

“TITHING”

2 Corinthians 9:7 and others

INTRODUCTION

Everywhere you turn you are encouraged to buy bigger and better; newer and to upgrade to the better option. Late night TV info-mercials boast about ways to get rich quick. We have the lottery and sweepstakes drawings – all enticing us with another way to get rich. We can’t get enough...stuff...or cash.

Geico sells car insurance and markets their insurance by appealing to you and I have more cash. They’ve even personified money for us.

Our culture says money is what matters. Culture claims money gives power and prestige. Culture claims money makes you important. Money gives safety and security. Money enables you to have no fears. Money gives happiness and health. If you have enough money you’ll be satisfied and able to get out of any trouble.

Q: Why is it that so often those with the most money have the wrecked lives?

The Bible teaches us that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. When we allow money to guide our lives we are in for a train wreck. Pastor and author Rick Warren explains,

“If you don’t learn to manage your money it’s going to manage you.” – Rick Warren

If we want to experience change in life we need to develop some good habits in regards to our money.

We have been in a series we’re calling, “H.A.B.I.T.S. That Will Change Your Life.” Take your copy of the Scripture and join me in 2 Corinthians 9:7. 2 Corinthians is the 7th book of the New Testament. This verse will serve as a launching pad this morning as we discuss how the habit of *tithing* will change our lives. Maybe at this point you’re thinking, “Oh, great! I hate this subject!”

Maybe you think churches talk too much about money or all you can think of are televangelists or church leaders who have lacked financial integrity. Maybe you don’t like the subject of money because you don’t have enough of it.

You might have already concluded with me this morning that tithing sure will change your life. *“Do you realize how much tighter our budget will be, Cleveland?” “Do you know what we’re*

going to have to give up?” Maybe you already have financial burdens and you think, *“There’s no way I can give to the church even if I wanted to.”* Tithing is a tough topic for sure.

The word, ‘tithe,’ literally means tenth. In the Old Testament, the tithe referred to God’s people giving the first 10% of their gross income to God to fund the ministry of the priests. Actually if you added all the tithes and other offerings required of God’s people it would result in over 25% of a family’s income. The Bible says,

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” – Malachai 3:10 (NIV)

In the NT financial giving among God’s people is focused more on grace, generosity, and the heart...not simply a percentage. The decision isn’t how much of your money you will give God; it’s how much of His money you will keep for yourself.

While we who follow Christ are not required to give a certain percentage today, we are called to give cheerfully. For God’s people, 10% should be the floor, not the ceiling, a place to begin, not a place to end. Basically, this morning, let’s define **TITHING**

as:

CHEERFUL & GENEROUS GIVING TO GOD

Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 9:7.

“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” – 2 Corinthians 9:7

So with those words in mind this morning, let’s discover how to be a cheerful giver. First, *I’m a cheerful giver when I recognize that...*

1. GOD’S PROVISION IS PLENTY

The apostle Paul lived this out. In Philippians 4 he wrote,

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” – Philippians 4:12 (NIV)

Being content is recognizing all that God has given to me is more than I need. When I realize everything I have is on loan from God then I realize I have plenty. We must learn to be content with what we have.

God is the source of all our stuff. You and I can be led to believe that money is our money. We're reminded in the Scripture to...

“...remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” – Deuteronomy 8:18b (NIV)

From the first book of the Scripture we learn that we were put on this earth for one reason and that is to manage, to take care of God's creation. He is the owner, we are the manager.

Here is what we tend to do, though. We kind of get the roles reversed. We begin to manage God's creation. We begin to kind of run this thing and we suddenly think, hey, it's mine. I am going to take it. I am going to be selfish. But God says we must remember our place.

And when we forget it can take the smile right off our face when we're giving. It's tricky in our world because there's always something we have our eyes on that costs money.

In a cemetery in England, there are tombstones side by side of a husband and wife. Her tombstone reads: *“She died wanting more.”* His reads: *“He died trying to give her more.”*

This idea of contentment and being satisfied has never been clearer to me than some of the people I've met over the years in San Francisco.

People like Mike who has only the clothes on his back and sleeps in his sleeping bag in a doorway every night. I've talked with Mike for 3 consecutive years. Mike is a follower of Jesus Christ and he said to me this year, “What else could I really want?” I'm living, get food, and have clothing.

Mike gets what the Scripture teaches in 1 Timothy 6...

“For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” – 1 Timothy 6:7-8 (NIV)

But maybe for you it's not the case of material needs that have your attention. It's the climbing piles of bills. Maybe there's just too much month left at the end of your money.

Singer (and I guess, theologian) Cheryl Crow explains this in her song *Soak up the Sun*,

***I don't have digital
I don't have diddly squat
It's not having what you want
It's wanting what you've got***

To be a cheerful giver we must recognize that what God has provided for us in life is plenty. Now, it's possible that for some your finances are stressed or maybe even out of control.

Our church offers a great class called, “Financial Peace University.” This class addresses the secret of being content. You will gain practical, biblical steps to help you get a handle on the finances (including debt if you have it). The result is that you smile when giving generously because your finances are not like a runaway train.

A new launch of this class is on August 29th with a special one week preview August 22nd. To register please find the brochure on “Groups @ Grace” in your worship program.

Not only has God provided the stuff in my life, but God's ultimate provision for us is spiritual. He provides us with forgiveness from our sin by His son Jesus Christ's death on the cross. When we recognize our need for forgiveness because of trying to live life our own way and receive God's forgiveness and leadership in life, it changes us.

We can't help but be people of gratitude because God provides payment for our ultimate debt. When we choose to become a

follower of Jesus Christ we learn to be satisfied with all that God provides for us in Jesus. We can't help but become a giver.

To be a cheerful giver I must recognize that God's provision is plenty. *But I must also recognize that...*

2. GOD'S HEART IS PLEASED

God loves a cheerful giver. That means God is blessed when you give with a smile on your face and joy in your heart. Perhaps this idea is even more clearly expressed by Paul in Philippians 4:18.

Paul was a missionary who had repeatedly been the recipient of generous gifts from this church. The Philippians were giving to support Paul's efforts. So Paul, describing the gifts, says,

“They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.” – Philippians 4:18b (NIV)

Paul is using terminology that comes from the Old Testament. The words *offering* and *sacrifice* reference a system where animals were offered to God as acts of worship. In the OT we read God's expectations for making sacrifices and offerings. When the worshipper obeys God's expectations for the sacrifice we read phrases like...

“...an aroma pleasing to the LORD.” - Leviticus 1:9c

That phrase is repeated many times in the book of laws for the sacrifices. It's the book of Leviticus. We don't have to sacrifice animals anymore because of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. When we give to God from an attitude of gratitude, we reveal our love for God and He is pleased. Even though money is essentially odorless, when offered to God it is a pleasing aroma to Him.

Being a cheerful giver reveals my love for God who has provided me with everything I need. Giving cheerfully says, “I love God.”

What if, after this service, I walked up to you and in casual conversation said, "You know what? I like golf. I really love golf." And you would begin to talk to me a little bit and say, "Well, Nick, do you ever spend any money on golf?" And what if I said, "A couple of dollars now and then, that's about it." Then you would say, "Well, Nick, do you ever play golf or watch golf on television?" "Oh, no not really. I don't." And you would think to yourself, “Is this guy nuts?

You'd expect me to put my money where my mouth is right?

The Bible says where our money is our heart is there. The same is true in our giving. When we give out of an overflow of what's

been given recognizing nothing is ours anyways, God is pleased and smiles at our offering.

God doesn't need our money. He is not some cosmic cash register. He's not saying, “Give me your money. I will take some from you, some from you, some from this church and I will invest it here and there and yonder.”

God owns it all. He is our creator, our sustainer. He doesn't need our money. Jesus reminded us to,

“[But] seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” – Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

God is saying to us, “I want you – people that I love, people that matter to Me – to give as a reminder that I am first place in your life. When you do that my heart is pleased.”

To be a cheerful giver we must recognize that God's provision is plenty, His heart is pleased, and finally, *I'm a cheerful giver when I recognize that...*

3. GOD'S PLAN IS PRIMARY

When we give cheerfully we get the benefit of partnering with God to accomplish His purposes on earth. Giving to the local church allows me to multiply my influence in that partnership.

Q: What is God’s plan?

God’s plan for our present time was given to us by Jesus. He tells us what He wants to accomplish in Matthew 28:19, where the mission is as simply stated as,

“...go and make disciples of all nations...” – Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

I love going to a football game that has great significance – like when a championship is on the line. One team will walk off the field chanting, “We’re number 1!” I love wearing these foam fingers – letting my allegiance be known. I think my team is the priority!

God’s plan right now is that fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ are established throughout the world. That is God’s number one priority in 2010! It should be our first priority too!

We who follow Christ have the divine responsibility of living on mission to make disciples of all nations. Our mission is our service to those who do not know Christ yet as we live each and

every day here in Wayne County. God’s plan for Wayne County is primary.

When you cheerfully give to this church it impacts our community. Your generous gifts help keep the lights on, the toilet paper stocked, minister to families, and take care of our staff. By giving above and beyond to projects like People Matter you help us pave the parking lot and address ministries needs like AVL. Your gifts help us keep God’s plan of life changing hope found in Jesus Christ primary.

Listen, we are so thankful for your continued faithfulness to the work God is doing through Wooster Grace. When I think of how generous you have been the words of Paul come to mind from Philippians 1:4-5...

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,” – Philippians 1:3-5

But there’s more. You see, God is a global God. He has always cared about the entire world. The Scripture says, “*God so loved the world...*” Now I don’t know about you but my journey doesn’t typically get me to all nations. But, by giving I become a partner with others who are around the world. By giving you become part of something bigger!

You see these are exciting days to be alive. There are more followers of Christ on earth right now than ever before.

Every dollar given through the ministries of Grace contributes somehow to developing fully devoted followers of Christ here and around the world. Our church budget designates 25% of your general gifts to “outreach”. When you give this morning (or this week online) do you know what happens when you give?

- 2 Church plants in Porto, Portugal took significant steps toward maturity.
- You strengthen the outreach and leadership development in Montceau les Mines, France.
- You equip a family with skills to share the hope of Jesus in the Chad
- You offer the message of hope was presented to those in Canada with the newest church plan in Alberta.
- You allow dozens more people in Prague in the Czech Republic were made aware of the person of Jesus Christ.
- You empower leaders of the church in Brazil to continue to carry on the work for Christ!

- National leaders in Battambang, Cambodia were further trained to make a living with a small business in order to give priority to God’s plan of sharing Christ.
- You are rescuing children in our orphanages in Cambodia & Thailand where you feed, cloth, and teach children from the Scriptures.
- You send teams to serve Americans in New Mexico, native and otherwise, were given opportunity to hear the good news of Jesus. And we have a team from Grace there who in a few hours will be responsible for the morning services where they will share the hope found in Jesus Christ!

And there’s even more, but I think you get the point, right? This picture is a clear reminder of Colossians 1:6 which says,

“This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world...changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God’s wonderful grace.” – Colossians 1:6 (NLT)

Giving cheerfully recognizes God’s plan is primary and your influence around the world is multiplied.

To be a cheerful giver we must recognize that when we give, God’s provision is plenty, God’s heart is pleased, and God’s plan is primary.

CONCLUSION

You know there are times when the thought enters my mind, *“Nick, you are giving a lot away each month. That’s a chunk of change, man.”* Then, of course, the ways I could have spent that money enter my mind.

At that moment I remind myself to look at what’s being done with that money! How can I put a price tag on orphans cared for and lives changed? That influence will last forever. Jesus reminded us that...

“And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?” – Matthew 16:26a (NLT)

Q: What would you give to provide the best health care for someone close to you?

Money is no object right? The value of the human soul exceeds the monetary worth of the entire world.

The cost of the Student Ministries Center was \$5 million. We are still making monthly payments on it through your faithful giving to the Touching Tomorrow campaign. According to that verse, the SMC has paid for itself many times over. It paid for itself last Sunday when a 14 year old young lady placed her faith in Jesus Christ for the first time! Since we opened the doors, many people have come to faith through the ministries in it!

You see Jesus was basically telling us to:

GIVE AWAY WHAT GOES AWAY TO KEEP WHAT NEVER WILL!