

2 Corinthians 9:8-11. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

The Lord Teaches us the joy of being generous.

I. He assures us of his gracious care

II. He encourages us to be generous

It was so good to see rain. After a few storms this past week and weekend we breathed a sigh of relief. We said a little Hallelujah as the sky got dark and the rains came down. For a while we were getting rather worried. It has been dry. It has been terribly hot this summer. The crops were starting to show signs of serious stress. But the Lord, in his loving kindness opened up the heavens and supplied us with some moisture that this past week. We give thanks to God.

And yet many would say that we are certainly far from being in the clear. We could use more rain, and the rains that did come came with some high winds that knocked down branches and bent over corn. We must also mention that this drought of 2012 has had a widespread effect on the whole country. And while the price of corn has gone up, which might seem like good news for the farmer around here who has a surplus, the price of seed and fuel and other material has gone up as well. Yes, we got some rain the past week, but things still look kind of tough and therefore future projections have many of you thinking about how you can streamline your budgets.

And so at this time that we find ourselves in this cautious and even pessimistic mindset that the Lord has now orchestrated this timely bit of divine coincidence as he drops this lesson before us today. With these words our faithful Lord **assures us of his care, he reminds us of our blessings, and he encourages us to be generous.** In short **he teaches us the joy of being generous.**

With much needed words of encouragement the Lord speaks to us today. At this time when it might seem more appropriate to count our challenges he tells us to count our blessings. When a person might be tempted to worry the Lord reminds us of his care and says that he will supply us with everything that we need. In this time of projected shortage the Lord speaks to us of abundance. At this time when it seems like a good time to be stingy he reminds us how good it is to be generous.

By nature this is difficult for us to do. By nature we aren't generous, instead we're selfish. We know we should think of others, but it seems much more important to think of ourselves. By nature we are also worriers. We know we shouldn't worry, but we do. We know everything is in the Lord's hands, but the inherent weakness of our flesh won't let us trust God completely. The Lord tells us to be content. He tells us to trust him, to look around and count our blessings and see how he has supplied for us. He urges us then to respond with thanksgiving to him and generosity towards others.

Now there is certainly much wisdom in paying attention to our gains and losses, our financial blessings and our challenges. God wants us to be good stewards of the gifts that he gives us. In difficult times it makes sense to reevaluate how much we can afford to give. But many times we are too quick to slash our charitable giving because we can't seem to look past our perceived shortages. Many times we wonder what the future holds and instead of seeing the joy of be generous and extending a hand to help others our hands quickly tighten around what we have. We become hesitant to share or unwilling to give.

In his words to the Corinthians Paul addresses the element of trust that closely accompanies the activity of giving. When a person gives, he or she trusts that his or her needs will be supplied even though he or she gives away a portion of wealth. The person who doubts that his or her needs will be met is the one who is hesitant to give. The person who trusts that his or her needs will be met is the one who is more willing to give. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages the Christians there to put their trust in God. Paul encourages the believers to give cheerfully, and he does so by reminding them of their trustworthy and generous God.

Our faithful Lord is the one who supplies all our needs. He is the one who provides sunshine and rain. He is the one who provides seedtime and harvest. He is the one who brings forth food from the ground and work for us to do. He is the one who cares for us in every way. And not only does God take care of us and give us what we need, but he gives to us in abundance. He gives us even more than we need. Paul reminds us that our gracious God takes care of us in all things, and at all times. And not only does God care for our physical needs, but he has taken care of our greatest need. He has saved us from eternal death. In his generous grace Jesus laid aside his heavenly wealth and glory and became a lowly man to die for us. Through his poverty we become rich in God's eyes. Through his death and resurrection Jesus has supplied us with forgiveness and eternal life. And now our generous and gracious God richly feeds and nourishes our soul with his Word in sacrament so that he might bring us to our heavenly goal. In every way, in every situation God have supplied our every need, and he gives to us in abundance. He gives and he gives and he gives. Paul assures us of the goodness of God and the generosity of his grace.

It is on the basis of this generosity of God that Paul leads his readers from a basic trust in God to the activity of giving. Paul builds up our faith so that it may

produce fruit. Our generosity to others is rooted in and grows out of God's generosity to us. His abounds to us **in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8).**

Chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians were written by Paul in direct response to a specific situation in the congregation at Corinth. An offering was being taken to provide assistance to the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem. But this offering had begun to lose steam, and had begun to falter. No doubt the challenges and the responsibilities of their everyday lives had taken their focus away from this need. And so Paul wrote to them to encourage them to finish the offering. To encourage them Paul pointed them to the example of the Macedonian believers who gave generously. They gave beyond what was expected of them, Paul even says that they gave beyond their ability. Paul also encouraged the Corinthians by directing them to their own history of generosity. And all this was fine encouragement to give, but above all Paul directed their thoughts to the greatest reason to be generous – their faithful God. Their faithful God is the one who supplies for their needs, and their Savior Jesus, who makes them rich with the gifts of forgiveness, new spiritual life, and the assurance of eternal life. God had blessed them greatly. Day after day he filled them up with blessings both spiritual and physical. And now God had placed before them an opportunity to share their gifts for the benefit of others. God was going to work through them to provide for the needs of the Jerusalem Christians. God was going to work through these Corinthians Christians to support and bless his people.

The last couple of weeks we talked about how God uses pastors to tend to the spiritual needs of his people. He works through these men and gives them a tremendous opportunity to participate in this work of God. Well in a very similar way God works through the generosity of his people to take care of the needs of others. In this case he was working through the Corinthians and their generosity to supply for the needs of the believers in Jerusalem. He gives us an opportunity to do his work as well. He gives opportunity to supply and care for the needs of his people. He gives us an opportunity to participate in his work by using our money, our time, our talents, and our skills to support the work of the church. God gives us all that we need and then some, not just so that we can live in luxury and in ease. But he gives us more than we need so that we can share with others. He gives us more than we need so that we can be generous with others like he has been generous with us.

God wants us to be generous with others. He wants us to give to help those less fortunate than us. And so he uses sections of Scripture like this one to teach us of the joy of giving. But this is not God strong - arming us into giving. Nor is this God try to guilt us into giving. And this is certainly not God negotiating with us saying, "If you give then I will take care of you." This is God's blessed assurance. This is God saying to you. *"I am going to take care of you. I am going to take of you in every way, in every situation. I am going to pour out my mercies upon you. I am going to love you with an*

undeserved love for all eternity. I will give you food for the body. I will give you food for the soul. I will make you spiritually rich, and righteous, and an heir of heaven, a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

Our gracious God gives us this assurance and then he gives us this encouragement. Now take care of each other. Help each other. Support each other. Be generous. Give what you can. Give gladly. When your brother is in need help him. When there is ministry to be supported give with a generous spirit and a glad heart so that others may know of my salvation in Christ Jesus. Give with a heart that trusts that the Lord will provide for you. Trust that God is able to provide in abundance for you. Trust that the Lord will supply your need and replace that which you gave away. Be generous as your God is generous with you.

Today, in fact, your generosity is on display in a unique way. This afternoon marks the unofficial start of soccer camp as coaches and helpers will be organizing materials and equipment for the camp. It has been a remarkable privilege to see your generosity on display these last 5 years in the way that you have supported the soccer camp. Your financial gifts to this camp have been generous and appreciated. The time and the effort, the meals and the hospitality have been given have been a great blessing to the camp. And because of your faith driven generosity God has worked through your gifts to share the gospel with the children of the community. Thanks to your generosity 80 children will hear God's Word proclaimed this week. Our faithful God has worked through your generosity to strengthen the faith of the coaches and staff and energize several congregations. As God has promised your generosity has led to thanksgiving to God.

In these times of financial uncertainty, may the Lord's generosity lead you to trust in his abundant care and may his generosity lead you to continue to give with a generous and a grateful heart. May the Lord who graciously sent us rain and provides for all that we need both physically and spiritually, give you a heart that trusts in him, and hands that share his abundant blessings. Through his abundant grace and generosity may the Lord daily teach us the joy of being generous so that you and I may be generous in every way. May the Lord teach us to be generous toward our fellowman and generous as we support the work of his church.

This morning I leave you with the same encouragement, that Paul gave to the Corinthians. **⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."** Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. **¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. Amen.**

Hebrews 13:7-8,17-21. Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. ¹⁸ Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. ¹⁹ I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon. ²⁰ May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

It's all about Jesus: The Great Shepherd tends to and equips his church

- I. He gives Shepherds to his Sheep
- II. He gives Sheep to his Shepherds
- III. He equips us for a life of service and an eternity of praise

I think each one of us has a special place in our hearts for a certain pastor. Maybe it was the one who baptized us. Maybe it was the one who taught us catechism. Maybe it was the one who walked us through Bible Information Class, or married us, or baptized our children. Maybe it was a pastor who guided you through a difficult time in your life. Good pastors are indeed a blessing from God.

Last week we talked about the important role of pastor; how it is a noble task. We talked about the qualifications of an overseer that Paul listed for Timothy - the qualifications that outlined what kind of man a pastor or an overseer should and should not be. Today we continue to expand on the relationship that God has intended for pastor and his people.

As Jesus looked at the crowds gathered around him in Mark 6 he felt for them. He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The Lord Jesus knew that these people needed the gospel, he knew they needed instruction in the word, he knew they needed the hope and peace that comes from faith. And so he spent time with them, he taught them. He cared for their spiritual needs. For a time he truly was their shepherd and he served as their pastor. But Jesus wasn't always going to be with them. He would have to send out his disciples and later many pastors to care for his sheep.

The title of pastor, itself, is a title that contains such warm significance. Embedded in this title of pastor is the idea of a shepherd. He is to be one who cares for God's people like a shepherd caring for the sheep. There is to be a loving watchfulness

that the pastor will employ for his people. He is to lead them to the life giving waters of God's Holy Word and Sacraments. There he and his people will find refreshment. There they will together find spiritual food and spiritual peace. The pastor is to instruct his people in God's Word. He is to show them God's ways. That means that he must speak the harsh words of the law as well as the sweet words of the gospel. He is to expose sin, and warn the people of the dangers of sin so that they may avoid spiritual harm. All this he does, not just because it is his job; but he does it with it love and genuine concern, as a called servant of Christ. The pastor gladly serves his Lord as an overseer of God's people and under-shepherd of that Great Shepherd of the Sheep Christ Jesus.

Jesus in his grace wanted his people to be fed and nourished spiritually. And so our Lord in his grace and mercy has established his church in this way that he has blessed us with pastors who tend to our spiritual needs by faithfully administering the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. Jesus is the Great Shepherd of the sheep and he tends and equips his people by giving us pastors. He gives shepherds to his sheep. What a blessed relationship God has established.

But what about the other side of the relationship; what kind of instructions does God have for his people? Several places in Scripture we hear that God has entrusted pastors and spiritual leaders with a serious responsibility. We are told that such overseers and under-shepherds are given a solemn charge to faithfully watch over God's people as men who must give an account. This is a high calling. This is a noble task. We are told this often. But not often are we told in the Scriptures how the Christian is to respond to their spiritual leader. We are perhaps shown both good examples and bad examples of those who listen or refuse to listen to their spiritual leaders, but we are not given many specific instructions. However, we are given such instructions in this final chapter of the book of Hebrews. After an extensive exposition of the gospel message the writer to the Hebrews ends his letter with various applications. Including how the application of how we as Christians are to treat our pastors and our spiritual leaders. So what instruction does the writer to the Hebrews give us? How does God want his people to treat those placed in spiritual authority over his people? The writer says ¹⁷ ***Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.***

Obey and submit. These are words that I think we all immediately bristle underneath. Remember and emulate former leaders - we can do that just fine. In fact, that is rather easy and enjoyable. We can and often do look back with fondness, but obey and submit to our current leaders, that is, a bit more of a challenge. After all, we naturally have trouble submitting to anyone but ourselves. We don't want to listen to anyone who says something we might not agree with, including our pastor. But we are told, by God's Word, to obey and submit.

However, the full flavor of these words, obey and submit, is lost when we lose sight of the nature of this relationship. This is not a slave obeying his master. This is not the pastor ruling over and subduing his members with an iron fist. But rather this is a loving relationship that God has established for the good of his church. It is an obedience rooted in the trust, reliance, and confidence that God has placed this person over me for my spiritual nourishment. What good does it do a person to resist or reject those whom God has put in a position to feed and nourish his or her soul? What good does it do to ignore or avoid a pastor who is only faithfully carrying out his duty? ***Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.***

And so listen to your leaders and obey them because not only will this make things easy for you and you're your spiritual leaders, but when you serve them, when you follow them, when you listen to them you know that it is as if you are serving Christ, because Christ Jesus uses these imperfect men to take care of you. Christ is working through them. Christ is speaking through them. When your Savior wants to communicate words of forgiveness or rebuke to you he does not rip apart the heavens and speak from the clouds, but he speaks through a humble man standing in front of you. **Your** Savior speaks to you in the words of the liturgy spoken by the pastor. He speaks to you through your pastor in words spoken in the sacristy, in the back of church, in the pastor's office. He speaks to you through a reassuring voice sitting next to your hospital bed, or over the phone, or in your home. He speaks to you through a voice that may not always have all the answers but a human voice that is there to care for you and guide you into God's Word.

This is a blessed relationship that God has established for the benefit of his church. But because of sin, pastors and their people, abuse and mishandle this relationship. God did not ordain the public ministry that men might simply hang a title from their name and therefore fill up their egos. He did not ordain the public ministry to give men a higher status or more social clout. And yet it is an unfortunate truth that men, by way of selfish ambition and impure intentions, have used the position of pastor for selfish gain and have strained and even broken the trust between pastor and congregant. Lord, we pray that you would keep pastors from abusing their position.

But of course, it is not only the pastor who can be guilty of straining and mishandling this relationship. The typical member of the congregation can easily fall into harmful habits. Too often I think people underestimate or devalue this relationship of pastor and member, of under-shepherd and sheep. Too often members of Christian congregations shun a relationship with their pastor because they are determined to handle their spiritual welfare on their own. Too often a Christian stubbornly takes up the attitude who is that pastor to tell me how to live anyway. It doesn't take too long to think of possible examples. A young woman assumes after catechism and confirmation that she no longer needs her pastor's help and therefore frequents church irregularly, and never contacts her pastor even though her faith is being tested and strained. A married couple might avoid marital counseling because it

just seems too difficult or to embarrassing to go to their pastor for help and work through their problems. A young man is struggling with a sin and getting himself into trouble and instead of looking to his pastor for help, he and his family do their best to cover things up so that the pastor won't find out. A man advanced in years has fallen on hard times and sits in his home confused about God's plan for his life yet he has no desire to speak to his pastor. Many times as believers we wander and we stumble through this life and yet we refuse to seek, ask for, or even receive help even though it is often right there in front of us. This is spiritual help and support that Jesus our loving Good Shepherd has established for our good.

Our Lord Jesus Christ loves you. He wrapped his glory in the humility of flesh, lived for you, and then died for you. He fulfilled the covenant of blood, his covenant of forgiveness and eternal life. Our risen Lord, that Great Shepherd of the Sheep, wants you to know more about what he has done for you. He wants you to know about his Word and he wants you to know his will for your life. And he wants you to believe in him as your Savior and to trust in him and rely on him day after day. Our Great Shepherd wants to equip you for lives of service. He wants to guard and keep you until you praise him for all eternity in heaven. And he has built and he maintains the relationship between a pastor and his people to that end. He works through pastors to strengthen your relationship with God, to keep you close to your Savior. He works through pastors who faithfully administer the means of grace so that they might fan the flame of the Holy Spirit within your heart.

With fondness in our eyes we look back to previous pastors who taught us the Word. We certainly would do well to remember them. We are to imitate their faith. But it is not about the pastor himself, but it is about the message that he brings. Pastors get older. They move on. Eventually they go on to their eternal home. But the message that God passed down to you is eternal. As it says here in the book of Hebrews, ***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*** The message that your former pastors spoke to you is the same that your current pastor speaks to you. It is the same that your future pastor will speak to you. It is all about Jesus. Jesus' love, His word, His life-changing gospel, his life-directing wisdom - that doesn't change. But God in his goodness has established the public ministry so that this unchanging word of Jesus may be applied over and over to the changing lives of his people. Jesus has a great desire to keep you in his word, to equip you for lives of service and to bring you home and so in his love the Lord of the Church Christ Jesus will continue to send out faithful pastors year after year and generation after generation to tend to his people and to teach and apply his saving word. To Jesus Christ, that Great Shepherd of the Sheep be glory now and forever. Amen.

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The Lord Teaches us the joy of being generous.

I. He assures us of his gracious care

II. He encourages us to be generous

It was so good to see rain. After a few storms this past week and weekend we breathed a sigh of relief. We said a little Hallelujah as the sky got dark and the rains came down. For a while we were getting rather worried. It has been dry. It has been terribly hot this summer. The crops were starting to show signs of serious stress. But the Lord, in his loving kindness opened up the heavens and supplied us with some moisture that this past week. We give thanks to God.

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And so at this time that we find ourselves in this cautious and even pessimistic mindset that the Lord has now orchestrated this timely bit of divine coincidence as he drops this lesson before us today. With these words our faithful Lord **assures us of his care, he reminds us of our blessings, and he encourages us to be generous.** In short **he teaches us the joy of being generous.**

With much needed words of encouragement the Lord speaks to us today. At this time when it might seem more appropriate to count our challenges he tells us to count our blessings. When a person might be tempted to worry the Lord reminds us of his care and says that he will supply us with everything that we need. In this time of projected shortage the Lord speaks to us of abundance. At this time when it seems like a good time to be stingy he reminds us how good it is to be generous.

By nature this is difficult for us to do. By nature we aren't generous, instead we're selfish. We know we should think of others, but it seems much more important to think of ourselves. By nature we are also worriers. We know we shouldn't worry, but we do. We know everything is in the Lord's hands, but the inherent weakness of our flesh won't let us trust God completely. The Lord tells us to be content. He tells us to trust him, to look around and count our blessings and see how he has supplied for us. He urges us then to respond with thanksgiving to him and generosity towards others.

Now there is certainly much wisdom in paying attention to our gains and losses, our financial blessings and our challenges. God wants us to be good stewards of the gifts that he gives us. In difficult times it makes sense to reevaluate how much we can afford to give. But many times we are too quick to slash our charitable giving because we can't seem to look past our perceived shortages. Many times we wonder what the future holds and instead of seeing the joy of be generous and extending a hand to help others our hands quickly tighten around what we have. We become hesitant to share or unwilling to give.

In his words to the Corinthians Paul addresses the element of trust that closely accompanies the activity of giving. When a person gives, he or she trusts that his or her needs will be supplied even though he or she gives away a portion of wealth. The person who doubts that his or her needs will be met is the one who is hesitant to give. The person who trusts that his or her needs will be met is the one who is more willing to give. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages the Christians there to put their trust in God. Paul encourages the believers to give cheerfully, and he does so by reminding them of their trustworthy and generous God.

Our faithful Lord is the one who supplies all our needs. He is the one who provides sunshine and rain. He is the one who provides seedtime and harvest. He is the one who brings forth food from the ground and work for us to do. He is the one who cares for us in every way. And not only does God take care of us and give us what we need, but he gives to us in abundance. He gives us even more than we need. Paul reminds us that our gracious God takes care of us in all things, and at all times. And not only does God care for our physical needs, but he has taken care of our greatest need. He has saved us from eternal death. In his generous grace Jesus laid aside his heavenly wealth and glory and became a lowly man to die for us. Through his poverty we become rich in God's eyes. Through his death and resurrection Jesus has supplied us with forgiveness and eternal life. And now our generous and gracious God richly feeds and nourishes our soul with his Word in sacrament so that he might bring us to our heavenly goal. In every way, in every situation God have supplied our every need, and he gives to us in abundance. He gives and he gives and he gives. Paul assures us of the goodness of God and the generosity of his grace.

It is on the basis of this generosity of God that Paul leads his readers from a basic trust in God to the activity of giving. Paul builds up our faith so that it may

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Today, in fact, your generosity is on display in a unique way. This afternoon marks the unofficial start of soccer camp as coaches and helpers will be organizing materials and equipment for the camp. It has been a remarkable privilege to see your generosity on display these last 5 years in the way that you have supported the soccer camp. Your financial gifts to this camp have been generous and appreciated. The time and the effort, the meals and the hospitality have been given have been a great blessing to the camp. And because of your faith driven generosity God has worked through your gifts to share the gospel with the children of the community. Thanks to your generosity 80 children will hear God's Word proclaimed this week. Our faithful God has worked through your generosity to strengthen the faith of the coaches and staff and energize several congregations. As God has promised your generosity has led to thanksgiving to God.

In these times of financial uncertainty, may the Lord's generosity lead you to trust in his abundant care and may his generosity lead you to continue to give with a generous and a grateful heart. May the Lord who graciously sent us rain and provides for all that we need both physically and spiritually, give you a heart that trusts in him, and hands that share his abundant blessings. Through his abundant grace and generosity may the Lord daily teach us the joy of being generous so that you and I may be generous in every way. May the Lord teach us to be generous toward our fellowman and generous as we support the work of his church.

This morning I leave you with the same encouragement, that Paul gave to the Corinthians. **⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."** Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. **¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. Amen.**