

The Cross as the Giving Standard

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Ben Deaver at New Hope Church on January 15, 2017

Intro—Associate Pastor; family

“It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas...storage!”

America Has More Self-Storage Facilities Than McDonald’s,
Because Apparently We’re All Hoarders

From the Huffington Post on April 21, 2015

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/21/self-storage-mcdonalds_n_7107822.html

Turns out the only thing Americans may love more than Big Macs is hoarding.

There are more self-storage facilities in America than there are McDonald’s restaurants... There were 48,500 self-storage facilities in America at the end of 2014... compared to a mere 14,350 McDonald’s restaurants.

(For the record, there were just 11,962 Starbucks coffee shops in 2014, making the number of self-storage spots larger than McDonald’s and Starbucks locations combined.)

You’ve got to wonder if all that stuff could just fit in the garage. In fact, 65 percent of Americans who rent a storage unit have a garage, but they rent one anyway.

Oof. This is the biggest case for spring cleaning we’ve ever seen.

We want to invite you to join us for our SoPo (that’s the South of Poyntz neighborhood) spring yard sale we’re hosting!

Resource: *Minimalism: A Documentary About The Important Things* on Netflix

- Houses are bigger, families are smaller.
- Master bedrooms have gotten massive. The master bedroom is essentially a house within the house.
- More TVs than toilets. Definitely more devices for consuming media than toilets. More sewage coming into our homes than going out of our homes.
- Dining rooms have shrunk. The sitting room is a relic of the past.
- Front porch culture to a back deck culture.
- Drive into our massive garages so we don’t need to engage with our neighbors.
- Let me show you an alternative to the mere materialism/consumerism that our world has spent billions of dollars on to shove down our throats.
- Let me show you a cure for our insatiable obsession for stuff...and more stuff...and more stuff...

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9^{ESV}

- Let's open the Scriptures to the Apostle Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth where he challenges a wealthy church to follow through with good intentions to give generously.
- In fact, he shames the Corinthian church by holding up an impoverished church who has become rockstar givers as a model they should aspire to.
- Paul shows us that the cross is the standard of giving, not Old Testament law.
- The specific need at the time was a widespread famine that you can read about in Acts 11 (and Galatians 2:10).

Pray

The Cross as the Giving Standard: Grace takes you way further than law ever could!

The Macedonian church problem was that they gave too much. Crazy! What if that was the New Hope problem? Slow down with your crazy giving, y'all!

The Macedonian Formula: Grace of God + Severe Test of Affliction + Abundance of Joy + Extreme Poverty = Wealth of Generosity

How does a community of believers become like the Macedonians with their zeal to give?

Let's talk about the American Church! How are American Christians doing?

First, let's talk about how much money we have. Then we'll talk about how much money we'll give. Then we'll look for help in the Scriptures so we can address this huge gap!

Am I Rich?

<https://irememberthepoor.org/3-2/>

- If you made \$1500 last year, you're in the top **20%** of the world's income earners.**
- If you have sufficient food, decent clothes, live in a house or apartment, and have a reasonably reliable means of transportation, you are among the top **15%** of the world's wealthy. **
- If you earn \$25,000 or more annually, you are in the top **10%** of the world's income-earners.***
- If you have any money saved, a hobby that requires some equipment or supplies, a variety of clothes in your closet, two cars (in any condition), and live in your own home, you are in the top **5%** of the world's wealthy. **
- If you earn more than \$50,000 annually, you are in the top **1%** of the world's income earners.***

*Source— MSN Money

***Money Possessions & Eternity* by Randy Alcorn, pg 291

****The Hole in our Gospel* by Richard Stearns, President of World Vision, pg 216

What about our poor?

- In America a couple who earns less than \$14,710 per year in 2012 will be considered below the poverty line, however they will still be wealthy enough to be in the top 10% of the wealthiest on earth.
- You do have to take into consideration that goods and services costs vary by country. E.g. \$14,710 dollars won't get you as much as it will in most African countries. However, everyone in America can easily access

clean water. You can go in to any public toilet and flush it then drink the water and have cleaner water than most people on earth will ever have.

- According to the World Health Organization, 1.1 billion people worldwide lack access to clean water—that's approximately one in six people on earth. None of these people are Americans.
- Today, of Americans officially designated as 'poor,' 99 percent have electricity, running water, flush toilets, and a refrigerator; 95 percent have a television, 88 percent a telephone, 71 percent a car, and 70 percent air conditioning.

Ok, got it. But surely we are a very generous people. Right?

Ok, but we're generous, right? How much do American Christians give?

Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money by Christian Smith, Michael Emerson, and Patricia Snell (2008)

- More than one out of four American Protestants give away no money at all—"not even a token \$5 per year,"
- The median annual giving for an American Christian is actually \$200, just over half a percent of after-tax income. About 5 percent of American Christians provide 60 percent of the money churches and religious groups use to operate. (It's these people who skew the average.) "A small group of truly generous Christian givers are essentially 'covering' for the vast majority of Christians who give nothing or quite little."
- "Americans who earn less than \$10,000 gave 2.3 percent of their income to religious organizations whereas those who earn \$70,000 or more gave only 1.2 percent."
- Want more stats? I got way more stats and more places to look too!

What could we accomplish with greater giving levels?

If you want stats about what we could tackle if American Christians lived sacrificial generosity out then ask me and I'll give them to you. Let's have this be an ongoing conversation, friends!

What about our church family?

How much money is there in New Hope Church?

- 2015 numbers from a recent census. Median income for MHK is \$50,354. FYI: Kansas is \$53,906. US is \$55,775.
- So estimated earning potential for NH directory of 162 family units: \$8,157,348.
- New Hope brought in \$350,693 total in 2016. That's a little less than 4.3% vs estimated directory earning potential.
- The situation is probably worse when we assume some are not in directory and some (trust me, far more than you'd think) give \$0/yr. Probably about 25%! Which is consistent with American Christian average of folks who give nothing to their local church where they gather to grow in the Lord.
- IF our directory averaged out for MHK, which it likely does, NH directory group by itself could give \$815,734 at 10%! Not bad! And the 10% tithe is not the standard for New Testament giving as we'll discover this morning.

The Cross as the Giving Standard!

Paul always links our behavior to the Gospel, not Old Testament law. We're under the law of Christ. Grace takes us much further than the OT law ever could. Love excludes compulsion and takes us beyond the minimum requirement. Love always issues in action that is rooted in the Gospel.

2 Corinthians 8:7-9 ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the

earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Gospel Circles

- Gospel = yet for your sake he became poor
 - Jesus is insanely rich! He owns the whole universe. He created everything out of nothing. It's His! He owns all of the stuff!
 - Yet... Yet... for your sake.
 - Read Philippians 2:6-11.
 - **2 Corinthians 8:5** ...and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.
 - **Action Step:** Get gripped by grace! By the Gospel!
- Gospel Truth = so that you by his poverty might become rich
 - The riches we possess in Christ are enough to bring us peace, joy, contentment. We are rich if we are in Christ.
 - GRACE = God's riches at Christ's expense
 - Are you more enamored with stuff or with the riches you have in Christ?
- Gospel Conduct = see that you excel in this act of grace also
 - This act of grace = wealth of generosity

How far does grace take us?

Gospel, Christ died for our sins, leads to Gospel Truth, we are rich, leads to Gospel Conduct, SACRIFICIAL GENEROSITY!

Pop Quiz: *Would you expect that those on this side of the cross who live in the most affluent society in history would give a) less b) the same or c) more than the Israelites were commanded to give?*

Why doesn't Paul just give 'em a little law? Just get that gold standard of 10%! He doesn't want to sell them short of the joy they can have by basing their standard of giving on the cross rather than Old Testament law. We make a lot of money. There's a lot of money out there to be made. 10% is not the high bar that we want to someday jump over. The tithe is the training wheels of giving, as Randy Alcorn puts it. We're so immature, dear friends. If you give 10% to New Hope you are so far above where most people are at with their giving. Lean into the Gospel. Don't settle for comparative righteousness. Excel in this grace of sacrificial giving! Excel. Keep going!

Most of us, though, need to put on the training wheels and get a little boost along the way.

In fact, the Bible says more about money than faith and prayer combined. Jesus says more about money than heaven and hell. How we deal with money says a great deal about our heart.

Big Idea: Grace takes your generosity way further than the law could ever dream of.

We are under grace and it is powerful! Some are concerned that we won't be moved to action unless we continue to preach the law. I assure you, for those who are gripped by grace they will go way further towards spiritual maturity than the law could ever dream of taking them.

How far does law take us?

- Using the tithe as your motivator can easily result in compulsion and giving the minimum required...plus it's arbitrary. It's not the New Testament teaching.

- *Is anyone planning to go way above and beyond when paying your taxes this spring?* Nope. Why? Because it's law motivated giving. We're trying to pay the minimum required under law.
- If you add up all that the Israelites were required to give it would amount to more like 23%.
- The cross is the giving standard!

Cool, so how much do I give? Let's get practical.

- 1. Give sacrificially!**
- 2. Give deliberately!**
- 3. Give cheerfully!**

1. Give sacrificially!

Give according to your means and beyond your means. This is what sacrificial giving means!

³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, begging to give more!

- God calls on us to sacrifice what we do have. He doesn't expect us to give something we don't have.
- Our standard of living has gone up but our standard of giving has gone down. That ain't cool!
- Are you more concerned with your standard of giving or your standard of living? How much do you need? How much do I need? Really?
- If a 10% tithe was the gold standard of giving then the application point today would be easy. If you're already giving at that level then you feel good about yourself and go home unchanged. If you're not giving anything at all and you can't hit the 10% gold standard you probably go home crushed and despairing and still unchanged.
- Giving according to your means suggests a graduated tithe would be appropriate. Why not make a plan as a family to increase your percentage of giving as your wealth grows while keeping your standard of living relatively stable?
- What kind of givers are we raising our kids to become?

Illus: Family of four making \$50,000 giving 10% lives off of \$45,000. Same family making \$100,000 giving 10% lives off of \$90,000. Same family could live off of \$50,000 by giving 50%. Wouldn't that be cool?

Jesus gave sacrificially!

2. Give deliberately! Impulse giving is weak.

2 Corinthians 9:5-7 ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction. 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.

- Spontaneous and sporadic go hand in hand...neither is good.
- *Illus:* Did you get your contribution statement in the mail? Did it reflect your intentions to give or did your intentions not quite materialize as you had hoped?
- *Illus:* When we cancel our Central Gathering it really shows up in how much is given to New Hope. Why is that? It's because people don't give deliberately.

1 Corinthians 16:1-3 ¹Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ²On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. ³And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

- Organization and orderly arrangements and deliberate intentionality lead to success and reduced pressure in the local church. It also keeps things above board.
- **My story:** First time I read Randy Alcorn's book *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* it made sense to me that I was a rich American and that the tithe is just training wheels and if I want to pick a number to tithe on then I should just go ahead and calculate all income and financial benefit we receive.
 - We've added supporting two children monthly through Compassion International to our giving. We had Kate pick a friend to support a few years ago and this past year we had Maddox pick a friend to support. Kate picked Minerva and Maddox picked James.
 - Maris and I need to revisit this together. Sound good, Maris?

Challenges we face in 2017:

- Huge budget...for New Hope. \$392,000 is the most we've ever budgeted for as long as we've kept records. The most that's ever come in at New Hope Church at least since we've kept records was just over \$360,000 back in 2005 when we were at two Central Gatherings. This is a big increase!
- Transient demographic
- Lots of students
- Lots of families who are raising support for their salaries
- Lots of young families with kids! Childcare is expensive.
- Poor communication and vision-casting this past year. \$30k deficit. Who remembers that?
- We finished 2016 with \$350,693 total being given to the church. That was almost \$10,000 above our 2016 budget but still significantly under our true expenses.

Tackling our 2017 Budget Together!

Btw, this is *OUR* church. We all benefit from it together. We all have a responsibility to keep the lights on, fix the chairs, pay the rent, etc.

\$392,000 (2017 budget)

\$350,700 (Income NH received in 2016)

\$41,000 (more needed this year compared to giving last year)

At 162 giving units, that's an increase of \$255/unit/year

\$21.25/month more per unit

Friends, we can handle that...and much more!

What would be able to do together if giving far exceeded this?

- Give more to existing organizations
- Initiate new initiatives
- Have more benevolence funds available
- Address childcare expense
- Finish The Greenhouse basement
- Consider long-term building ideas
- Address staffing needs

Action Step:

- A baby step of faith could be giving just \$25 more per month to New Hope. The bigger that number the scarier the step of faith. Just how scary a step of faith are you prepared to take? It's kind of exciting!
- Electronic Fund Transfer can be very helpful in this regard. Go online to www.newhopeks.org and set up giving if that's helpful to you. We don't accept credit cards at this point because we get hit with big fees and we don't want to encourage people to give out of debt. It's mostly about the fees though.

Jesus gave deliberately!**3. Give cheerfully!**

2 Corinthians 9:5-7 ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, **not as an exaction**. 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**.

- Law Motivation? **Malachi 3:8-9** ⁸ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.
- God loves us all, of course. That's why He sent His Son. But His heart is happy when you grow to become a cheerful giver. That's the direction that sacrificial and deliberate giving takes you. Towards cheerful giving!
- *Does the cheerfulness come before or after you give?* I think most assume that it should be before...but I'm not so sure. Perhaps the cheerfulness comes as you discipline yourself towards sacrificial generosity in light of the cross. *What do you do if you're not a cheerful giver? Should I not give?* NO! Remember, the crutch of duty can be helpful until the desire comes. Paul had to give these exhortations because they weren't cheerful enough yet. Don't hide behind this one. Well, I'm just not excited to give so I guess it would be unbiblical for me to take a step towards giving. C'mon. Serious?
- *How do you move from reluctant giving to cheerful giving?*
- **Matthew 6:21** Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Quote: What we do with our money doesn't simply *indicate* where our heart is. According to Jesus, it *determines* where our heart goes. This is an amazing and exciting truth. If I want my heart to be in one particular place and not in another, then I need to put my money in that place and not in the other. I've heard people say, "I want more of a heart for missions." I always respond, "Jesus tells you exactly how to get it. Put your money in missions, and your heart will follow." —Randy Alcorn in *Money, Possessions and Eternity*

Jesus gave cheerfully...for the joy set before Him!**What's your scary step of faith? Just how scary are you willing for your step of faith to be?**

1. Go from giving \$0 to \$25/month. Baby step!
2. Go from giving 10% to 15%. That's a scarier step...perhaps.
3. *Money, Possessions and Eternity* by Randy Alcorn
4. Welcome Card
 - Indicate interest in a *Kingdom Stewardship* class
 - When should I do this class?
 - Indicate desire for Budgeting help. YNAB or Every Dollar
5. How is God leading you?

Questions to Ask Jesus:

(Some questions are from *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* by Randy Alcorn p. 218)

1. What does my standard of giving indicate about my experience/understanding of the grace of God? What does the way I handle money say about how I view God?
2. Is the fact that You've entrusted me with so many resources an indication that you have given me the gift of giving and want me to learn to exercise it more frequently and skillfully?
3. Do You want me to set a basic level of income and assets to live on, then give away whatever you provide beyond that (regardless of whether that's 50%, 90%, or more)?

Bring up ushers and PRAY 2 Cor 8:7-9 over New Hope!