

3G

Lesson Fifteen: Giving

We are nearing the end of the 3rd G. This last G stands for Go. In the last lesson we talked about how God has gifted each of us and commanded us to serve one another and those who are outside of the faith. In this lesson, we are going to explore the topic of money and how we can use it to invest in things that matter for eternity.

It's A Team Effort

What is your favorite sport? _____ Basketball has always been my favorite sport. Basketball is all about the team. We often think of the great players. Players like Magic Johnson, Lebron James, Larry Bird, and Kobe Bryant. But without a team playing with them they are nothing.

Consider Michael Jordan. He is the greatest to ever play the game ever, but he didn't start winning championships until the Chicago Bulls started assembling a competent team around him. And Michael had to learn to trust and utilize his teammates to accomplish the goal of winning a title.

And in much the same way, you and I have been called to partner together to accomplish the mission that God has given to us. No, we aren't called to win a sporting championship, but to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus. And we can't do that alone. So how can we reach the world?

Crazy Generous

We reach the world through our generous giving. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul uses a poor church in Macedonia to teach us a powerful lesson on giving. Let's start with verses 1 and 2, "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality."

Paul begins this chapter by using the Christians in Macedonia as an example of generous giving. But what kind of church was this that was so generous? Complete these phrases from verse 2. "...in a great trial _____
_____..." "...and their deep _____..."

These Christians were the poorest of the poor and yet they gave very generously. We make all kinds of excuses for why we can't or shouldn't give, but the Macedonian believers didn't do that. They were going through all this stuff, and yet they were very generous!

He describes their generosity in 2 Corinthians 8:3, "For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;" They gave and they gave sacrificially. They gave beyond what was logical. Beyond what made sense to other people. Some people aren't going to understand your generosity and that's ok. Don't let that deter you from giving in such a way that pleases God and helps others.

Join Hands

These people were so poor that they had to beg Paul to take their gift. Notice what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:4, "Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."

They were so insistent because they wanted to partner together with Paul to reach more people with the gospel of Jesus. That's what the phrase, "take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." means. It is a partnering together.

I like to use the illustration of joining hands. Imagine two people that are twenty feet apart. How can we connect them without either one moving from where they are? What we need are people who can come alongside and join hands until the two are connected. They have to partner together to accomplish the mission. And that is exactly what we do when we give.

We partner together to reach people right in our own community. When you give and people trust Jesus here, you have a part in that. We partner together to reach people all around the world by giving to missions. We join hands with men and women all over the globe to reach those who are outside of the faith. And every time that someone trusts Jesus in any of these places, you have a part in that when you give.

Invest!

But how could these poor Christians in Macedonia be so giving? That is a great question and one that Paul answers in 2 Corinthians 8:5, "And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

What did they give first? _____

And that is the secret to their generosity, they gave themselves to God first. Have you ever given your life to God? _____ I'm not talking about trusting Jesus as your Savior. I'm talking about surrendering your life completely to Him. A full surrender that says, "Lord, wherever you want me to go, I will go. Whatever you want me to do, I will do. Whatever you want me to give, I will give."

When we give ourselves to God fully, it's not really a big deal for us to give Him our money, our talents and abilities, our time and everything else. But how can we know if we have really given ourselves to God? Jesus gave us a test to figure it out. The same phrase is used in two separate accounts of Jesus' life. Luke 12:34 says, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6 says exactly the same thing, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

The first thing that I want you to notice about these verses is what they do not say. They do not say that where your heart is there your treasure will be also. It says where your treasure is there will your heart be also. In other words, we can look at where we spend our money and it will show us where are hearts really are.

For instance, if I invest heavily in Apple stock, my heart is going to be with Apple. I will want to see them succeed so that I can make money! Our wallet shows where our hearts are located. I could sit down with you and have you pull up your bank records online and based upon that I could tell what the most important things in your life are. And you could do the same with me.

If money can show us where are hearts really are, that also means that I can use my money to change my heart. Let's go back to the apple stocks. Let's say that we sell off all of our apple stocks and decide to invest them in Microsoft. Which company are we going to hope does well? _____ Why? _____

Because that's the company that I am invested in. Many times, our hearts aren't close to God because I'm not invested in God. Many times, we feel distant from the church because we aren't invested in the church. If you want that to change, Jesus has given us the formula to change that. Start investing today!

Grow In Generosity

Some of us are invested, but Jesus wants us to grow in our generosity. Now Paul wants the Corinthians to apply the example of the Macedonians. Look at 2 Corinthians 8:6-7, "Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

The word grace in verse 1 and here is in reference to their giving. They didn't give based upon worth or merit, it was grace. Paul commends these believers for their faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence, and their love for Paul, but they hadn't grown in the area of generosity.

All of us need to grow in generosity as well. We could all give more to God. We could all give more to reach others, both in our own community and around the world. You ought to be able to look back over this past year and say that I am a more generous person today than I was yesterday.

Now Paul wants to clarify something for us in 2 Corinthians 8:8, "I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love." Notice what Paul tells them. I'm not commanding you to give, but I do want to share with you what others have done and how God has used them.

He doesn't command them, because God isn't in the arm-twisting business. 2 Corinthians 9:7 shows us how God wants us to give, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." We are to give with purpose. And we are to give cheerfully. Not because I have to, but because I want to. You should have a desire to give.

Notice the second half of 2 Corinthians 8:8, "I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love." Paul says that giving proves that your love is true. True love gives! And Jesus proved that!

Jesus is our example and look what He did in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. Jesus set the example for us. He was willing to give everything for you! Including His life!

Conclusion

What about you? Are you holding back from Him? Or are you giving Him everything that you have? The first thing that you need to give to Jesus is yourself. Jesus, I surrender my life to you!

Once we surrender our lives to Him, it's not such a big deal to give Him our money, our time, our talents and abilities. God is a generous God, and He wants you to be generous too!

On a scale of 1, not invested to 10, very invested, how would you rate your generosity in reaching people in our community and around the world? _____ What is holding you back from being even more generous than you are right now? _____