**1 Corinthians 16:1-2** October 21, 2018

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*1 Corinthians 16:1 Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

Dear Fellow Recipients of God’s Undeserved Love,

Have you been down to the far end of Lincoln Trail in the last couple weeks? It is a mess! Earth movers crossing the road, police cars with lights on parked out there during work hours. It makes a dangerous intersection downright scary! I haven’t asked what they’re doing. I’d guess that they are widening the road to four lanes and maybe even putting in a new overpass. I wonder if this is how it happened: One day, a bunch of guys with nothing better to do just showed up with some heavy equipment at a Vine Grove city council meeting and told them to let ’em have a go at it and see what happened. Actually, I am 100% sure that is *not* what happened. There were drawings and reviews and meetings. Those guys with equipment big enough to turn monster trucks into scrap iron have plans so detailed that they know where to dig and deposit the dirt to within a couple inches.

It happens on a smaller scale, too. The kid who graduates *valedictorian* didn’t get there by accident, and the parent who leaves an inheritance, and the business owner with eight employees and the homeowner who burns the mortgage paper and the HVAC guy who gets his journeyman’s license – there is a plan behind them all. Some require more planning, some require a lot of planning, and some of them are fairly simple but still require a person to stick with that simple plan. As we say, “There is a method to the madness.”

Living out joyful generosity to God is most joyful and generous when there is a method, a plan. It doesn’t require the sort of planning you need for building a skyscraper. It is so simple that anyone with a third grade education can understand it. In fact, as our children’s message indicated, you probably don’t even need that. In one Bible verse—in less than one Bible verse, in one half of one verse—God puts the plan out there of how we can effectively live in joyful generosity to our God.

**The Giver’s Method: First and Proportional**

First, let’s review where we are at. In the first of this stewardship series God’s word taught us is that “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” Everything we have and we see comes from God. The food, the car, the family, the friends, the house, the breath in our lungs, it is from God. Christians realize that we have even more than that. We have a Savior, forgiveness, eternal life. Through faith in Jesus, God adopts us and accepts us for who we are.

Then in the second week we looked at our Christian attitude. Godly giving is an emotional response. Because God has given us so much, we are joyful and generous givers. In that sermon we saw King David at the end of his life. David gave rich offerings for the building of God’s temple. His heart was in it! Our emotional response to a loving and caring God is joy and generosity.

Godly giving starts with an emotional reaction to good news. But it isn’t just an emotion. Today’s message is about a plan, “Now, what can I do for Jesus who did so much for me?”

I remember one snowy day and an icy exit ramp up by Rochester, Minnesota. An almost penniless college student ended up in the ditch and the helpful police officer was about to radio in a tow truck that would cost me quite a bit of money, when a guy in a 4x4 pickup pulled over, got out a chain and pulled me out of the ditch just like that! I was so grateful! What could I do? Would he take $10? A bunch of homemade cookies I had with me? My emotion asked, “What can I do to show you my thankfulness?” (He ended up refusing it all, which was a little disappointing to me.) But that is what a joyful and generous heart asks, “Now what can I do? How can I give?”

As we look at our reading in 1 Corinthians 16, most of these two verses do not really apply to us. Paul is talking about a specific special one-time offering, something like our door offerings. He isn’t talking about our regular week to week offerings. What Paul was talking about was a special humanitarian offering to be taken to poverty-stricken believers in another part of the Roman Empire. But in the first half of verse two, Paul sums up a lot of Biblical teaching about a method, a plan for joyful generosity in a single sentence: ***“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.”*** That is a Christian giver’s method. Let’s look at it in detail.

***“On the first day of every week…”*** This is a really important concept. It is a concept very similar to our Old Testament reading. Remember in Deuteronomy? It talked about two annual offerings the Israelites gave to God: the firstfruits and the harvest tithe. Now that doesn’t sound anything like 1 Corinthians 16. In 1 Corinthians 16 Paul says, ***“Every week”*** but back in Deuteronomy it says, “when you harvest.”

Both are essentially saying the same thing. Old Testament Israel was an agricultural society. People were farmers. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he was writing to urban dwellers, city folk. Farmers get their wealth on an annual basis, most city folk back then received their income daily or weekly. And so we see the same principle at work. One gives 52 times a year, the other twice a year, but the same principle guides both of them: Give to God *when he blesses you*. Don’t wait till a need arises. Don’t put God at the end of the soup line. Give to him at the start.

The next phrase ***“****On the first day of the week,* ***each one of you…”*** told the Corinthians and us that no one is exempted. Every single Christian is a citizen of God’s kingdom and needs to give to help support it. This was a sort of strange idea to the Corinthians for a variety of reasons. Ancient Greek society may have been democratic, but it was ordered in a very different way from ours. Way back then, there were no income taxes. The expenses of the government and society were paid almost exclusively by the rich. Translate that into the church and the average Corinthian Christian might have looked at church offerings as primarily the responsibility of wealthy Christians. Paul says, “Not so. ***Each one of you…****should give****”*** Some surely thought, “Just let the poor people be. The amount they give really doesn’t amount to all that much. Let the rich pay the bills.” But that is the wrong way to look at offerings. If the main point of offerings is just to pay the bills, then sure, soak the rich. But if the main point of offerings is a response to God’s goodness, saying thank you, then everyone should give – just as Paul said, ***“Each one of you…”*** That is why Jesus did not tell the woman in the temple to keep her two copper coins. If it was just a matter of what God needed, she should have kept the last money that she had for her food. But Jesus let her put her last cash in the collection plate, not because God needed it, but because she needed to live out her faith.

The third of four phrases is ***“set aside a sum of money.”*** God expects us to give to him of our hard-earned cash. God requires it. Not only that, it is to be set aside. Decide what you are going to give to God and then build a firewall around it. Don’t use it. Don’t touch it. Of course, we know that if it is a matter of dire emergency you would use it. But only dire emergency. IF you don’t build that firewall, we know what happens. The moment there is a pinch, if there is money lying around, like Sunday’s offering that hasn’t been put in the offering plate yet, we know how tempting, *and easy* it is to just open the drawer and take $20 out. Listen to these words of God from the book of Ecclesiastes: *“When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow”* (5:4-5). When you have pledged money to God, set it aside, give it.

There is a corollary to this: Don’t give your offerings at the end of the week, at the end of the month . If you put off giving, till after you have bought everything else, do you know what you are doing? You are treating God like a dog: you are giving him the leftovers. You make the house payment, buy the food, pay the lights and water, then if there is money left-over you go to the dentist, eat an extra time or two, buy some clothing for the season change, and at the end of it if you have a $5 bill in your wallet you put it in the offering plate. God hates leftovers. He wants to be first on your list. This is not to say he wants the majority of your income (more about that in a minute) but God does want to be first. As Creator and Savior he deserves to be first!

Finally, *“set aside a sum of money* ***in keeping with your income.”*** When we plan joyful giving, God wants us to give proportionately, a percentage. In the Old Testament, it was pretty simple. God told the Israelites, “Put 10% in the offering plate.” In the New Testament, God names no percentage, but simply says, “Give ***in keeping with your income.***”

What do you give? If you are paid $500 a week, a 10% offering would be $50. If you give $10 that is 2%. $75 would be 15%. God has given us the freedom to decide, how much to give. Now I would say that 10% is a goal that people should seriously try to give to God. If that is what God wanted OT believers to give, I would say that we of the New Testamenters who have seen Christ should try to match that. Many Christians do give 10%. A few give more. Perhaps some, in certain circumstances will not be able to do that. That is a decision that God has left to us to decide. It is a decision we need to reach after sincerely considering what God has done for us, and what would be appropriate thanks.

Now in a couple minutes, the collection plate is going to get passed. An usher, or the person sitting next to you will hand it to you. For at least some people some of the time – perhaps most people most of the time – it is the most uncomfortable moment of the service (except for that moment when you think the preacher is about done with his sermon, and then you realize he is just winding up for part two of the sermon). And if you are a visitor, I imagine that offering plate makes you feel more uncomfortable than anyone else here. Please don’t. Please don’t. Offerings are especially for God’s people. If a visitor wants to give, they can, but the collection plate is especially for those who have made the commitment of membership.

And there are a number of other reasons that offerings are uneasy moments. Sometimes it is simply that we are selfish people who love money more than we should. Offerings can be uneasy for people who give only once a month because they get paid once a month. So they feel strange when they put nothing in for the other three weeks. Others are uneasy because they don’t even think about offerings until the sermon is over. All of a sudden they see the offering plates come out and they are fumbling for their wallets. But when we follow God’s plan for giving, these difficulties have answers and disappear.

As you give, remember to connect the emotion of joyful generosity with a plan for joyful generosity. Remember these words, ***“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.”*** Rejoice to give freely and proportionately. Amen.