

This morning's sermon title is *"God Loves a Cheerful Giver and Six Ways to Become One."*

If you're new to joining us, I've been preaching a few sermons on giving.

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I used to coach junior high wrestling. After one season, some of my wrestlers decided to buy me a gift. They pooled their money and purchased a nice plaque they planned to give me at the end-of-year banquet. While riding their bikes with the plaque to the banquet, one of them accidentally dropped it on the road and damaged it.

They were so happy to give me the plaque that, at first, nobody told me why it was damaged. Finally, someone apologized and explained what had happened. But they didn't need to apologize because I was blessed by how happy they were to give it to me. Regardless of what it is, a gift means so much more when given cheerfully.

The opposite is also true: a gift means little when given reluctantly. Picture people who give through clenched teeth with the gift (figuratively speaking) having to be pried from their hands. Imagine they say:

- "I hope this makes you happy, but I bet you would never give me something like this."
- "You better appreciate this because you wouldn't believe how difficult it was for me to get it."
- "I don't want to give this to you, but I know it's your birthday, so I hope you enjoy it."

Nobody wants gifts from stingy people, and the Bible even discourages us from accepting them:

**Proverbs 23:6 Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies, for he is like one who is inwardly calculating. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, but his heart is not with you.**

In other words, he doesn't really want to give you any of his stuff.

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If you're a parent, think about a young child giving you a gift. If we're honest, unless our child is very talented, the gift probably isn't something we would purchase if we saw it in a store.

Our children's gifts are not valuable to us because of their quality. They are valuable because they are signs of their love for us.

Another way to say it is children's gifts are meaningful because of the heart behind them.

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In a previous sermon, I said that giving is much bigger than the gift, and I gave you an analogy: the gift is an iceberg above the water, and everything that goes into the gift is below the surface.

The last sermon focused on the sacrifice involved in giving or the sacrifice below the surface. This sermon will focus on the way we give, or our attitudes because like we want gifts given to us cheerfully, so does our heavenly Father:

**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.**

I shared this verse in a previous sermon but didn't cover its conclusion: God loves a cheerful giver.

The Greek word translated "reluctantly" is *lypē*, meaning "with grief, sorrow, or sadness." God wants glad givers, not sad or mad givers.

Robert Rodenmeyer said, "There are three kinds of giving: grudge giving, duty giving, and thanksgiving. Grudge giving says, 'I have to'; duty giving says, 'I ought to'; thanksgiving says, 'I want to.'"<sup>1</sup> God wants the third type of giving.

The Greek word translated as cheerful is *hilaros*, which is related to our word *hilarious*. This is the only place it occurs in Scripture. God wants giving from hearts that find it enjoyable and entertaining.

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Now, here's what you might say: *"In the previous sermon, you said to give sacrificially, and now you're saying to give cheerfully. These don't go together! I can give sacrificially or cheerfully, but I can't do both! The more sacrifice that's involved, the less cheerful I am. The less sacrifice involved, the more cheerful I am."*

I recognize the tension between giving sacrificially and cheerfully. But if you remember what we learned about the Macedonians, they're an excellent example of doing both. Look at 2 Corinthians 8:1:

**2 Corinthians 8:1 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.**

Notice it says they gave with "an abundance of joy." They didn't merely have some joy when giving. They had an abundance of it! It's like they had so much joy they gave and had some left over!

It also says "their extreme poverty" and "overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part." They were destitute but still gave generously, which means they gave sacrificially.

They gave cheerfully and sacrificially!

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So, if you find giving challenging, let me give you six reasons why we should be cheerful givers.

**Give cheerfully because (Lesson One) God loves a cheerful giver.**

As Christians, we should be familiar with what God loves, and there are quite a few examples in Scripture:

1. Deuteronomy 7:9 says God loves those who keep His commandments.
2. Psalm 11:7 says God loves righteous deeds.
3. Psalm 17:7 says God loves those who seek refuge from their adversaries at [His] right hand.
4. Psalm 33:5 says God loves righteousness and justice.
5. Proverbs 8:17 says God loves those who love Him.
6. Proverbs 15:9 says God loves those who pursue righteousness.
7. John 3:16 says God loves the world.
8. John 16:27, God the Father loves those who love His Son.
9. Romans 5:8 says God loves us while we are still sinners.
10. Hebrews 12:6, which quotes Proverbs 3:12, says God loves those He disciplines.

Finally, according to 2 Corinthians 9:7, God also loves a cheerful giver. But notice it doesn't say God loves cheerful giving; it says He loves *people* who give cheerfully. The Amplified Bible says, "God loves a cheerful giver [and delights in the one whose heart is in his gift]."

God loves everyone, but He has a unique love for cheerful givers.

If for no other reason, we should strive to give cheerfully because we love the Lord and want to be people He loves.

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The next reason to give cheerfully:

**Give cheerfully because (Lesson Two) it sends wealth ahead.**

Consider this story:

A rich man died and went to heaven. Abraham greeted him and said, “Welcome to heaven. Let me show you where you’ll be staying.”

As they walked, the rich man saw beautiful mansions stretching out in every direction. They were constructed of gold, silver, and precious gems. As they passed one mansion, the rich man said, “Who gets to stay here?”

Abraham replied, “That’s for your groundskeeper. He was a godly man who loved Jesus and served Him all his life. This is his reward.”

They continued past other mansions until they reached an extremely large one. The rich man asked Abraham, “Is this one mine?”

Abraham said, “No, this one belongs to your maid. On the little bit of money you paid her, she raised six children and gave to her church.”

They continued to walk until they came to a different section of homes that weren’t as nice. As they walked up a small hill, they stopped in front of a shack made of tar paper and used sheet metal. The front door was cut out of an old refrigerator box. It was held together with baling wire, twine, and duct tape. After pausing momentarily, the rich man asked, “Who lives here?”

Abraham responded, “Why, this is yours!”

The rich man couldn’t believe it. He said, “There must be some mistake!”

Abraham said, “No, there’s been no mistake. We did the best we could with what you gave us!”<sup>2</sup>

It is tragic that some people work so hard to prepare for the final years of this life but neglect the eternity that follows!

We have two choices with our wealth. The first choice is to send it ahead! What we give away on this side of heaven is kept for eternity. The best givers in this life have much waiting for them in the next life.

The second choice for handling our wealth is to keep it for ourselves like the rich fool:

**Luke 12:18 He said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’**

If we keep our wealth for ourselves, we will be prepared for this life but unprepared for the next. When we choose to enjoy our wealth now, we don’t get to enjoy it in heaven, which leaves us eternally destitute.

Listen to what God asked the rich fool:

**Luke 12:20 God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’**

The answer?

Not his!

Whatever we accumulate in this life will be left to others, and this brings us to the next reason to give cheerfully:

**Give cheerfully because (Lesson Three) we can’t take wealth with us.**

Jesus said:

**Matthew 6:19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”**

Jesus described what happens to our earthly possessions: they break down, rust, decay, and are stolen. Keeping this in mind makes giving cheerfully easier. Our earthly wealth loses value in our eyes and becomes easier to part with.

And even if this doesn't happen with our wealth in our lifetimes, we can't take any of it with us.

The spirit is immaterial (nonphysical), and the body is material (physical). When the spirit leaves the body, it brings nothing material (physical) with it. We come into the world with nothing and leave the same way:

**Job 1:21** Job said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.”

**Psalm 49:10** Korah said, “[Men] leave their wealth to others...<sup>17</sup> When [they die they] shall carry nothing away.”

**Ecclesiastes 5:15** Solomon said, “As he came from his mother’s womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand.”

**1 Timothy 6:7** Paul said, “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”

God repeatedly reminds us that we take nothing with us, not because He wants to discourage us, but because He wants to encourage us to live in light of this reality.

Randy Alcorn said, “When Jesus warns us not to store up treasures on earth, it is not just because wealth might be lost; it is because wealth will always be lost. We leave it when we die. Realizing its value is temporary should radically affect our investment strategy.”<sup>3</sup>

Knowing we leave everything behind should make giving cheerfully much easier.

Jim Elliot was a Christian missionary killed along with five other men while attempting to evangelize the Huaorani people of Ecuador. He famously said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

The quote applies perfectly to earthly wealth: We should give cheerfully because we can't take wealth with us, but we can give it for the next life.

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The next reason to be a cheerful giver:

**Give cheerfully because (Lesson Four) because we enjoy wealth for a short time.**

Imagine there's a house you've wanted for as long as you can remember. One day, the house owner hands you the keys and says, “You can have it!” You're excited, but he adds, “The only catch is it will burn down soon.” How excited are you now?

This is also the case with everything the world offers, including our money. When viewed in light of eternity, everything we have will burn down soon:

**2 Peter 3:10** The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up.

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The Christian life must be lived by keeping its shortness in view. When Jonathan Edwards was only 19, he wrote 70 resolutions that he committed to practicing for God's glory. Number nine was, “To think much, on all occasions, of my dying.” This might sound morbid, but he always wanted to remember how temporary this life is.

Jonathan Edwards isn't the only one who thinks we should focus on the shortness of this life. God wants us to do the same. We know that because He repeats it throughout Scripture:

**James 4:14 What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.**

**Job 7:7 My life is a breath!**

**Psalm 102:3 My days are consumed like smoke.**

**Psalm 144:4 Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.**

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Giving cheerfully is easier when we focus on the temporary nature of this life because we recognize our wealth is enjoyed for only a short period.

Adam Clarke said, "It requires but little of this world's goods to satisfy a man who feels himself to be a citizen of another country and knows that this is not his [home]."4

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The short enjoyment of riches is illustrated well in Daniel's life. Here's the background: Belshazzar was the king of Babylon, which was the superpower of the day. He threw a party, invited 1,000 lords, and drank from the vessels the Babylonians took from the temple when they conquered the Jews. While they drank and praised their false gods, a hand appeared and wrote on the palace wall, terrifying Belshazzar. Wanting to know what the writing meant, he said to Daniel:

**Daniel 5:16b "If you can...make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." 17 Daniel answered...the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will...make known...the interpretation.**

Daniel interpreted it for the king, and then...

**Daniel 5:29 Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. 30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom.**

Daniel was offered the most common worldly desires: riches, fame, and position. He declined because he knew it was all temporary. Babylon would be conquered that night. Belshazzar gave Daniel the rewards anyway, but he possessed them for only a few hours.

It's tempting to say, "Sure, it was easy for Daniel to decline Belshazzar's offer because he would only enjoy it for a little while. What about the things I can possess for years or decades?"

In light of eternity, whether it's a few hours, years, decades, or even if we could enjoy earthly possessions for centuries or millenniums, it is still only a short period. This should make giving cheerfully easier.

**Give cheerfully because (Lesson Five) God sees what's in our hearts versus our hands.**

Imagine a man with a wallet divided into two sections. In one section, he puts the money he plans to give to the church. In the other section, he puts the rest of his cash, which is considerably larger.

When the offering is taken, he accidentally reaches into the wrong part of his wallet, takes out the large amount of cash, and puts that in the plate. After service, he realizes what happened, tells the pastor, and comforts himself by saying, “It doesn’t matter, though, because I gave it to the Lord, and He recognized the amount I gave.”

The pastor asked, “How much did you intend to give?”

The man answered, “I intended to give the smaller amount, but I accidentally gave the larger.”

The pastor replied, “Then that’s what God recognizes because that’s what you decided to give in your heart.”

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One of the best ways to encourage cheerful giving is to remember that God is looking at our hearts rather than the amount. Giving is a heart issue because, as 1 Samuel 16:7 says, “the LORD looks at the heart.”

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To emphasize how important the heart is when giving, consider this...

In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:21-41, Jesus condemned murder, adultery, lying, and retaliation as we would expect. But in the next chapter, He condemned things we would *not* expect, such as praying, fasting, and giving.

Why?

When the right things are done with the wrong heart, they become the wrong things. Jesus said:

**Matthew 6:1-2 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”**

Wanting to be seen by others reveals a heart that is giving wrongly. This offense is so serious that regardless of the amount given, it results in a loss of reward. If we missed this warning the first time, Jesus repeated it a second time in the following verse. He wanted to help us avoid losing our reward!

He even again gave instructions about giving with the right heart:

**Matthew 6:3-4 When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

Of course, hands don’t have minds of their own. We can’t hide from one hand what the other hand is doing. The point is we should give in a way that nobody knows what we are doing except the Lord. Giving secretly is admirable because it’s not being done to impress others. Instead, it’s being done to please our heavenly Father.

We are giving with the right heart when we give cheerfully versus reluctantly.

**Give cheerfully because (Lesson Six) of all we’ve been given.**

Here’s an important principle in Scripture: We should do for others what God has done for us. For example, Jesus said:

**John 13:34 As I have loved you...you also love one another.**

We should love others because God loved us.

In the parable of the unforgiving servant, the master rebuked him:

**Matthew 18:32 “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?”**

The wicked servant was condemned because he wouldn't forgive as God had forgiven him.

We should forgive others because God forgave us:

**Ephesians 4:32 Forgive one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.**

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Regarding giving, because God has given us so much, we should give to others.

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Ephesians 5:1 commands us to “be imitators of God,” which means we should give, too.

Listen to this:

**Proverbs 21:26 The righteous gives and does not spare.**

Why is giving righteous?

God's actions define righteousness. Because God gives, giving is righteous and makes us imitators of Him.<sup>5</sup>

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Let me conclude with this...

I once read about a stingy man who said, “The preacher told us to give until it hurts, so I don't give at all because just the thought of giving hurts.”

If we still feel like this man even after these six reasons to give cheerfully, let me give you three recommendations.

First, we can confess our struggle with giving cheerfully and pray that God helps us grow. He knows us better than we know ourselves, so He already knows this is one of our weaknesses.

We can ask Him to replace our joylessness with joyfulness, our cheerlessness with cheerfulness, and our wrong heart with a right heart.

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Second, we can look to Scripture to grow in cheerful giving. Read the verses that apply, meditate on them, and memorize them. Write them on notecards and put them where we will see them regularly, such as on our refrigerator, mirror, or car dashboard. A great place to start is 2 Corinthians 9:7.

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Third, we can meditate on how much God has given us:

**John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

When we think about all God's given us, how can we not give to Him cheerfully?

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I was going over the sermon with Katie, and she said, “Didn't you say something like this at the end of a previous sermon on giving? Give because of what God has given us, specifically His Son?”

She was right! It was a little different, but the point was still the same.

But here's the thing...

Is there a higher, better reason I can give you for giving?

What else can I appeal to?

I'm not going to tell you it earns or improves your salvation.

The highest, best, and greatest reason to give is that it is a form of worship for the God who has given us so much, including His own Son.

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If you have any questions or I can pray for you in any way, I will be up front after service, and I consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Rodenmeyer, as quoted in John Blanchard, comp., *Gathered Gold: A Treasury of Quotations for Christians* (Welwyn, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1984), 113.

<sup>2</sup> J. Stephen Jordan, "Giving," *JStephenJordan.com*, September 25, 2017, <https://jstephenjordan.com/2017/09/25/g/>.

<sup>3</sup> Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*, (Multnomah, OR; Multnomah Books, 2003), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Earle, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible* (Cleveland, OH; World Publishing, 1997), 1619.

<sup>5</sup> Some spiritual gifts, such as teaching and leadership, *seem like gifts* because there's a benefit to the person receiving the gift. But other gifts, such as mercy and serving, *don't seem like gifts* because they seem to benefit others more than they benefit the people who received the gifts. This gives us insight into why God gives us gifts, which we must consider because God's reason for giving gifts can be different than our reason.

We typically give gifts to bless the recipient, but God gives gifts to bless the recipient *and* so the recipient can bless others:

**1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace"**

(We can enjoy the gifts God has given us—for example, God has given me the gift of teaching, which I enjoy—but being good stewards of our gifts means using them for others' benefit. This applies to all God has given us, including our wealth.

Let's return to two of the parables we looked at earlier. First, in the parable of the talents, the third servant buried his talent (gift) in the ground and was severely punished in response (Matthew 25:18, 30). The financial application is that when we keep our wealth to ourselves, we're acting like the third servant—we're taking what God has given us and, in a sense, burying it in the ground. Second, the parable of the rich fool reveals we aren't given wealth to keep it for our ourselves. When we hoard our wealth, we're acting like the rich fool.

In both parables, the men failed to use God's generosity the way it is intended: for others. God is generous with us so we can be generous with others.