

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in a row, that I've had to do something that makes me feel somewhat uncomfortable. No, I didn't have to nurse a baby or give someone a hug ... What it is that makes me uncomfortable, is when I have to teach on giving.

I said it a couple of weeks ago: "I'm really reluctant to give a message on giving/tithing, because I never want to be seen as 'that preacher', who's always after your money..."

But I **do** want to be a preacher who teaches you **everything** that's in God's word. And that's why we work our way through whole books of the Bible, and we leave nothing out.

And for 2 whole chapters (and so it's the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in a row now), our Bible reading has been talking about Giving, and so therefore, that's what today's message is about...

I've given today's message the title, "Giving in Faith". And that might seem like a strange title, because the word "faith" doesn't appear anywhere in the whole of Chapter 9.

But the way that Chapter 9 describes how God provides **through** the giver, and **for** the giver, is all about trusting in God – And what do we call that? FAITH.

So, Paul's been boasting about this Corinthian church – he's been boasting about how generous they are – and he's told the Macedonians all about them,,, but now he's feeling just a little bit anxious – he's worried that he's going to be left looking a bit silly,,, because although the Corinthians had been very keen to **commit** to giving (to support the needy

Christians in Jerusalem), they actually hadn't gone through with their commitment...

And so he's urging them, to get the offering together, so he doesn't have to chase them for it, when he gets there... And we covered that pretty well over the last 2 weeks, so we don't need to spend any more time on it now. Let's pick it up from V6.

I really connect with what Paul's saying here, because he's using an agricultural example... I 'get' farming stuff, and some of you understand farming stuff too... But for those who don't, I'll explain it.

And I'd better begin by defining "sowing" "S-O-W-i-n-g". What does it mean to sow? It's not the same as "S-E-W"... I was surprised (even when I was an instructor at the Dalby Ag College (back in the day), we had students training to be farmers, and they didn't know that "sowing" was another word for planting. Alright: It's got nothing to do with a needle and thread – sewing is planting. And I don't really know why, but usually "sowing" is about planting wheat / barley, and not very often used for planting sorghum / chickpeas / cotton.

Maybe row-crops are planted rather than sown...

Righto:

Talking about giving, Paul says: <sup>6</sup> The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and

whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

<sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Now, it took me a while to mull over what he was talking about here. To “sow sparingly”, does that mean you’ve 1000ha of cultivation, but you only plant 100ha? Or does it mean that instead of planting at 50kg(seed)/ha, you only plant it at 5kg/ha??? Well, I think it could actually be both, but to me, it makes more sense if we’re talking about the sowing rate.

Alright, so let’s connect the analogy to giving.

Throughout the world, the need to support ministry and mission, and the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ, (who are suffering persecution and are living in extreme poverty) – the need is enormous... *If you’re anything like me, you might be constantly bombarded, with appeals to support this charity / that charity, or to support this ministry / that ministry... And it can all seem somewhat ‘overwhelming’...*

And if our generosity, is the sowing of seed, there’s a decision to be made... The need is enormous – the need is so vast... It’s like having 1 000 000ha of cultivation, but you’ve only got a 65hp Massey Ferguson, and a 10’ planter... And you know you can’t possibly plant it all... And so, in that case, sowing sparingly, would mean that you’ve only got capacity to give in one or 2 ministries, and all other donation requests have to go unanswered. “Sorry, I’ve given to my capacity.”....

That's what it **could** mean “to sow sparingly”, but I think this next example is what it **does** mean.

If you think about planting wheat (winter crop[for those who don't know]):

Depending on:

- the location of your farm
  - heavy soil / light soil
  - summer dominant rainfall / winter; and
  - whether you're dryland / irrigated;
  - full profile of moisture / totally dependent on rain,
- the sowing rate can vary quite markedly.

When I was a young fella (growing up on a farm near Goondiwindi), There were a few South Australian families moved up from the Kadina area... And they had been used to planting wheat at around about 70kg/ha. But around Goondiwindi we only planted around about 28 or 30... When I was working at the Dalby Ag College (when it used to exist), around there, we'd plant at about 40-45kg/ha... But for an **irrigated** crop, you'd plant it at around about 100kg/ha...

And I remember Dad telling me (when the South Australians were going to plant their first crop), and they talked to the local's about planting rates, they said, “*How are you going to get your yield?, if you're only planting at half the rate???*”

You see, what they understood is: you sow sparingly, you reap sparingly...

If irrigated crops (planted at 100kg/ha) give us the best yield, why don't we **always** plant at 100kg/ha? Why don't we plant dryland wheat at 100kg/ha, in light soil in South Western Queensland?

It's because it's highly unlikely there's going to be enough moisture to sustain the crop...

Planting rates, are all to do with limited resources... Alright, so around here, most of our rainfall, is Summer rainfall. And so if we plant at too high-of-a rate, the crop will go gangbusters until it's sucked all the stored moisture out of the soil profile (and it's only just starting to tiller), and then, unless it gets rain, it's going to wither and die.

But with an irrigated crop, you can water it when you need to; add Nitrogen when you need to...

If you planted an **irrigated** crop at 10kg/ha, (if you sow sparingly), you will reap sparingly (the crop won't yield anywhere near its potential)... And when the resource is **not** limited, if you sow **bountifully**, you will reap bountifully..

And this is where Paul's illustration, equates to giving – it's about faith – What do we believe about God??? If sowing rates are lowered because resources are limited (In Australia, rainfall)

But when it comes to giving, if **God** is the source / resource of everything that we have... And if God has promised to us,

that he will always provide us with what we **need**,,,, will we ever have **less** than we need??? No...

And so when it comes to giving, we can have every confidence that we can sow bountifully (give generously). We don't need to hold back, because we will always have enough [we will always have what we need]... If we have a practice of giving generously, God will provide what **we need**, (not only so we can survive) but so that we can give generously again.

V7 <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written,

"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever."

How does God give to the poor? He gives to the poor, through us... What about if we give so much, we become 'the poor'? Well, God will supply our needs, through others.....

**God loves a cheerful giver** ...– Is there such a thing???  
Of course there is.

You see, when it comes to generosity, it's all about the heart. If God loves a cheerful giver, I'm pretty sure He's not at all

impressed with a **reluctant** giver... “Oh, I s’pose I’d better put something in the offering.” And **definitely** not impressed if we try to make a rule that everybody has to give a certain amount...

Some of you might remember 2 weeks ago, we were talking about how, as Disciples of Jesus, we have a readiness to give, because we’ve already given our whole self to God... Everything I have, already belongs to God – it’s His anyway....

And if generosity isn’t part of our character, there is something seriously deficient in our relationship with God... It means I haven’t surrendered myself to God.

And that’s why God loves a cheerful giver – not only because it’s the way of Christ, but because it’s evidence of a good relationship with God... We’ve already given everything to God – everything that we **are** and everything that we have.

You see, the way God’s grace abounds, is He gives us sufficient (for what we need), and it’s sufficient, so that we can do good in His Name.

But how **much** should I give??? People ask me that sometimes. And I could talk about tithing (Old Testament principle of giving a tenth of our gross income back to God); or I could talk about another Old Testament principle Deut 16:17 of “giving as we are able” , but the New Testament principle is much greater than tithing...

“How much should I give?” Well, back in chapter 8 we learned it was about having a **readiness** to give, and we give what we have – not what we don’t have...

And here in V7, Paul gives a very simple answer to the question... <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart. “How much should I give?” <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart.

If Holy Spirit is living in your heart, What’s the Holy Spirit telling you to give???

(flesh vs spirit)

<sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart .  
The only proviso is: Don’t do it reluctantly, and don’t give because someone is making you give... We have to **want** to give..., ... God only wants us to give, if it’s generosity, coming from an overflow of love from our heart...

Alright, but what if we genuinely, really **want** to give, but we’re just not sure that we can afford to???

Well, what are we afraid of???

Are we afraid:

- we won’t have enough to eat;
- can’t afford that holiday;
- won’t be able to realise our dream of buying a farm (or a better farm);
- won’t get a new car in a year or 2;

- won't be able to retire with the nest-egg we were planning...

What are we afraid of, that makes us think that we can't afford to be generous? ; and be continually generous (over and over again)?

Well, before I answer that, I feel I need to de-bunk some **dreadful** teaching that gets regurgitated over and over again – it's a teaching that appeals to our sinful nature of greed – it's teaching about how "If you give, God will make you rich"...

Some churches will tell you, "If you put \$100 in the offering, God will give you \$1000 back".... And the whole 'giving of the offering' gets presented as some kind of obscene 'get-rich-quick scheme'... What an abomination that is...

When it says **whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully**.

It's **not** talking about getting rich, or increasing our wealth so I can buy that flash new car... It's about how, when we give, **what** we give,

- makes ministry happen;
- makes mission happen;
  
- the word of God gets preached;
- the homeless are housed;
- the hungry are fed;

**That** is the bountiful harvest. **whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully**. But the bountiful harvest doesn't stop there:

V<sup>10</sup> 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**. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way **to be generous in every way**, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

Alright, this is not about God increasing our harvest, so that we can have more ‘stuff’...

Let’s put a bit of a flow-chart up here:

Where does what we have come from? God gave it to us...

Don’t ever get filled with pride, and say “I’ve got what I have because I’m such a good businessman”... Don’t be filled with the pride that says “I’ve got what I have, because I work really hard...”

*A friend of mine told me once, about the hardest workers he’d ever seen::: 2 men (I think they were in Indonesia), who would start work at sunrise, and they’d finish at sundown, and for the whole day, they would swing sledge hammers, smashing white rocks into powder, to provide white pigment for paint. And for their efforts, they’d make enough money that their family would survive another a day... And yet we have the arrogance to proclaim, “I’ve got what I have, because I work so hard”...*

Let’s be in no doubt about this: We have what we have, because in His mercy, God has provided it for us...

So, out of what God provides for us, there's bread for our food, and seed for sowing. Alright, our Heavenly Father knows what we need, and He gives us more than we need (Why does He do that?), so that we can sow the seed of generosity...

God doesn't give it to us so we can be rich and buy nice stuff. It's so we can sow bountifully – it's so we can be **generous**. And if (once again, in the Grace of God), He gives us even more, it's not so that we can spend it on ourselves (on a lavish lifestyle) – he's increasing our seed-stock... And we don't keep the seed for ourselves, just in case He doesn't provide us with more – He increases our seed-stock, for sowing...

You see, it comes down to faith. There is no limiting resource here. There is no reason, to sow sparingly. Our heavenly Father, will always provide what we need... And so we have every reason to sow generously.

And so, we give, and He multiplies our seed for sowing.

You know, sometimes I think that what holds us back from giving, is we've had the virtue of self-sufficiency ingrained into us... And if we're not self-sufficient, we're a blight on society... But the picture we're getting here, isn't about self-sufficiency – it's about **God**-sufficiency.

And sometimes, I think we really miss out. Those who have plenty, don't get to experience God supplying their needs, unless they give.

Righto, so if the prosperity preachers are so wrong, and the reward for giving, isn't about 'getting more in return'... **Is there a reward for giving???** Too right, there is.

Don't get me wrong – giving isn't an easy thing... And giving willingly and joyfully, isn't necessarily because we hate having money... In fact, V13 tells us that it's an act of submission. Paul says that it's an act of, **submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ**

Hey, - tying ourselves to Christ – embracing Christ – acknowledging that Christ is our Lord, demands submission – we submit everything to Him.

And when other Disciples of Jesus benefit from this act of submission:

- **they** give thanks to God
- They **glorify** God (because they know that it's **God**, who is providing for their needs [He just chooses to do it through us])

**And he says: they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.**

Isn't that wonderful...

There have been a few people, who I don't even know, who have been listening to the Bush Disciples Podcast, and have really appreciated the Bible teaching, and they just started

donating money (to support this ministry) – people we didn't know.

And you know what? What Paul's talking about here – that's what I felt. I longed to meet them... I see so-and-so's offering on the Bush Disciples bank statement, and I want to know who you are – I want to meet you – I want to know you – I want to know what God's been doing in your life, to move you to do this... And I want to know what **your** needs are, so that I can pray for you... This is what Paul's describing here...

And you know what, down the track, some of these people, we've actually met in person, and it's been an absolute delight...

Righto, it's time to finish up, and I'm not going to do anything different from what Paul did... He always brings everything back to Christ.

V<sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

- What words could we use to praise God?
- What gift could we give in return for what Christ has done for us?
- How could we ever repay Him?
- Not even our words, are good enough to describe how wonderful, the gift of Christ is...

We owe Him everything.

<sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Giving in faith. God provides through the giver, and God provides for the giver.

Questions.