

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

**SERMON TITLE:** How Do We Give?

Well, next Sunday, May 11, is the day we've been aiming for over these last three weeks. It will be Commitment Sunday for our capital stewardship campaign, as well as Pentecost Sunday, Mother's Day and the 25<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for our congregation. It's going to be quite a day!

On the Commitment Sunday piece, we're looking to raise \$1.2 million to increase our education and office space, to renovate the Family Life Center, and to increase our parking capacity. The campaign theme is *Honoring Our Past, Building Our Future*.

To help us prepare for this important day in the life of our church, we've been looking at a series of questions related to our giving: *Why Build? Why Give to Build? How Do We Give?* This morning we're going to take one more look at that final question: *How Do We Give?*

Our scripture lesson this morning is 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. Paul is writing to encourage the Corinthian Christians to participate generously in the offering Paul is collecting to assist the church in Jerusalem. Listen for the word of God: **SCRIPTURE READING.**

So how do we give? Paul's advice is that we give bountifully and cheerfully out of the abundance God has already provided. Let me share with you a story told by Pastor Victor Shepherd in one of his sermons entitled, *What Price Gratitude?* "In the early days of my ministry I had supper with a missionary surgeon who was home on furlough. His reputation as a surgeon was matched by his reputation as a gruff, abrasive fellow who was equal parts kindness and sandpaper. We ate together in a steak house. I ordered my steak rare. When it arrived it was so rare it was hemorrhaging. He glanced at it and barked, 'Do you want a tourniquet for that thing?'

“A few months later I met him again. This time he was speaking to a small group of university students about his work in the Gaza Strip. He was telling us that we North American ‘fat cats’ knew nothing about gratitude. Nothing! On one occasion he had stopped at a peasant hovel to see a woman on whom he had performed surgery. She and her husband were dirt-poor. Their livestock supply consisted of one angora rabbit and two chickens. For income the woman combed the hair out of the rabbit, spun the hair into yarn, and sold it. For food she and her husband ate the eggs from the chickens. The woman insisted that the missionary surgeon stay for lunch. He accepted the invitation and said he would be back for lunch after he had gone down the road to see another postoperative patient. An hour and a half later he was back. He peeked into the cooking pot to see what he was going to eat. He saw one rabbit and two chickens. The woman had given up her entire livestock supply--her income, her food, everything”—and she was happy about it! Her gift was not given reluctantly or under compulsion. There was joy in her giving. “He concluded his story by reminding us that we knew nothing of gratitude. He wept unashamedly.” (Shepherd, Victor. April 5, 1992.)

What an incredible witness! If ever there was a woman justified in sowing sparingly, surely it was this woman—and yet she sowed bountifully and cheerfully! She chose to live out of a sense of God’s abundant provision--not out of the fear of scarcity. She somehow trusted that she would have enough of everything she needed which then freed her to share abundantly in this good work for a man who had cared for her in her need. Through her giving, the missionary surgeon gave thanks to God while this poor woman was enriched in everyway through the grace of God.

My brothers and sisters, if we are to reach our campaign’s goal for building up the ministry of our church and extending that ministry even further into our community, then we too

will have to give bountifully—and yes, we're invited to give cheerfully out of the abundance God has already provided. And as we've seen, people are already stepping forward and committing their gifts. Let me call on Clark Meier to offer his witness of support.

People are stepping forward and committing their gifts to this good work. In fact, as of today, 24 advance commitments have already been made to our campaign totaling \$424,686.

People are already sowing bountifully so that we might reap bountifully.

And why not? God's grace has already provided so much to sustain our lives from day to day, including the indescribable gift of the good news of Jesus Christ. We're even welcome at his table. There is no scarcity here—only abundance. So how will we respond? Thanks be to God!