyway) inspected his return and sent Wesley a letter. "[We] cannot doubt but you have [silver] plate for which you have hitherto neglected to make an entry." They were saying a man with his income certainly must have a sizable amount of silver in his house and were accusing him of failing to pay property [excise] tax on it. Wesley replied "I have two silver spoons at London and two at Bristol. This is all the plate I have at present, and I shall not buy any more while so many 'round me want bread."

Much teaching on giving advocates determining the amount to give based on a percentage of income, and often a fixed percentage at that. I suggest that a model of determining what you need to live on, and experiencing the blessing of funneling any funds that come in above that into investments in God's kingdom, is very much in the spirit of what we find in 2 Corinthians 9.

¹⁹ I am indebted to Randy Alcorn for Wesley’s example ([Money, Possessions & Eternity](#), pp. 298-9).

Matthew 6:19-20

Speaking of "investing in God's kingdom", Jesus used "investing" as a second word picture for giving in Matthew 6. Elaborating on His teaching earlier in that chapter that God rewards the one who gives (and prays and fasts) motivated by a desire to please Him, not to impress people, Jesus says beginning in verse 19 ...

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal" (Matt. 6:19-20).

Note that Jesus doesn't tell us NOT to store up treasures. On the contrary, he commands us to. He says, "Stop storing them up in the wrong place, and start storing them up in the right place."²⁰

Why not make the accumulation of earthly possessions a primary pursuit of our lives? Because all kinds of things happen to take things away from us or cause them to lose their value.

In contrast to earthly treasures, which will certainly be lost, either by "moth, rust and thieves" while we live or will be left behind when we die, Jesus instructs us to "store up treasures in heaven", where they are safe (their value can't be lost or stolen) and produce an indestructible return (in "God's Eternal Bank").²¹

The course of my life was forever changed when as a young adult I first read these words written by Randy Alcorn:

- You can't take it with you
- But you can send it on ahead.

Rather than pursuing the accumulation of material possessions during this relatively brief life on earth, possessions destined to lose value while we live, and that we cannot take with us when we die, God invites us to pursue investments in His kingdom work. This results in eternal impact in people's lives today, and treasure in heaven for all eternity we can never lose. You can't take it with you, but God gives us the amazing opportunity to send it on ahead.

Steward

In addition to (1) sowing and reaping and (2) investing, Jesus (and Paul) often used a third word picture for the Christian life that also has direct application to giving, that of a steward.²² That was a very familiar role to readers in Jesus' time but not as much today, so it may help to have a little background.

Sometimes our English Bibles translate this as "manager", but the position had a much broader scope of responsibilities than we typically assign to that word. A steward had far-reaching if not complete authority to manage the master's assets in the master's absence.

His commission was to manage those assets in the master's best interest, until the master returned, at which time the master would evaluate how well the steward fulfilled his commission. In those days remote communication was extremely limited, so the steward had complete autonomy until the master returned. Perhaps having full "power of attorney" for someone completely out of contact for an extended period of time might be our best approximation.

²⁰ Alcorn, p. 94.

²¹ As he describes the outcome of generous giving in 1 Timothy, Paul also uses this picture of "storing up treasure" (6:19).

²² E.g., Jesus in parables of talents (Matt. 25:14ff) and minas (Luke 19:11ff); Paul in 1 Cor. 4:1-5.

All the master's assets were at the disposal of the steward, he had the authority to use them in any way he saw fit.

- A faithful steward would use the master's assets in the master's best interests.
- An unfaithful steward used those same assets for his own interests.

It was completely up to the steward for the entire time the master was away.

But make no mistake about it, one day without advance notice the master would return. Then there would be an accounting, an evaluation of how faithful the steward was, i.e., the extent to which he carried out the master's wishes.

In the same way, Jesus has entrusted each of His children with a vast array of resources: spiritual gifts, abilities, passions, family, friends, time, energy, as well as finances, just to name a few. In every area of life, we are called to faithfully steward what God has given us, to make it all available for Him to unleash the "surpassing greatness of His power" working in and through ordinary people like us. We have this opportunity to be faithful (or not) until that day when our tenure as a steward ends (at death or Jesus' return), after which time He will evaluate how faithfully we used His assets for His interests.²³

The words from today's song capture perfectly the perspective of the faithful steward.

- I'm waiting my whole life for that day
- I will live my life to hear You say
- Well done, well done²⁴

Conclusion

At the church Brenda and I were attending when we first met, the month of January was set aside every year for sermons on giving. But instead of preaching on passages like 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 that highlight the blessings of generous giving, that church emphasized a law-based, fixed percentage, guilt-motivated approach. I think for most attenders this annual routine was something they endured with gritted teeth, akin to going to the dentist.

In contrast, what we saw this morning is the blessedness of "sowing" and "investing" and serving as "stewards" in God's kingdom work, which is surely one of the great joys and blessings of my life. Using the language of 2 Cor. 9:7, "let each one do just as he has decided in his heart" in taking our own personal next step into the blessedness of the cheerful, generous giving that God has in store for us.

²³ At the Judgment Seat of Christ, 2 Cor. 5:9-10.

²⁴ Chorus from "Well Done", The Afters.