

Cultivating Faithful Generosity
God's Abundant Blessings
2 Corinthians 9:6-15
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Today is the third and final message in our series, “Cultivating Faithful Generosity.” I’ve chosen “God’s Abundant Blessings” as the title for today’s sermon, because the Bible passage we’re looking at today, 2 Corinthians 9: 6–15, emphasizes God’s amazing blessing in response to our giving. I want to begin the message today by looking closely at this passage, because God’s promise to bless us abundantly is the starting point for us being generous stewards of all we’ve been given. I encourage you to follow along as I read these verses.

⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, 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:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their 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 enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

¹² This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! – 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

This is classic Pauline writing! He frequently strings together adjectives and phrases, one on top of the other, like he's a little kid who just experienced something so exciting that he can't contain himself. Listen to some of the words and phrases Paul uses to describe God's response to our generosity:

- Reaping generously based on what we sow
- God loves a cheerful giver.
- God will bless us abundantly. We'll have all we need. We'll abound in every good work.
- The righteousness of those who give to the poor endures forever.
- God will increase our store of seed and will enlarge our harvest of righteousness.
- We'll be enriched in every way so we can be even more generous, and our generosity will result in praise being given to God.
- The needs of God's people will be met, and God will be praised.
- Those who are blessed by our generosity will pray for us, thanking God for his grace.

The overarching message that Paul tries to convey in the verses I read is that God's response to our generosity is to pour his blessings on us in amazing ways. And God's blessing isn't limited to meeting our needs just by replacing or restoring what we've given away. He blesses us in such a way that we're empowered to serve and bless others, and ultimately, He is praised by those we serve and bless.

What Paul communicates in these verses is a powerful cycle of sowing and reaping!



God blesses us by caring for our needs. We, in turn, bless others by generously giving out of what God has given to us. The hearts of those we're generous with are filled with thanksgiving for us and express their thanks to God. God, in turn, pours more of his favor and blessing on us so that we're even more able to bless others, and the cycle of generosity continues.

The statement "You can't outgive God" is repeated so often that it becomes almost trite, but it's so true. The book of James tells us that our Heavenly Father is the giver of every good gift. As God blesses us with his good gifts, we're positioned to bless others, and the cycle of God's blessing and our generosity and the needs of people being met continues.

In this series, I've wanted to move beyond sharing theoretical information with you and provide you with practical examples and tools. One of the ways I've tried to do that is by sharing anonymous testimonies from people at McBIC regarding what God has taught them as they've sought to be generous stewards of all God has blessed them with.

#1) When we entered Financial Peace University, we already knew we found joy in generous giving. The problem was we didn't have much to give. Going through Financial Peace University helped us gain a better long-term vision for our financial picture, and it

also helped us to prioritize and make some short-term sacrifices to achieve long-term goals. One of the pillars of FPU that we appreciated the most was that the ultimate goal in FPU is always learning how to save money and build wealth in order to give it away. It's never about just building personal wealth to be wealthy. We have not achieved all of our goals that we set in Financial Peace University, but using the skills we learned there, we have been able to increase our giving, and we continue to look forward to more opportunities for increases in the future.

#2) From our earliest years of marriage, we made a commitment to always tithe 10% of our income before we paid any of our other bills. Many times, it was not easy with raising a family and all the financial responsibilities that goes along with that. But in staying true to our commitment, our children learned that we valued stewardship of our finances over giving in to personal wants that never really satisfy. Through the years, we found that God showed his favor to us many times with unexpected blessings, such as family trips through job connections and numerous material gifts that we could use for fun family activities. When it came time for college tuitions and other major expenses, we looked at our limited income and wondered how we would be able to afford it all, but we were always amazed at God's faithfulness and how he provided for all our needs.

In more recent years as our income has increased to the point where we have more income than we need, God has impressed on us the privilege we have to give generously to the church, people around us who are in need, and organizations that reflect our passions and values of helping others and sharing the gospel.

We have found great joy in being able to trust God to provide our needs and to give generously to others and watch the many ways God works through his people to accomplish his purposes on the earth. Remember, you can never outgive God!

Thanks to all of you who have willingly shared your testimonies with us. They've been very helpful!

I think it's important for me to acknowledge my understanding that these messages have been difficult for some of you because of the challenging financial circumstances you find yourselves currently in. It's hard to think about being generous and giving to the church or to bless others when you're maxed out of credit and struggling to meet monthly bills. I've mentioned Derek Mauldin and Shawn Greenland, two of our church board members who do a phenomenal job overseeing our church finances, and who in their professional lives are committed to helping people grow as stewards as well. We're blessed with many people in our church family with strong financial acumen and a heart for Jesus who could provide practical help.

I also want to mention Bob and Betty Lehman, long time members of McBIC, who have helped dozens of individuals and couples in our church family make plans to create a budget, get out of debt, and get on the path toward good stewardship. For the past 20 years or so, I've recommended couples I meet with for pre-marriage counseling to meet with Bob and Betty. If you'd like to connect with any of those folks, feel free to reach out to me or our Office Administrator, Sherry Selkirk, or any of those folks directly. You've also heard a number of the people who shared testimonies reference Dave Ramsey's course, Financial Peace University. McBIC has hosted that course in the past, and the course is routinely hosted by other churches. That has been a great resource for thousands of people across our country.

Each week in this series, I've been highlighting a cultural trend I've noticed in my role as a pastor. A trend I've noticed at McBIC—and pastors I know from other churches have confirmed seeing this in their churches as well—is that people are very responsive to special offerings but not nearly as enthusiastic about regularly giving to meet the ongoing needs of their local church. In September, I invited two local BIC pastors and a financial person or two from their board to meet with me and our treasurer Derek Mauldin to talk about the trends we've been experiencing and to brainstorm what steps we might take. We didn't necessarily come up with clear solutions, but I left that meeting convinced I need to do a better job helping people understand the connection between their weekly/monthly giving and McBIC's mission.

I don't think it's a coincidence that this tendency for churches to struggle in their weekly general fund offerings has become more pronounced since the pandemic in 2020. At McBIC, our

staff and ministry leaders have been very diligent about minimizing our ministry expenses in 2020 and in the ensuing years. As a result, the budget our church board is proposing for 2024 will be 8% less than it was four years ago. As the reality of the pandemic hit us followed by the economic volatility of the past few years, we committed to doing all we could to maintain a high level of ministry while reducing our expenses. Many churches had to severely limit, if not shut down, vital ministries, including ministries to children and teens. In some cases, those ministries have continued to struggle or have even been discontinued. I was so pleased by the way our staff forged ahead in finding creative ways to continue to minister to people of all ages, even though ministry looked different for the better part of a year. I'm especially thankful to what Pastor Susan, Pastor Hersh and I call our "younger staff." I know, basically that means we're all getting older. 😊 Pastor Cindy Agoncillo did a great job in expanding our online ministry. It was so timely that she had joined our staff in September 2019. Pastors Jen, Evan and Cody did great work in continuing to pastor children, students, parents and volunteer leaders. Each of them were very attuned to the challenges of trying to do ministry safely during a pandemic, but they didn't let that slow them down. At one point, our teens even had a sleepout event. I'm convinced that our younger staff members' resilience in ministering in tough circumstances is why their ministries are thriving today.

The longer I've served as McBIC's Lead Pastor, the more I've become aware that our church's ministry is frontline ministry-focused. Frontline ministry-focused may not be a great description, but it's the best I could come up with. Let me explain what I mean by the phrase "frontline ministry." First, our staffing philosophy has a strong focus on pastoral ministry to people. McBIC has seven pastors. That's a sizeable number for a church with an attendance of 400 people. Our staff includes pastors for children's ministry and for middle school and high school ministry. Our children's and youth pastors—Jen, Evan and Cody—don't just pastor the students and the parents in their ministries; they pastor our entire church.

One of the learnings I gained during COVID was how important it is to have all of our pastors engaged in our worship services assisting with greeting people, preaching, prayer and caregiving. Another facet of what I've labelled as a focus on front line-ministry is that we're blessed with high-capacity teams of volunteers who oversee our finances, care for our facility

and grounds, organize caregiving through our Bible Fellowship Groups and through a Care Ministry, and provide leadership for our formational prayer ministry. These volunteers do amazing ministry, and they're supported by our staff. We choose to do ministry this way rather than contracting that work out.

Another facet of our focus on frontline ministry is that McBIC manages all we do with minimal dollars invested in support staff. There have been seasons in our church since I've been lead pastor where we had three full-time office staff. For the past several years, we've had one full-time office staff supported by Pastor Cindy Agoncillo, who oversees communication. Recently our board approved the hire of a part-time Administrative Assistant, who is now assisting our Office Administrator Sherry Selkirk in the office, but the ratio of our support staff to pastoral staff demonstrates the emphasis we place on ministry to people. As we seek to connect your giving with our church's mission, I believe it's important for you to understand where our focus is in terms of staffing as we seek to lead our church family well.

Dave Ramsey, a well-known speaker, author, and the founder of Financial Peace University, uses an illustration I find very helpful. Ramsey notes that we can approach stewardship in one of two ways: with a closed fist or with an open hand.



A closed fist is a natural response when we're feeling insecure or vulnerable financially, but the close fist not only doesn't allow us to give to and bless others, but it also limits what we're able to receive from God. In contrast, the open hand is generous and giving to others and is able to freely receive God's blessing as well. God's heart for each of us and for our McBIC

church family is that we would have open hands. Without actually using the image of our hands, the Scripture passage we read earlier speaks to that image.

Those of us who are parents know that being a parent is a wonderful blessing in many ways, not the least of which is what parenting children teaches us about our Heavenly Father and our relationship with Him. Having your kids start to drive can be nerve-wracking for parents, but there are also blessings that come with it. Older children who drive can transport their younger siblings around so that mom and dad don't always have to be the full-time taxi drivers. After my son turned 16, he bought a car for a good deal from his aunt. Since he had a car, we frequently asked him to help us out by driving his younger sister to and from sports practice and to church for youth group. I noticed that when we asked him to do this, he would typically take our car, rather than his own, so he could use our gas and save the wear and tear on his own vehicle. After I noticed this, I initiated a conversation with him and told him I'd observed him using our car when we asked him to transport his sister. I told him that it concerned me he was doing this, because it demonstrated a scarcity mindset rather than trust in us. I assured him that if he used his own car rather than ours, we'd make sure that he was more than reimbursed for the gas he used and the wear and tear on his car. For me, the parallel with my relationship with God and how I handle my wealth and possessions was clear (and I probably preached a mini-sermon to him 😊). All I have is God's, and as I generously steward all He's given Greta and me, He'll make sure we're cared for and that our needs are met. In Dave Ramsey's language, will we choose to approach our stewardship with closed fists or open hands? I'd like to close our time today by re-reading some of the verses from 2 Corinthians chapter 9 that I read earlier.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work

You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved

yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

– 2 Corinthians 9:6, 8, 11–15