

## Joyful Generosity 5

October 15, 2017

**1 Corinthians 16:1,2 (EHV) – <sup>1</sup> Now concerning the collection for the saints, do as I directed the churches in Galatia to do. <sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each of you is to set something aside in keeping with whatever he gains, saving it up at home, so that when I come, no collections will need to be carried out.**

We're in the fifth week of our "Joyful Generosity" series, and I hope it's been a blessing for you. Or maybe you're getting tired of hearing about money. There's just one more week left! As we near the end, let's review what we've talked about so far. First, where does everything come from? From God! **"The earth is the LORD's, and everything that fills it."** That affects how I view life! Second, do we have a God of abundance or scarcity? We have a God of abundance! That affects how I view life too. Third, **"where your treasure is, [there your heart will be also]."** There's a close connection between your heart and your money. Finally, last week we heard about generosity. Do you remember how much King David gave? About \$5 billion. Wow! Joyful generosity!

But maybe you're thinking, "I don't have \$5 billion." Of course we don't! But today, God has some very practical giving advice for all of us. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, **"Now concerning the collection for the saints, do as I directed the churches in Galatia to do."** Paul was in the middle of collecting a big offering for the people in Jerusalem. He wanted all the congregations to participate, so he shared some of the most practical giving advice in the Bible. He said: **"On the first day of every week, each of you is to set something aside in keeping with whatever he gains."**

We're gonna spend the whole sermon talking about just that one verse! The first words that jump out at me are, **"Each of you is to set something aside."** How many people were to participate in the offering? **"Each of you."** The way the IRS works today, you can earn quite a bit of money before you're expected to pay income taxes. That's not the way God works. Giving to God isn't just for the rich or well-off. It's for **"each of you."** Every single person has been blessed by God with something. So, every single person has something to give, including **"each of you!"**

Here's how: **"On the first day of every week, each of you is to set something aside."** Sometimes people say, "If I give my money to God, I won't have anything left!" God doesn't ask you to give *everything* to him. What he asks you is to give to him *first*. God knows you're not King David with billions of dollars. He knows that you need money for lots of things. That's why he gives you money! God doesn't ask you for *all*, but he does ask you for *first*. On the first day of the week, before everything else, the Christians were to set aside a sum of money for God. God loves to hear people say, "You first!"

In the Bible there's a concept called **"firstfruits."** Firstfruit giving was one of God's commands to the Israelites. When they started harvesting their crops, they gave the first crops to God. They didn't give *all* their crops to God, but they said, "You first!" When new animals were born, they didn't sacrifice them *all* to God, but they always gave God the firstborn. "You first!" Even when a firstborn child was born, they obviously didn't sacrifice their child, but they gave a special offering for that first child. "You first!" Not *all*, but *first*! What was the whole point of firstfruits? It made them trust in God. Even after a long winter, they gave the first grain to God. More would come. They trusted in God. "You first!"

I think you probably know why God says, "First." How many of you have a lot of money left at the end of a pay period? Not me! "God first" easily becomes "God gets what's left!" When you talk to your financial planners about retirement, what do they recommend? Pay yourself first! Take some off the top and put it in your

retirement account. That's the only way it's going to happen, because if you don't do it first, how much is going to be left? You first!

That's how God asks us to give. For us today, it might not be every Sunday, but with every blessing, God wants us to say back to him, "You first!" When your check gets deposited in the bank, say to God, "You first!" Before the bills. Before the mortgage. Even before the IRA. "You first!" Earlier we heard God's promise in the Verse of the Day: **"Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest; then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine."** God doesn't ask you to give him *everything*. He asks you to trust him enough to give to him *first*.

Does that describe your life? Do you say to God with a smile, "You first!" Or do all the other things that we feel that we need overwhelm us – the house payment, the car payment, the school payment, the clothes, the bills? And then, without realizing it, what's left? The seemingly "urgent" things in life so easily can push out the important things in life. God doesn't ask for *all*. He asks for the *first*. Are you willing to say to God, "You first"?

Do you like leftovers? I mostly do, but not all of them. Not leftover taco salad. Meat, sauce, cheese, lettuce, chips – all together: good! The leftovers – not so much. We've learned that you need to eat it all up the first time around. Old lettuce and soggy chips and once melted cheese all stuck together – it's the same stuff, same ingredients, but it just isn't the same. What is it we're offering God? "You first" or "Here's the leftovers"? Even if, in the end, it might be the same stuff, it's not the same. "You first" and "leftovers" are a world apart.

What's amazing is that God is the one Father who never gives us leftovers. Remember how I said that God commanded his people to give the firstfruits? That's exactly what God has done. God gave us his firstborn. He gave us Jesus. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."** Many have asked: "If Jesus was innocent, why did he die?" That's a fantastic question! With an even more fantastic answer: Jesus died because he put you first. For every time I've put me first, Jesus said, "You first!" when he died to forgive my sins on the cross. God invented the phrase "You first!" God has put you and me first, even when it came to his own Son. So how can we not say to God, "You first!"

"You first." But how much? That's the other big question, right? How much should I give? Here's what God says: **"On the first day of every week, each of you is to set something aside"** – now here's the key – **"in keeping with whatever he gains."** We're maybe more familiar with the NIV's – **"in keeping with his income."** God doesn't give a number, because every person is different. He doesn't want us to compare. He doesn't want us to give what somebody else gives. He wants us to look at what he's given us and give in keeping with our income. So how much? Give your best, in keeping with what you have. It's going to be different for each of us, but the attitude is the same. God first. My best.

Imagine a scenario. What if you went to the bank to get a mortgage for a new house. Let's say \$150,000. What if the banker looked at your salary and your credit and finally said, "I'll give you \$150,000 on one condition: You have to pay back whatever you want." Would you ever complain: "What? You want me to pay back some of what you gave me? This isn't fair!" No, you'd probably think: "This is a pretty cool bank! These terms are way more than I deserve! I want to give back my best." Isn't that the way it is with God?

Let's think a little more about that phrase **"in keeping with whatever he gains."** God is a big believer in percentage giving. In the OT, he told his people the percentage – 10% (a "tithe"). That was the law for the Israelites. 10% of crops, herds, fruit, everything. They were to look at what God had given them and give back 10%. Some churches demand 10% today. Some even ask members for their tax statements and calculate their

offerings for them. The problem is that the tithe is part of God's Old Testament laws meant just for the Israelites. If a church demands 10% today, it should also have daily sacrifices, celebrate the Sabbath, and not eat pork, because all those laws go together. Today God doesn't demand 10%, but he still tells us to give a percent **"in keeping with whatever he gains."**

When we hear we don't have to give 10% anymore, there's often a problem. A church-shopper once asked a pastor if his church demanded that people give 10%. He said, "No!" She replied, "Good, because I don't want to give 10%. Who wants to give 10% to God? I have a lot of other things I want to spend my money on!" When we hear we don't have to give 10%, what do we often think? "Now I don't have to give much at all!" That's our sinful nature talking. That's not faith! God doesn't force us to give a certain percent. Instead, he says, "Give your best from your heart." The truth is, if you don't *want* to give, don't give at all. God doesn't want your money without your heart.

But I know God has your heart. You love Jesus. You want to give back to God. So how much? Remember this: "God first. My best." I can't tell you what your best is, other than that God wants you to think in terms of percentages. He wants you to look at everything he's given you and decide what percent you want to give back to him. That means our offerings will change. Sometimes our incomes go up. Sometimes they go down. So will our offerings to God. If you don't know where to start, maybe try using that ten percent as a guide. If you make \$50,000 a year, ten percent would be about \$100 a week. If you make \$100,000, it'd be \$200 a week. If you make \$20,000, it'd be \$40 a week. Could you give that much? Could you give more than that? I'm not telling you that's what you must give. I just want you to think about it. What's my percentage right now? Does that put God first? Is that my best?

King David's best was five billion dollars. There was once a widow whose best was two little coins. People mocked her, but when Jesus saw her, he praised her in front of everyone. The widow gave a few pennies. David gave five billion dollars. In God's sight, they both gave exactly the same! This is what makes God's way of giving offerings so great. He doesn't want you to compare yourself to anyone else. He doesn't hold everyone to the same standard, because he's blessed us all in different ways. He just reminds us that every person has been blessed. Everyone has something to give. God first. My best.

I want to close by sharing with you a really cool connection in the Bible. I told you about this practice of "firstfruits." The first of everything always went to God. There was also a special Festival of Firstfruits at the beginning of their harvest season. When the first sheaves of grain began to ripen in the spring, they were to take them to the temple during Passover week on the day after the Sabbath – on a Sunday. They couldn't eat those first heads of grain. They were God's – the firstfruits. They gave those to God and trusted that more would follow.

Well, do you know what big event happened on Firstfruits Sunday? Easter! Jesus rose from the dead on the Sunday after the Passover. As Jesus was rising from the dead, all Jerusalem was filled with people bringing their firstfruits to God. Here's what God says about it: **"For as in Adam they all die, so also in Christ they all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ as the firstfruits and then Christ's people, at his coming."** Remember the whole point of firstfruits? When you see the firstfruits, you trust that more will follow. So why did Jesus rise from the dead on Firstfruits Sunday? When you see Jesus rise, you know that more will follow. Everyone who believes in him – me, you. We have a great God – a great God who's put us first in every way. So, we say back to God, "You first. My best." Amen.