

Gratitude of the Heart

October 31, 2021

Youth and Adult Bible Study. . . Mark Bethea and Kenny Hoomes

“As each has received a gift use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” – 1 Peter 4:10

Background Passages

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Focal Passages

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Central Bible Truth

Gratitude fuels our generosity including our time, talents, and treasure.

Teaching Aim

To help learners commit their time, talents, and treasure to God and His Kingdom’s work.

Teaching Outline

Gratitude of the Heart

- Are We Planting? 2 Corinthians 9:6
- Giving Reveals and Refines Our Hearts 2 Corinthians 9:7
- God is The Source 2 Corinthians 9:8
- Gratitude Fuels Our Generosity 2 Corinthians 9:9-11

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Youth/Adult Bible Fellowship Lesson
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Introduction

When we look back over the past twenty months, we are reminded of what God has brought us through. COVID has had an unprecedented impact on our world, our nation, and our church. In addition, over the past several weeks, we have been cleaning, restoring, and reassembling from the arson attack on our church. During these daunting days, let me ask, is there a better time for us to be grateful? Is gratitude of the heart being expressed as we thank God for what didn't happen?

Today here at First Baptist Church we are beginning our 2021 Stewardship Emphasis as we prepare to commit ourselves to not only pledging our budget, but also committing our time, our talents, and our treasures to the LORD. Stewardship is a matter of the heart as we express our gratitude to God. All that will be accomplished over the coming weeks is for His glory!

So, as we study God's Word together this day, I want to circle our efforts on this idea of gratitude. Gratitude spills over to so many avenues of our hearts and lives. We need to have an attitude of gratitude over us every day of our lives. And so, as we enter this stewardship season, we want to thank God for His steadfast love that continues from generation to generation. That's our heart, that's our hope, that's our goal, that we will be overwhelmed with gratitude and that all that is done is for His glory!

With this attitude in mind let's spend a few minutes together studying Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth. Together we can discover how to express gratitude of the heart for what God has done for us. Our focal passage is taken from 2 Corinthians 9:6-11.

Are We Planting? (2 Corinthians 9:6)

"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

Paul draws upon the universal principle that we cannot expect to reap what we do not sow. If you sow sparingly there will be very little return for your efforts. However, if you sow much there will be much gathered in return.

Imagine that I am showing you a flowerpot and sharing with you that in about a month, I expect flowers to be bursting forth from this pot. Yet, you discover there is a problem, the flowerpot is empty. How can I expect flowers to grow from an empty pot? It is necessary that I plant the flowers. This flowerpot requires soil, seeds and a nurturing hand to bring forth flowers. Right?

Relate the above illustration to parenting. God has blessed Brittany and me with three beautiful children. Suppose I said to my son . . . “Micah, you’re five years old now, you are on your own, you can make it . . . go figure it out.” Would such a statement from a dad to his child be insane? Absolutely! It would be insane for me not to share with him what God has done in my life, and what He has planned for Micah’s life. For the flower of faith to blossom in his life, I must make the investment of faith in him. These truths of God’s Word must be planted and nurtured for Micah to become the man God desires.

In your own life, let me ask the question again, “Are you planting?” Are you investing seeds of the gospel in the lives of those people around you? This is a critical issue. We are often guilty of assuming we and those we encounter will become spiritual giants and yet, we do nothing to assist in their spiritual nurture. Friend, let me remind you of Paul’s words in Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

There has been no other time in my life where I have seen this law of the harvest illustrated better than in the life of my mother. We were gathered as a family at UAB when we received the news that she had pancreatic cancer and it had advanced very far. The two doctors that shared this news stated that without any treatments she would be expected to live only 3-6 months. In the midst of such devastating news, I watched as a smile appeared on my mom’s face and there was a peace that surpassed all understanding. Now, was that something that was fabricated at that moment? No. She had years and years of sowing seeds of gospel truth into her heart and into her soul. She had years and years of investing into a body of believers so that when the time came, when she was met with terrible news, she was prepared and trusted in Jesus. She knew she was surrounded with people that loved her and that trusted in Jesus too! And because of years and years of planting she walked this difficult valley. Oh, my friends, I’m afraid in our own lives we have not invested in planting, and we wait and wait for these flowers in an empty pot to bloom. So, let me ask one final time, “Are you planting?” As you look over the landscape of your life, how are you planting? How are you investing in God’s Kingdom Garden with your time, talents, and treasure? How are you planting and what are you planting?

Giving Reveals and Refines our Hearts (2 Corinthians 9:7)

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

The decision to give begins in our hearts. As we look inwardly into our hearts and we ask, “Lord, what is it that You want me to give” we seek carefully, and lovingly for an answer. As we enter this season of stewardship, we are not asking that you give a “flippant” response. We are asking that you prayerfully and carefully decide what God would have you give and how you should respond. Each of us should go through the process of verse seven deciding, “Lord what are you calling me to do?” As we accomplish this process, the internal reflection reveals and refines our hearts. Suddenly what He has done for us far outweighs our material possessions. The desire for each of us should include releasing the idols in our hearts of money, time, and possessions. Our goal is to be reminded of Jesus’ words, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” – Matthew 6:21.

Gratitude of the heart involves a willingness to give not under compulsion or in reluctance. God is not in the cosmos saying, “You gotta do this, or do this or, else..”, but rather He desires that we willingly give and from a merry heart.

I’m reminded that about twelve years ago, I had decided to ask Brittany to marry me. She was the girl of my dreams and we had dated for seven years. As I searched for an engagement ring, I discovered they were expensive! Now, I’ve also been somewhat of an investor and particularly in the world of technology. At the time I had purchased stock in NVIDA a small up and coming company. I went to my broker, and without hesitation sold the stock to purchase the engagement ring. The other day, I went online and looked, that particular stock has risen some 1200% since I sold it. But, in my heart of hearts, I would do it all over again because I know Brittany was worth every one of the dollars that I was giving up, she was worth it! Even then, I didn’t sell reluctantly, or because she was telling me it was time after seven years of dating. NO! It was a joy filled transaction to sell that stock. We give joyfully, cheerfully, because of His great love for us. Our attitude of giving makes all the difference in the world. Why? Because God is the source.

God is the Source (2 Corinthians 9:8)

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

This is the central reality here, God is the source, He is the giver of all good gifts, He blesses, and He has sufficiency in all things. Some translations even say it this way, “You’ll have what you need to be generous for others.” Because we have been given

much, we give. Because we have plenty, we give. We give to bring joy to our very lives and to be a blessing to others. Notice again verse eight, God gives us “all grace...all sufficiency...all things...at all times...in every good work.” He has blessed us to be a blessing to others, God is our source! All that we have is His already, He has simply allowed us to be a steward of those things and to use them for His Kingdom’s efforts.

We must recognize here, God is the source of all, even those small and seemingly insignificant things in our lives. The provisions He has provided, along with His mercies are new every morning, great is His faithfulness. When we live and give in this manner, we increase in our appreciation and humility on a daily basis.

Gratitude Fuels our Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:9-11)

“As it is written, ‘He fully distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.”

As we recognize where our gifts come from, it should lead us immensely towards gratitude, which even further fuels our hearts for generosity. The psalmist reminds us, “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever” - Psalm 107:1. We remember and we are grateful. In all things and at all times, gratitude fuels our generosity. If there is a time when you are not feeling generous, ask yourself if you are grateful for what God has done for you. Gratitude of the heart produces generosity.

I’m reminded of the parable of the forgiven debt found in Matthew 18:21-35. One man is forgiven a very large debt and instead of being joyful and forgiving to others seeks out a man that owes him a very small debt. He is then unwilling to grant the same mercy that was given to him in forgiving his large debt. When the king hears this news, he is very angry and responds with just punishment. My friend don’t be like the unforgiving man in the parable. Allow a spirit of thanksgiving and gratefulness to invade your heart and change your spirit. Look around you and take stock of how God’s blessings have been given to you. If you struggle with a generous heart, examine your gratitude to the Lord for all He has done for you. Spend time in prayer reflecting on these questions... (1) Do I have a generous heart? (2) Do I exhibit a willing spirit? (3) Do I practice extensive gratitude? (4) Am I willing to trust God?

One last thought is that a tangible way we can practice gratitude of the heart is by participating in our Stewardship Emphasis here at First Baptist Church. For our 2021-2022 Stewardship Emphasis, prayerful planning began months ago. Now after much prayer, thought, and counting the cost, our church has approved our 2022 budget of \$6,905,000.

For many if not most, a commitment card feels uncomfortable. Yet, it is simply one small way we can count the cost of discipleship and commit our time, talent, and treasure to the One who has given all to us and all for us. For our Stewardship Emphasis to be a success, prayerful planning must proceed to the next right step of obedience, rather than our natural inclinations. Remember the words of scripture, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” – 1 Peter 4:10.