

**SCRIPTURE LESSON:** 2 Corinthians 9:6-15  
**SERMON TITLE:** Thanksgivings to God

Today is Commitment Sunday. Later on in this service, we'll be offering to God our financial commitments for 2010. And yes, I know, we're making these commitments in a year when the economy is not the best that it can be. People are hurting and afraid.

But my brothers and sisters, this is not a day for anxiety or fear; this is not a day for guilt or reluctance or compulsion; this is a day for us to learn from the Apostle Paul; this is a day for all of us to cheer up, to experience *Joyful Generosity*, to give thanks, to make up our minds about our giving, and then to open our hands and scatter the seed bountifully through the commitments we offer today. After all, God loves a cheerful giver!

By the way, do you know what cheerful givers look like? Let me give you an example. A woman from Kenya, Africa, joined a Presbyterian church in the United States. Her name was Lydia. Lydia told her pastor how much she loved her new congregation, but that she did miss certain aspects of her home church, especially certain parts of the worship service. The pastor asked her what she missed the most. Do you know what she said? The offering! *I miss the offering*, she said. *In Kenya, we would sometimes dance down the aisles during the offering. We didn't have much to give, but what we did have we gave with much joy. What a privilege to give back to God!*<sup>1</sup>

God loves a cheerful giver. And isn't it true? There is so much to bring us cheer. Despite a difficult economy and job losses and foreclosures and stock market declines and burdensome debt loads and all the rest, hasn't God provided us with every blessing in abundance? Those poverty stricken Kenyans in Lydia's home church certainly thought so.

You see, God doesn't intend for us to be a people who wring our hands in worry, out of

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<sup>1</sup> "The Rev. Dr. Scott Weimer - What God Values in Stewardship - Day1.org." *Sermons, Preaching and Christian Community | Welcome to Day1*. Web. 25 Nov. 2009. <[http://day1.org/1555-what\\_god\\_values\\_in\\_stewardship](http://day1.org/1555-what_god_values_in_stewardship)>.

fear that we just don't have enough. I do that way too much of that as it is. Our God is not a God a scarcity, but a God of abundance who provides seed to the sower and bread for food. In fact, our God multiplies the seed for sowing so that we might share abundantly in every good work—so that we might imitate God and scatter our gifts abroad—and give to the poor—and experience an increase in the harvest of our own righteousness as we share in the very righteousness of God that endures for ever.

And then, notice this: In God's economy, when we give, we're not impoverished—we're not made poorer—it's just the opposite—we're enriched in every way—and this produces thanksgiving to God—in fact, this generosity overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

Let me give you several examples of how this works. First of all, Pastor Terry has told me that when he was on the staff of First UMC, Austin, the church provided a substantial amount of assistance for more than a month for a woman whose husband had left her with a small child and no job. The woman was thankful for the help she had received.

As it turned out, this woman got a job at Dell. When she retired she was a millionaire. Do you know what she did? She gave First UMC, Austin a gift of \$100,000 and she gave the three pastors on the church staff \$10,000 each. When we meet the needs of others, thanksgivings to God tend to multiply.

Another example: Earlier this last week I got a call from a young man in the military who was seeking assistance for a woman who lives in his apartment complex. The lady was on the verge of being evicted for non-payment of her rent. This young man assured me that his neighbor was in legitimate need. He told me that he and his wife had given \$100 toward the rent, but the lady was still \$200 short and he was asking if we could help.

Well, as it turned out, I had a little over \$150 in the Pastor's Discretionary account. Now

normally, we don't help people with needs that large because we try to help many people with smaller amounts rather than a few people with larger amounts. But in this case, I felt a prompting to come up with the full \$200—and I did. I met the woman and she was thankful—but that gift lowered the balance in the fund to the point where I would not be able to help anyone else until after the first Sunday of December when we replenish the Pastor's Discretionary Fund with the communion offering.

But then, not more than 24 hours later, a person that we had helped earlier in the year with a gift of \$125—a gift that was made possible through the generosity of one of our church families—handed me a check for \$250 for the Pastor's Discretionary Fund. There was thanksgiving all the way around because when we meet the needs of others—when we sow abundantly instead of sparingly—God tends to multiply the thanksgivings.

And there are those among us who can testify for themselves as to the ways in which the ministry of this church has overflowed with many thanksgivings to God. I invite your attention to the video screens.

So I ask you: How has the ministry of this church overflowed with many thanksgivings to God in your life and in the lives of others that you know? Even more importantly, how will we glorify God today in obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ through the generosity of our sharing? After all, don't we all know the surpassing grace of God so freely and abundantly given to us? And don't we all thank God for this indescribable gift? So why not join Paul and our brothers and sisters in Kenya and be cheerful givers this day?

Now over these next moments, we each will have time to consider our financial commitments for 2010. Commitment cards are available in your bulletin and in the pews. Please take the time that you need and when you're ready, bring the cards to the altar rail. Feel

free to kneel before God in prayer as you make your commitment. Please know that no matter what your response today, there will always be a place for you in this church.