



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

In God We Trust

Generosity #Grace #Stewards #Thatblessedlife,
2 Corinthians 9:6–15
Steve Lombardo | February 25, 2018



When I was around 27 years old, I became a senior pastor of a church. I say “senior pastor” because I was the only pastor and I just wanted everybody to call me senior pastor. It felt good. So when I took the pastorate position in a country church, I felt like I had some sweet spots in some areas of preaching. I loved to preach the gospel and call people to repentance. I mean, it’s the best news ever that you can be forgiven for all your sin—not only past and present sin, but future sin—because God loves you and died on the cross for your sin. It’s Jesus. It’s the gospel message. I loved the message and I loved to preach it.

I also liked to talk about apologetics, to share with people that there are reasons to believe that what is in the Bible is true. Jesus was a real person Who died in Jerusalem and rose from the dead on the third day. There are reasons to believe that.

Today I enjoy preaching through books of the Bible and speaking to the culture we find ourselves in, considering how we are to live and make an impact in our day and age. Are we to be people who simply resist, pushing culture away and keeping our families behind closed doors? Are we to stay in our little holy huddles? Or are we to be out in the world, mixing it up with people and creating a new Christ culture in the world? I would say the last option is the right one.

But one of the areas I very rarely preached about was this matter of money. I think there were a couple of different reasons behind that. First, I didn’t have a lot of money at the time, so I didn’t feel like I had the experience to talk about it with much authority. We also had a lot of debt and that made it hard for me to speak with confidence. By the way, we have paid down a massive amount of debt, but let me just tell you that we still have student loan debt. I’m 40 years old and we’re still under the weight of student loan debt. As the Bible says, we are slaves to the lender. So please talk to me, young person, if you’re thinking about going to college and graduate school (which I did) and I’ll give you some advice. Okay?

The second reason I didn’t like to talk about money was that I witnessed many abuses of preaching about money in the church. I grew up seeing preachers on television asking for money, purchasing their own private jets, then talking to the little grandmothers for more money—all with their diamond cuff links and gold chains. with their wives all decked out. (You can laugh. This is my last Sunday, so I’m letting it all out.) So I got turned off by this idea of people asking for money.

My generation grew up when the mega-churches were just rockin’ and rollin’. Those were the Baby Boomer churches. A lot of people in my generation were very skeptical about the megachurch. We doubted those massive institutions, which just seemed to have taken regular entertainment and called it Christian entertainment. Churches were spending great amounts of money for what seemed to be things designed primarily to make people feel more comfortable. Or they built bigger and bigger buildings, maybe for the sake of the lead pastor who seemed to be building a kingdom for himself. I always wondered if that was what Jesus would have done.

I don’t want to pretend I’m taking the spiritual high road here. I realize that sometimes it’s necessary to build those buildings. It’s necessary to have good facilities to take care of the things God has blessed us with. But when I thought about money in the church, these were some of the things I wrestled with—so I didn’t preach much about it.

By the way, this hasn’t been the case here at Village Bible Church. By God’s grace, we have been blessed by God and have turned that blessing over to bless others. Just think of our Indian Creek campus in the town of Shabbona, worshipping God right now and

seeing people come to know Jesus Christ. We just heard testimony of this recently. We had baptisms of those people who have come for the first time, as adults, and said, "I am a sinner. I need Jesus." They have received Jesus Christ by faith and are being changed. Pastor Phil out in Shabbona has had an impact in the local community schools. He has been there through some very tragic events that have happened, and Village Bible Church has been a part of it.

The Aurora campus continues to grow as a diverse, multi-ethnic congregation, currently translating the sermons into a couple different languages. It's pretty amazing. El Camino, which meets in Aurora as well, is the little campus which has been through so much but isn't so little anymore. For the past couple months they've been pushing 50-60-70 people, proclaiming the gospel in Spanish.

This has to do with your generosity, with our generosity as a church. We could hoard all the resources and continue to grow and invest in this place, building bigger and bigger buildings. Rather, we are investing in other locations across the Fox Valley area. That is a testimony not only to the leadership of the church, but also to the people in these congregations.

We're working on plans right now at the Plano campus to make some improvements and get the facilities ready for guests. Village could have kept its best and brightest, continuing to build right here. This message is about generosity, demonstrating to God and the watching world that we are trusting in God by our generosity. Church, you are doing it. Collectively, you are doing it. Great job! Because of the nature of our hearts, we can so quickly begin to look inward and become selfish, but even while we are doing this as a church, we have to be reminded of it on a regular basis.

Just because your church is being generous, it doesn't automatically mean that you are being generous. So we will talk about it today. Don't get nervous. "Sarah, grab your purse. The preacher's talking about money." Not in that way, but in a way that talks about generosity from the heart.

Do you know that pages of Scripture are filled with verses about money, how we handle money and about the generosity of our hearts? Jesus talked about money a lot. Sixteen of His 38 parables had to do with money and being concerned with how you handle the things God gives you. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of every ten verses deals directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, just about 500 verses on faith, and get this—more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions! Let me give you some examples from the Good News Translation:

Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal. For your heart will always be where your riches are (Matthew 6:19–21).

If you love money, you will never be satisfied; if you long to be rich, you will never get all you want. It is useless (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

And he went on to say to them all, "Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be" (Luke 12:15).

Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never leave you; I will never abandon you" (Hebrews 13:5).

You cannot be a slave of two masters; you will hate one and love the other; you will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24).

So why is this the case? Why is money a recurring theme in the Bible? Money is a big deal in the Bible because how we handle it demonstrates what we think about God and what we think about ourselves. If you really want to get to know someone, look at their checkbook, which many of us don't keep today as we're learning through the Financial Peace University. But if you look at an accurate checkbook, it is a reflection of a person's heart. Both its vices and its generousities are revealed in a checkbook. Matters of money are a great indicator of your spiritual health, especially in the place and time in which we find ourselves. In other places and at other times, Christians have had to make a stand for Christ that could possibly even mean their own death. In other cultures today people face the loss of employment, the loss of honor, the loss of friendships, the loss of family and many other losses for their belief in and their proclamation that Jesus died on the cross and that He rose again on the third day.

When you live in that type of environment, the wishy-washy and the not-truly-committed are easily identified. This is actually part of the argument for the historicity of the resurrection. Those disciples, who were once cowards and ran when Jesus was arrested, sometime later were out proclaiming that Jesus Christ was Lord, that He was risen from the dead—each one going to their own death, not recanting their beliefs. Instead of turning from this testimony, these disciples actually turned the world upside down with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now we have different cultures and communities where others are having to give their lives, which makes it really easy to see who the genuine disciples of Jesus are. But in our culture here in America in 2018, the line between authentic faith and mere intellectual assent is blurred. It's tough to tell who the real disciples are. It's tough to tell the difference between people who truly believe in Christ and are following Him and those who say they believe in Jesus but whose lives haven't been transformed. Here is one way to see that line more clearly: look at how generous they are.

If you have your Bibles, turn to 2 Corinthians 9:6–15. Let me give you a little background to this letter. It was written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. It is one of two letters we have in the New Testament written by Paul to this church, but it is clear from those letters that he wrote more letters. At least one letter we don't have is mentioned, but he might have written more than that.

The church in Corinth was a messed up church. How messed up? In 1 Corinthians 5:1 (NLT), Paul says, *"I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you—something that even pagans don't do. I am told that a man in your church is living in sin with his stepmother."* That was happening in the church and nobody cared. Things were happening in the church that would make the outside world blush. Yet it was okay in the church in Corinth? They also had conflict in this church. Paul writes them concerning different things to do in different situations, even how to handle the Lord's Supper because they were messing that up. Paul tells them to repent of their sin, cast out and discipline the one who was living in sin with his stepmother, turn back to God, be the church and be generous toward the Lord's work.

In the first four verses of 1 Corinthians 16, Paul lays out a very practical way to systematically give to the church. The first day of the week they were to come together and take a collection. Then he explains the nuts and bolts of giving. We're still passing the offering plate at Plano, and that's the nuts and bolts of giving. Pass the plate, put something in the plate. Or you can put it in the box or go on line to set up an auto draft.

Then in this text, Paul gets to the heart behind the practicalities of giving. Let's look now at 2 Corinthians 9, starting at verse six:

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 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. ⁹ As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

We show that we trust God when we are generous.

In order to be generous, we must understand #grace (verses 6–9).

We are not generous because we have to be.

Paul starts this first truth in verse six, when he says we sow, and what we sow is what we reap. This is not the prosperity gospel. This is a biblical principle that is true in every regard. We will harvest what we plant. Our actions have consequences.

Paul wrote in Galatians 6:7–8, *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."* This is the true biblical principle: what you do has consequences. What you invest in will yield a reward. What you plant will grow, then you will harvest it.

So after 2 Corinthians 9:6, many people might think, "Well, now I've got to give this much because that's what I'm supposed to do. If I want a big harvest, I have to make a big investment. So I'm going to force myself—I have to do it. I have to give." Paul goes on, *"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

Wait a minute. You're not to give because you have to and don't give if you're reluctant. So now you're thinking, "That's awesome. I don't have to give today. I'm a little bit reluctant right now." It's true that God loves a cheerful giver. Proverbs 22:9 says God blesses a cheerful and generous man. This is not a legalistic demand. This is not part of the law. There is freedom in how you give.

We are generous because God is generous.

The Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that God is sufficient for all their needs. He is rich in grace toward His people. Verse eight: *"God is able to make all grace abound to you."* God is going to take care of His people. He even supplies the need of those who have nothing to give (verse nine).

So how does God make all grace abound to you so that you will abound in every good work? Through the cross. This is His love for you. This is the gospel. If you forget everything else today, hear me on this point. You are a sinner in need of a Savior. One day you will have to answer for your sin. You can pay for your sin yourself, but it's going to take an eternity away from God to do it. But God has made a way for you to be forgiven. While you still have breath, there's hope. You haven't drifted so far that God can't save you, that He can't redeem you. As a matter of fact, you can't ever earn His love and you can't earn His grace. You can't get Him to save you. He loves you just the way you are. *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). Christ died on the cross for our sin when we were sinful and dead. *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When you come to faith in Jesus Christ and say, "I believe," you receive this gift. It's a gift that cannot be earned. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8–9). You've been saved by God's grace, and *"there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1). Are you in Christ Jesus today? Have you joined the Messiah's team? It's the winning team. Jesus paid for your sin—don't try to pay for it yourself.

We need to understand that salvation is not a work. It is not Jesus plus other things. It's only Jesus. It's only by God's grace through faith. When we get this through our thick skulls, then we will understand that in light of the generosity of God to us, then we can be generous. We're going to give to others. We're going to give to the Lord because we owe our whole lives to Him. That changes things!

Generosity comes from the heart. When we write that check, it's not with reluctance or by compulsion or because we have to; it's because we want to. We owe everything to God and His grace.

In order to be generous, we must understand #stewards.

The second word to understand is this word "steward." It's a word we don't use much anymore. A steward is a person who manages another's property or financial affairs. He is one who administers anything as an agent of others. We use the word manager. In 2 Corinthians 9:10, Paul uses an interesting phrase, *"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."*

We do not own anything; we steward what we have been given.

If I go to your house for lunch after church, and you pick up a piece of bread, I might ask, "Where did you get that bread?" You might say, "I made it." How many people make bread here? It's a fun thing to do, isn't it? It's an incredible waste of time, but it's fun. You know that Aldi has bread for something like 12 cents.

So you made your bread. What did you make it out of? "Well, my wheat." Your wheat? Who gave you the wheat? "I grew it." Keith Duff says, "I grew it." I think he's got a back yard full of wheat. (If you're new here, he's a vegan. And our lead pastor makes pork chops and chicken. It just works out somehow.)

So you have your bread that you baked—good job. You made it with your wheat that you grew in your back yard. But who gave you the seed? We're just managers. God gives us all things—all things. Yet we can be tempted to think that because of our hard work (which is good) and because of our intelligence (which is great), but even the ability to work and think comes from God Who made you.

The nation of Israel needed to be reminded of this in Deuteronomy 8:

¹¹ Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵ who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, ¹⁶ who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. ¹⁷ Beware lest you say in your heart, "My power and the might of

my hand have gotten me this wealth.”¹⁸ You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Do you have a good job? Awesome. Praise God that He gave it to you. Do you have a good house? Praise God that He’s given you a good house. Are you renting a nice place right now? Praise God that He’s supplied all your needs. Are you struggling paycheck to paycheck? Praise God—He’s keeping you humble. He’s teaching you the lesson that He is all there is.

When we give, do we think our check is going to make a difference? That’s not to say it doesn’t—it does make a difference when we give—but God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He’s going to get the job done with or without you.

The question is do you want to be part of it? Do you have generosity in your heart? Are you overflowing with a desire to participate in those things God has put before you? All too often we are like the children of Israel. There’s a reason they’re called the “children” of Israel. It’s because children very quickly forget that they’re not owners.

So then, go out to lunch today. Take your kids or grandkids to their favorite restaurant and tell them, “You can order whatever you want off the menu.” Be generous today. Then when the food comes, excuse yourself really quick—go to the bathroom or something. Then come back to little Johnny and take a chicken tender off his plate. See what he’s going to do. See what that evil little heart is going to say.

Now, you might be blessed with kids like my middle kid. If you do that, he’ll say, “That’s good, Dad. Have some more.” But you might be like my other two kids, who are like the majority of all our kids: “What are you doing? That’s my food!” They don’t understand this idea of being a steward. They don’t understand that those chicken tenders are yours because you paid for them and they’re only eating them because in your grace and love you paid for them.

But that’s what we’re prone to be like with the Lord, right? God gives us these things; so quickly we think we’re the owners. We sink our claws into the possessions around us. Like the nation of Israel, we think, “It’s because of my might and strength that I am here.” We’re rugged, individualistic Americans. That’s who we are.

We don’t own anything. It’s all God’s. We steward what we’ve been given. In Matthew 18, Jesus tells the parable of the unjust steward. It’s a story of a guy who owes a billion dollars to his boss. He goes to his master and falls on his knees. Weeping, he says, “I cannot pay this back.” And the master forgives him of his debt. Then two weeks later he goes out and sees a guy who owes him ten bucks. He throws him in jail for not giving him ten bucks. That is not a heart of generosity. That is not the heart that God calls us to have.

This truth that we are stewards brings freedom.

Why does the truth that we are stewards bring us freedom? Because we are no longer defined by what we do or do not have. We are not judged by what we do or don’t do. We are given great things from God. It comes through our work and is part of our culture, but we get to invest those resources in a way that benefits His Kingdom.

You’re not defined by what you wear. You’re not defined by the vacations you take. You’re not defined by your wealth. You’re defined first as a child of God through Jesus Christ. That’s who you are. God in His wisdom and sovereignty is going to allow you to invest in His Kingdom. He’s going to entrust you with some things in this life. But we only have a limited amount of time to manage His things for Him. How can we manage it to the best of our ability, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to make more Christians? We want people to hear the good news, that they don’t have to be lost. They don’t have to be on their way to hell. They can be saved through Jesus Christ. Their families can be healed.

The town of Plano can experience revival—and Sandwich and Yorkville and Sugar Grove and Aurora. But we only have a short time. I’m 40 years old now, and I’m feeling it. I don’t have as many years as I used to. We get to steward God’s possessions and there’s freedom in that. Let’s live as much as we can for God and give all we can for Him.

In order to be generous, we must understand #thatblessedlife.

The last word we need to understand is that “blessed life.” If you type #thatblessedlife in the Facebook search bar, you’re going to see some people who are thankful to God for what they have been given. You’re going to see some people who love Jesus Christ. But you’ll see a lot of people who are living #thatblessedlife by driving that best car, or by having that best house.

The blessed life has nothing to do with the amount of wealth.

Second Corinthians 9:11 says, *“You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.”* That blessed life does not have to do with the amount of possessions. The blessed and enriched life has to do with generosity. It is better to give than to receive.

The blessed life has everything to do with stewarding what we have been generously given.

Paul continues in verse 13, *“By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others.”* If you want to live the enriched and blessed life, steward the things God gives you in such a way that it's going to bless others, which is the generous life. Then, by God's grace, we will give of our finances. It might be benevolent giving.

I can give you examples of people at the Sugar Grove campus who have been blessed by your giving of benevolence offerings. There are individuals and families who have been taken care of when they really needed help—and you blessed them through your giving of your finances.

Last year was a record-setting year of giving, which allowed this body of Christ to be built up and equipped to take on a new campus in Plano. That's a big deal. You can talk about it being a big deal in two ways. It's a big deal that a group of people would sign over their building, their land, all their checking and savings accounts to say, *“It's yours. Let's do this thing. Let's be the church. We're with you.”* That's a big deal. But it's also a big deal on the other side, because it's expensive to do ministry. Now we have another campus to think about. We're now a church in five locations. That's a big deal—but that's the generous life. We're giving to God out of what we've been given from Him to make a difference for His Kingdom. That's an amazing thing.

We also give of our time and gifts, to serve and be deployed. It's part of our discipleship model: *“To discover disciples, to develop disciples and to deploy disciples.”* We had a fantastic annual meeting on Friday night out in the foyer. I had the opportunity and honor to give a blessing, a gift, to someone in our church on whom we put a volunteer spotlight—Rainy Abbott. A lot of you might not know Rainy. She works behind the scenes, lining up people for First Impressions at the Welcome Center. She makes sure people are handing out bulletins. Then she takes meticulous notes. She does all this because she remembers when she first came through these doors that she was made to feel welcome. She experienced the love of Jesus in this place. She thought, *“This is incredible. This is a cool place. God is here. I've been ministered to. So you know what? I can do the same thing. I might not have all the gifts or abilities, but I have some administrative abilities. I can plug people into strategic places so new people coming in will feel the love of Jesus just like I did.”* She has poured years into service to the Lord out of a generous heart.

Generosity. God's grace is the foundation. It leads us to understand that we're not owners—we're stewards—so that we can give of ourselves for the glory of God and for the sake of His name.