

SEVEN-DAY

Faith Promise

A DEVOTIONAL BY DR. PAUL KOOISTRA



All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

INTRODUCTION



The grace of giving is one of the most amazing blessings of the Christian life. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments God reveals that He intends that His redeemed people—those bought by the blood of Christ—are to be the channel for His gospel to be extended to the all the nations of the earth.

How, then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.'

Romans 10:14-15

It is both the privilege and the duty of the Christian to send missionaries by means of generous financial gifts. In ways beyond all human understanding of logic or of math, God takes our gifts, multiplies them, uses them, and repays the giver with blessing. As a spirit of selfless generosity is a mark of healthy Christian, so the practice of collective benevolence is indicative of a vital church. The adage, "Show me your wallet, and I'll show you your heart," is as applicable to the church as a whole as it is to the individual.

In over 35 years of ministry, I have never seen a church's operating budget or building program hindered by a thrust for world missions. However, I have frequently watched churches stagnate when the opposite approach has been taken.

Funds designated for world missions are called by a variety of terms, the most commonly-used being *faith promise*. However, the *nomenclature used is far less important than the fact that these gifts flow from the hearts of God's people through the local congregations and denomination to the various ministries around the globe.*

We, at Mission to the World, offer these biblically-based stewardship materials for use in your church. Because *faith promise* is the title of choice for missions offerings in the majority of our supporting churches, that name is used here. However, the truths in these seven devotionals are equally applicable for those whose missionary benevolences are called by some other term. They come

with the prayer that God will use them for His glory, for the benefit of world missions, and for the spiritual good of all who participate.

*May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your ways may be known on earth
your salvation among all nations.
May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you.
May the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you rule the peoples justly
and guide the nations of the earth.
May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you.
Then the land will yield its harvest,
and God, our God will bless us.
God will bless us,
and all the ends of the earth will fear him.*

PSALM 67

Faith Promise

P R E F A C E



Your faith promise pledge for missions holds the potential to have a greater impact on your spiritual life than any other event this year. In faith promise, you will be asked to make a financial commitment, agreeing to give a specific amount as God provides, "as you are able, and even beyond your ability to give." Faith promise is not designed to replace your normal giving, but to increase it and, in increasing your giving, to expand your faith.

The faith promise is about money, but it is about more than money. A close friend of mind often reminds me that the most sensitive nerve in the human body runs from the wallet to the heart. Faith promise is essentially about your heart.

The question is not, "How large is my gift going to be to God's kingdom work?"

The real question is, "How large a place will God have in my life?"

The faith promise concept has been richly used in many churches. Of the 23 churches in the United States with the largest mission budgets, 20 (almost 90%) utilize this program. More importantly, God has used the faith promise strategy to turn believers' hearts to Himself. It provides His children new "glasses" with which to evaluate their lives and center them on eternal matters through serious reflection on their temporal bounty.

I believe God will use this seven-day devotional to work in your life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches, *"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty. Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will be safe from thieves. Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be"** (Matthew 6:19-21).

A faith promise commitment is not primarily an appeal to support individual missionaries. It is an invitation to become involved in

*My translation.

the greatest cause in the world. Only the gospel brings peace—peace with God and peace on earth.

As you spend the next seven days considering this invitation to become part of God's kingdom work around the world, pray that His grace, which is far greater than any need we have, will fill your heart, your soul, and your mind.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

II CORINTHIANS 8:9

Note: Each of the following devotionals comes from II Corinthians 8 and 9. In these chapters Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians of a financial commitment they had made a year earlier—and he uses the example of the Macedonian Christians, who “in extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity,” to spur them on to liberality in fulfilling their earlier pledge. You may find it helpful to read these two chapters in their entirety as you begin the devotionals.



GOD'S CALL TO STEWARDSHIP



"And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."

II CORINTHIANS 8:5

Paul gives the strongest stewardship lesson in the Bible in II Corinthians 8 and 9. The churches in Macedonia were weak. They were poor, yet they distinguished themselves by begging for opportunities to give and then giving out of their poverty far more than anyone could expect. (II Corinthians 8:3) Their attitude defies logic. You would expect them to be begging for welfare, rather than becoming the fountains of such magnanimous and sacrificial charity.

Some preachers try to shame church members into giving more by reminding them that every year Americans spend almost as much on peanut butter as they give to missions. While such admonishment may make us squirm, it never develops a deep stewardship awareness in a church.

Stewardship does not begin with the question, "How much shall I give?"

The first question of giving is, "Who is the real owner of everything I have?"

Even before this question there is another that is more foundational: "Who owns me?"

The understanding of stewardship revolves around the fact that I am a steward holding all that I have, including myself, in trust for God, the God of the Bible, the Creator of the universe. It was this single revelation that sparked the giving of the Macedonian Christians (II Corinthians 8:5). They first gave themselves to God. They didn't give only a part of their lives and possessions; they gave everything. They belonged entirely to God; therefore, they gladly gave everything to God.

For a long time Helen Rosevere has been one of my favorite missionaries. So many missionary biographies describe missionaries as so perfect they seem almost sanitized. Helen's two autobiographies are more realistic, actually more like the Bible. Helen tells of God in all His glory and grace, but she also exposes the good, bad, and ugly of human life.

When Helen graduated with a medical degree from Cambridge University in 1952, she went to serve in a part of the Congo (Africa) with a population of over 200,000 and not one doctor in the whole area. This meant she was tied to a 24/7 job long before anyone had coined that term. A brick surgical ward was a necessity in such a hot, humid climate, but there was no one to make the bricks. She prayed for a builder, but none came. In the middle of a busy surgery schedule, she got busy making bricks out of mud and straw. One day while she was shaping bricks, an emergency arrived at the dispensary. With bleeding hands, she scrubbed for surgery. The pain was excruciating! When she returned to the brickyard after the operation, one of the nationals said, "Doc, we know now that you love us and care for us. When you enter the operating room wearing your mask and gown, you frighten us, but when you come out here and work with the rest of us and bleed the same as we do, we realize that you are one of us."

Helen quit praying for a builder. She realized that the main reason she had come to Africa was not to be a medical missionary. She had come because she belonged to God, and He had called her to Himself. It was her life more than her particular acts of service that impacted the people.

Until we get this right, we will never get the rest of stewardship right. God does not want ten percent or even 50 percent. He wants 100 percent. He wants our lives, "lock, stock, and barrel." The old gospel song has it right: "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe." What we do with the portion we don't put into the offering plate is as important as what we give. It's all God's money.

As you consider your faith promise commitment, tell God that nothing is off limits to Him. It is all His already. Also, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the gift of generosity (See Romans 12:8). It is not easy to get.

Finally, ask God to make the behavior of the Macedonians real in your life.

PRAYER:

Please, God, help me to give myself first to You. Before everything else in my life, make Your presence a reality. Don't let other things squeeze You out of the center of my daily affairs. Rather, become the true center of all that I do. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

1. Mother Teresa said, "You will never know that Christ is all you need until Christ is all you have." Consider what you are facing today. If the only resource you had was Christ, how would it change the way:

you feel right now?

you approach your responsibilities?

you meet disappointments?

you respond to successes?

It is possible to give gifts to people and to God and yet keep yourself at a distance. Money, which ought to be an expression of personal commitment, can actually be a substitute for personal commitment. Paul does not want that kind of money. Of first importance is to give ourselves to God and to God's people.

—John Piper

HOW MUCH SHOULD I GIVE?



“And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.”

II CORINTHIANS 8:1-3

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

II CORINTHIANS 9:6

“How much should I give?” That is the right question, isn’t it?

I encourage you, rather, to ask, “How much does God want me to give?” There may seem to be very little difference between these two viewpoints, but the divergence is immense. “How much should I give?” is a self-centered question. It focuses on bank accounts, bills, obligations, and regulations. “How much does God want me to give?” places the focus on Him. He is the center.

The immediate concern is not on the financial bottom line, but rather on faith, needs, opportunities, joy, gratitude, and the Holy Spirit. The Macedonians, even though they could have qualified for a hand-out, begged for the “privilege of sharing with others.” God’s mercy and grace, not rules and obligations, were at the center of their stewardship.

Dr. Hugh McKean, a missionary who served in Chiang Mai, Thailand, told of an impoverished church in an isolated area of Thailand. The 400 members, each painfully poor, were diligent to give at least ten percent, usually more, of their meager income to God’s kingdom work. Though their weekly wages averaged less than 20 cents, they had done more for Christ than any other church in Thailand. They paid their own preacher, supported two missionary families in an isolated community, and were intensely interested in all forms of Christian work, especially work for

unfortunates of all kinds. Their love for Christ overflowed with joy to make Him known. This “church of the overflowing hearts,” was a church of lepers. Every person had leprosy. Do you suppose their disease helped them to escape the grip of materialism and to center their lives and their stewardship on God?

One pastor in my denomination has the habit of “attempting something so great for God that it is doomed to failure if He is not in it.” We need this perspective in our stewardship, as well. An outlook that limits itself to “what-I-can-do” creates spiritual nearsightedness.

What keeps us from giving substantially from our wealth, let alone from our poverty, as the Macedonians did? We have a materialistic mindset rather than a Macedonian mindset. We often fear that we will not have enough money or provision, that we will run out. Should we not learn from this text that you cannot out-give God? The fact is that we have less because we have given less. We may receive little, Paul says, because we have given little. (II Corinthians 9:6)

There is no fixed formula for how much we ought to give. The tithe may be a very good place to begin, but it cannot be an inflexible standard by which we measure our giving. Christians in an affluent environment may quickly come to view the tithe as a minimum. If this text in II Corinthians teaches us anything, it is that we must get beyond the confines of the tithe. God teaches us this in other places as well. When the prostitute anointed Jesus’ feet with costly oil and the Pharisees protested, He commended her faith and declared her sins forgiven. (Luke 7:36-50) When the widow gave only two pennies to the offering, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth...this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” (Luke 21:3-4)

How much does God want you to give? Let me suggest that He wants you to give more than you think. This is because giving has so much more to do with our faith in God and so much less to do with simply existing. God wants you to give more than you think, because He wants to stretch your faith far more than you can imagine.

I encountered such faith in an elderly couple I met several years ago in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I was asked to visit some very important donors to the seminary where I was working. Knowing something of their generosity, I expected to find a large palatial

home with a manicured lawn and luxury cars in the garage. I was so astonished by the small white frame house that I rechecked the address to make sure it was correct. However, the loving welcome I received erased my doubts.

As they shared something of their spiritual pilgrimage, the wife told how she had become a believer many years earlier and had started to regularly increase her giving. At first her husband thought she had lost her mind, but soon he began to covet her joy. Her giving brought the husband she loved to faith, and a spirit of generosity has become part of the foundation of their marriage. Throughout a lifetime of giving, God has stretched and enriched their faith over and over. Money that could easily have been spent on luxuries was invested and reinvested in kingdom work.

I left that modest frame home smiling—smiling and praying quietly that God would work that same spirit of selfless joy into my life and my home.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, please help me to look to you and not simply to my bank account as I consider how much my faith promise ought to be. Free my mind from math-centered stewardship. Let Your Spirit speak to my spirit. Please use my giving as a way to stretch my faith. May my giving overflow from the joy of my salvation. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

1. In what way can your faith promise commitment stretch your faith?
2. How does your stewardship perspective change when you move the focus from “How much should I give?” to “How much does God want me to give?”
2. After prayer and reflection, write down a preliminary faith promise.

Men who expect a good return at harvest are not wont to pinch and spare at sowing their seed.

—Matthew Henry

THE FAITH IN FAITH PROMISE



“But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”

II CORINTHIANS 8:7

This is a profound insight into the Christian life. You cannot expect to excel in one area if you are miserly in another. In God's reality the sacred and the secular are woven into the same fabric. If we want to grow in giving, we must grow in faith; if we want to expand our faith, we must expand our giving. The one moves the other. We know that *“faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”* (Hebrews 11:1) Our certainty is proven by our actions.

Brother Lawrence became famous in Europe for his piety and deep faith. Yet he was one monk who didn't spend his days in solitary contemplation and prayer. He was the chief cook and bottle washer, the “lord of the pots and pans,” in his monastery. The “secret ingredient” of his piety was that everything was a matter of faith. “The time of business,” he wrote, “does not with me differ from the time of prayer; in the noise and clatter of my kitchen...I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees.” Faith is important in prayer, but it is also important in meal preparation, automobile repair, gardening, shopkeeping, and a thousand other pursuits. It is as critical on Tuesday afternoon or Friday night as it is on Sunday morning.

This is one of the most important results of faith promise. We are challenged to exercise our faith in the very personal and practical area of our daily needs. Faith is expanded as we trust God for our income, bank account, savings, and even our retirement plans. Faith can hardly become any more real or practical than in these most personal aspects of our lives.

Immediately we can see that the practice of making a faith promise encourages us to consider that God alone is our Provider. Paul writes, *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every*

good work" (II Corinthians 9:8). God provides for us financially so that we can have money to give.

There has never been a country where the words "having all you need" are more fitting than they are in America today. We are, in fact, the richest people that have ever lived on the face of the earth. Faith helps us understand that God has been good to us, not so that we could spend money on ourselves, but rather so we can give to the "abounding of every good work." By faith our stewardship becomes a concrete way in which we engage ourselves in God's kingdom work. The Corinthians first gave themselves to God in faith (II Corinthians 8:5) and then in faith gave contributions "beyond their ability." You cannot do the first and not the second. The life of faith and the life of giving are the same life.

We must give everything we are and everything we have. In the words of Henry Wilson,

*My body, soul, and spirit thus redeemed,
Sanctified and healed, I give, O Lord, to Thee,
A consecrated offering, Thine evermore to be,
That all my powers with all their might
Thy sole glory may unite.*

God wants to stretch your faith through your giving. Most of us have probably seen the famous picture of an old man praying before a simple meal of a little soup and a small loaf of bread. Our first response may be that such faith seems extraordinary when he has so little. Here is a truth that is important for us to understand: Such faith would be even more extraordinary if he had substantial wealth. Paul says, in essence, "I have learned how to live (by faith) whether I have much or little." (Philippians 4:11) It is this quality of faith, not depending on what we have, but on the faithfulness of God, that brings great glory to our Creator. It is this kind of faith encouraged in the faith promise.

A farmer who was known for his generous giving was asked what his secret was. "It is no secret," he replied. "I keep shoveling into God's bin, and He keeps shoveling into mine. But God has a bigger shovel."

PRAYER:

Father, use the faith promise to introduce me to a new level of faith in You. I want to be as fully dependent on You when I have more than I need as when I have little. By faith, I want to perceive that I have nothing that was not given to me by You. May the process of giving remove the idols of materialism from my life. Help me to glorify You through my stewardship. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

1. Think of all God has given you. Why do you think God has given you so much?
2. How are faith and stewardship connected in your life?
3. How can faith promise stretch your faith?

Gratitude...is a response to grace. The compassionate life is a grateful life, and actions born out of gratefulness are not compulsive, but free, not somber but joyful, not fanatical but liberating.

—Henri Nouwen

The only safe rule is to give more than one can spare. In other words, if our expenditures on comforts, luxuries and amusements, etc. are up to the standard common amount with those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. There ought to be things we should like to do but cannot do because our charities expenditure excludes them.

—C. S. Lewis

THE PROMISE OF GOD



“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

II CORINTHIANS 9:10-11

The faith promise concept, like any other blessing of God, can be vulnerable to misuse if we are not careful in our approach. We must never assume that the promise is ours rather than God's. God promises that He will give to us so that we in turn can give generously to His kingdom. The purpose is not to exert leverage on God, but to put a lever on our stewardship. We may think we can dictate an amount to God and promise that we will give that amount if He provides it sometime during the year. Our temptation is to challenge God, when in fact the text challenges us. We need to understand that the promise is not *to* God, but *from* Him. The challenge is for us to become more deeply involved in kingdom work through the privilege of giving.

We are finite. Even at our best, we are not always as involved as we should be, not always *there* when we're needed. We see chaos in society, dysfunction in homes, and broken lives resulting from the “absent father syndrome.” The dads have been too busy, too distracted, or too irresponsible to *be there* for their families, sometimes even when they were physically present.

Francis Schaeffer referred to our Heavenly Father as “the God who is there.” He exists. He is the great I AM, “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (Rev. 1:8b). His promises are reliable. He promises to be with us always. He is with us, as Amy Carmichael writes, “all the days and all day long.”

Faith promise gives the opportunity to stop and take careful account of how God has been there for us. His promises have been 100% faithful. We often live by looking only out the “front windshield” of our lives. We see dangers and threats; we fear the

uncertainties around the next curve. God, our Father, encourages us to spend more time looking out the “rear view mirror.” When God blesses the people of Israel with the Ten Commandments, He begins not with the rules, but with a review of His blessings. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Then He says, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2-3). Throughout the Scripture He reminds His people of His faithfulness to their fathers. Therefore, they can be confident of His care and provision in the present.

As we give to specific workers, projects, or teams, it is natural that our hearts will follow our treasure. Every missionary needs an army of faithful prayer warriors who will daily bring his or her name and needs before God’s throne of grace. They need friends on the home front who befriend them, keep in touch, stay alert to special needs, and welcome them graciously when they return. As we become involved in God’s global outreach, our own worlds expand and we are enriched. The “harvest of righteousness” that comes from undergirding God’s servants far exceeds the cost.

The faith promise commitment is a time for us to reaffirm our faith in the promises of God. When Paul says, “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry,” (Philippians 4:12b), he is reaffirming his faith in God’s provision. God’s resources are never limited. He gives us all we need and all He wants us to have, but we must give it away in order to gain it. “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (II Corinthians 9:6). John Maxwell tells a parable that helps drive home this point. Sundar Singh and a companion, traveling through a high pass in the Himalaya Mountains, came across an inert figure lying in the snow. Sundar wanted to stop and help the man, but his companion resisted. “We will all die if we help this man.”

The companion went on while Sundar Singh lifted the poor traveler onto his back. With great effort he carried the man, and gradually the heat from his body began to warm the poor frozen fellow. Soon both were walking together, side by side. Catching up with the companion who had gone on alone, they found him dead, frozen by the cold.

PRAYER:

Father God, I want my security in the present and my hope for the future to rest in Your faithful promises and not my savings. I want You who have given me everything to be more real and more important than the gifts You have given. Father, as I consider my faith promise commitment, make Your promises so real that my response reflects far more my faith in You than it does in taking a calculator to my checkbook. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

1. As you think of the promises of God, which are the first two that come to mind?
2. Consider the promises found in John 16:24; Philippians 1:6; Matthew 10: 29-31.
3. In what way does giving in faith, based on the promises of God, change your attitude about generosity?

Let me stress that God is not promising to make generous Christians wealthy. He is promising to make generous Christians capable of even greater generosity.

—John Piper

If our giving is only driven by what we can get back, then we can become guilty of treating God like the stock market; do not be surprised if your shares crash. God will not feed our greed or materialism, but He will meet our needs and make us a blessing to others.

—David Holdaway

WHERE WILL IT COME FROM?



“You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion...”

II CORINTHIANS 9:11

“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.”

II CORINTHIANS 8:2

Before we ask where money for a faith pledge will come from, we need to consider what a faith pledge is. It is not first and foremost faith in what God will give me, but it is faith that God will enable me to give. It is more important that you pray for a giving heart than that you pray for added income. Giving is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:8), and experience teaches us that the gift of giving is an uncommon gift.

Paul challenges the Corinthians, *“just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving”* (II Corinthians 8:7). Increased giving starts, not with increased income, but with the grace of God enlarging our hearts with the joy of giving.

Some seem to argue that the money given in a faith promise pledge commitment can be expected from some unusual and unexpected source. God can provide for us any way He chooses, and often He delights in reminding us of that fact in dramatic ways.

Recently I met an energetic young couple who had gone to the mission field. As they prayed for funds, God began to provide, and eventually all they lacked was 700 dollars. One day a beautiful cockatoo landed in their backyard.

Amazed, they caged it and advertised for the owner. Receiving no response, they sold it to a pet store for exactly 700 dollars. “The last money we needed fell out of the sky!” they exclaimed, “Literally.”

Some might consider them “lucky.” Not so. God may astound some of us as we pray for an increased gift of giving, but we should never sit back and enjoy the windfall.

Others have enjoyed generating creative sources of income. One man made an investment and dedicated all the proceeds to his faith promise. A woman with a special recipe made and sold Vidalia onion relish. A housewife did word processing, while some teenagers engaged in extra lawn work and babysitting. Possibly God will provide a second job for a few hours a week or an idea for making and marketing crafts or baked goods. We can ask the Creator for a little sanctified creativity. The results may be amazing.

No doubt, the greatest source of money for faith promise comes from what may be called lifestyle giving. Such giving is rooted in a resolution to make our stewardship a major priority in our lives. Lifestyle giving, simply stated, begins with better management of our finances. Think how much you might save if you put the brakes on impulse spending. Even shopping for groceries with a list and sticking to the list can save money for giving. Shopping at sales, watching the newspaper for coupons, or finding low-budget menus all can become adventures in depending on God. I know a family who was able to give several hundred dollars by halving the amount spent on Christmas presents one year.

Lifestyle giving can also grow out of living more simply. Taking a less expensive vacation, driving an older car, or wearing our clothes for several seasons can also be the source of substantial funds for giving. We can pray and ask God to show us things we can do without. Proverbs 8:12 in the old King James translation says, “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence and find out knowledge of witty inventions.” Prudence is not simply an old fashioned girl’s name. It is a virtue of thrift and simplicity that will honor our Father and serve us well. God will use it to lead us to new insights in wise and joyful living.

Maybe the most challenging aspect of lifestyle giving involves what we are willing to give up. The Macedonians had graduated to the level of sacrificial giving. This kind of giving takes a great deal of faith and a great deal of prayer.

Finally, there is giving from abundance. God blesses His people. The people of Israel sang, “Then the land will yield its harvest, and

God, our God will bless us" (Psalm 67:6). Have you not experienced this? God allows us to save money, earn interest, and succeed in our occupations, all so we can give. As our wealth grows, our giving ought to grow faster.

*By the gates of the treasury still he sits,
And watches the gifts we bring,
And he measures the gold that we give to him
By the gold to which we cling.*

—F. C. Wellman

When you ask, "Where will the money come from?" consider the advice of John Wesley: "Make all you can, save all you can, and then give all you can."

PRAYER:

Father, You are the source of all that I have. As I consider my faith promise, I ask first, that you provide me with a giving heart. Begin to show me how much you want me to give and also where you want me to give from. Make me willing to work harder, to live more simply, and even to sacrifice. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

1. How have you decided what to give in the past?
2. How would you like to change your giving priorities in the future?
3. How can you increase your giving through faith promise?

Dennis the Menace was walking out of church with his dad and mom. As they approached the pastor, Dennis asked, much to the embarrassment of his father, "What are you going to do with my dad's quarter?"

THE PURPOSE OF STEWARDSHIP



"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and of your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

II CORINTHIANS 9: 12, 13, 15

Why do we give to missions?

A quick priority check reminds us that, of course, the reason to give to missions is to bring glory to God. We have the privilege of showing His greatness, His majesty, and His incredible love to men and women. Astounding though it is, God allows even a clump of dirt like me to reflect His glory to the world. He actually says that “men will praise God” as a result of my gifts.

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”

His glory is the reason we exist. He made us for His own glory, and He saved us for His glory. God is worthy of all praise. He brought everything into being. He sustains everything, and He came to redeem His people with His own life. Everything we are and everything we do ought to bring praise, not to ourselves, but to God.

Recently I was asked at a missions conference if it would not be a good idea to take all the money from fields where very little fruit is seen and give it to others where things are obviously happening. I answered that God is working in both places and that we cannot evaluate missions simply on a business model. His work is invisible, and we should never assume that we are able to see the entire picture.

Amy Carmichael brings this out in a quotation from “the wise and well-loved Robert Wilson of Keswick.”

...he stopped near a stone-breaker, who, squatting beside his pile of stones, was hammering steadily.

"I will tell thee a story," the dear old man said, pointing with his whip to the stone-breaker who tapped stolidly on and never looked up. "There was one who asked a stone-breaker at work by the roadside, 'Friend, which blow broke the stone?' And the stone-breaker answered, 'The first one, and the last one, and every one in between.'"

Some of us plant and some of us water, but only God produces the fruit of the harvest (I Corinthians 3:7). All the glory goes to God because all the glory belongs to Him alone. Only He can turn hearts from stone to flesh and change men from lovers of self to lovers of God. When we give a faith promise, we are not giving to a missionary, but to God.

The second reason we give is to be a blessing to others. The Apostle John tells us that God is love. He is a dispenser of love, not a consumer of love. As we grow in grace, especially in our stewardship, we have the privilege of reflecting the nature of our heavenly Father. He wants us to love the world that He loves.

I love the story of the American businessman who was visiting Korea some years ago and observed an old man and a young man plowing a rice paddy by hand.

"They must be very poor," the businessman said to his host.

"No, they are rich," replied the missionary. "You see, some members in their church had nothing, so they sold their only ox and gave the earnings to their poor friends. This spring they are pulling the plow themselves."

"What a sacrifice!"

"They did not call it a sacrifice," said the missionary. "They only said it was a wonderful thing that they had an ox to sell."

We also give in order to serve Christ. Jesus left us the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), the command to go into all the world and make disciples for Him, as His last words on earth. He ascended into heaven only after He had triumphantly finished all that He came to accomplish on earth. With His final words, He

turned to the Church and put us to work. "I am finished; now you begin."

And what are we to do? We are to be involved in every way we can to tell others about the good news of Christ's redeeming love. I often say that God's arena has no spectators and no bench. Every player, even the most inconspicuous, has a significant position in the game.

Every year our mission organization has a children's project in which youngsters bring a gift of their own money, usually for ministry to other children somewhere in the world. It is quite obvious that this collection would never come near meeting the budget of our mission activities, but I believe God is greatly pleased by this activity. Little ones are learning of their worth in God's kingdom. They are developing habits of generosity that may continue for a lifetime as they learn to serve the One who said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14)

Finally, we give out of gratitude. Look at what God has done for us! He gave us life; then He sacrificed His own life so that we could have eternal life. The song of our heart is to be,

*Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

PSALM 100:3

Nothing compares to the joy of giving to the One who gave us everything.

PRAYER:

Father in heaven, You are the source of everything that I have. Help me not to build up treasures here on earth, but to be more concerned about treasures in heaven. Clean up my heart in order that I may wish no glory to come to me. May I bring glory to You through my giving. Teach me to serve others and to really care for them as much as I care for myself. Give me a thankful spirit for all You have done for me, and let thanksgiving be the source of my faith promise commitment. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why is it so hard to focus on glorifying God?
2. What has God done for you that you are particularly thankful for?
3. Consider your faith promise and your service for Christ. Pray that God will bring the realities in question one and question two together in your life.

Whenever we turn toward God our lives begin to bless others.

—David W. Shenk

I guess that going to more receptive people to the exclusion of less receptive people might be a bargain for missions dollars if we think that we can purchase people for money. But we can't purchase people to be saved. We can only proclaim the gospel and hope that some will be saved. If it were possible to win people with money, then we would spend all our time raising money to pay the ransom—but this is a ransom that Jesus already paid!

—Jews for Jesus

AN ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT



“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

II CORINTHIANS 9:7

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”

II CORINTHIANS 9:15

Have you ever had anyone tell you, “You need an attitude transplant”?

If you have, you know it feels like a slap in the face. What a humbling experience! It hurts if you deserved it, but it hurts even more if you didn’t.

In the past, the Corinthians had given even more than Paul expected, and he makes it clear that he expects them to continue the giving trend set earlier. Still, He reminds them that as they plan their gift, they should examine their attitude. It is important for us also, to search our heart attitudes in relationship to this process.

Giving to God’s kingdom work is far too important to be simply a duty. The foundation of our stewardship is God’s indescribable gift of His Son, who “for the joy set before Him,” took the punishment for our sin upon Himself. We come to Him with nothing but our sin and our need. He gives us His righteousness for our sin, His riches for our poverty. He transforms us into sons and daughters of God and changes our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. The gospel at work in our lives causes us to give. We give out of the gospel.

Those of us who have been enriched by the work of Christ are to embellish that richness through the act of giving. Victorian author, Mary Cholmondeley wrote, “Every year I live, I am convinced that the waste of life lies in the love we have not given, the powers we have not used, the selfish prudence that will risk nothing, and which, shirking pain, misses happiness as well. No one ever yet was the poorer in the long run for having once in a

lifetime let out all the length of all the reins.” This is also true in the spiritual sense.

There is much spiritual poverty because of the lack of giving among believers. Through our giving, we experience the privilege of being instruments of God’s grace. Missionaries who have given up much for God’s work are empowered to preach the gospel to those trapped in the darkness of unbelief. Churches are planted as light in places where there is little hope. Homeless children are brought to experience love through the family of God. Broken people find healing through medical missions.

Our culture is obsessed with the accumulation of wealth, but not spiritual wealth. Nothing is sadder than to be rich in material things, but poor in the experience of God.

Little we do pays spiritual dividends as high as giving to God’s work around the world. Giving, like love, cannot be forced. Paul may even be suggesting that giving under compulsion can be dangerous to your spiritual health. As you consider your faith promise, pray not only that God will guide you in your giving, but that He will give you a longing to give. Ask that this desire will be so great that it would hurt too much not to give.

Some years ago, Louis Evans served as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Hollywood. In his congregation was a gifted surgeon who was called by God to go to Korea as a missionary. During a visit to his friend, Pastor Evans observed him operating in severely primitive conditions on an eight-year-old child. After three harrowing hours, the doctor stepped back and said, “She will be all right now.”

As he joined his pastor, Evans asked, “How much would you have received for that operation back in the States?”

“Oh, 500 to 750* dollars is the going rate.”

“And how much for this one?”

“Oh, a few cents—a few cents, and the smile of God.”

The surgeon put his hand on Pastor Evans’ shoulders, shook him slightly, and added, “But, man, this is living!”

*Far below today’s cost.

It is in this same spirit that Paul says, “*Give what (you have) decided in (your) heart to give, for God loves a cheerful giver.*” (II Corinthians 9:7)

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you for the privilege of giving. You have enabled me to give, and You have provided the faith promise opportunity for me to respond. I now ask You to give me a heart that desires to give with joy. Let me give out of the gospel. Show me what You want me to give, and please continue to enable me to give. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

1. What does it mean for you to give out of the gospel?
2. Do you consider giving a duty or a privilege?
3. You have been praying about your faith promise pledge. How much did you intend to give before you began?
4. As you have studied God’s Word, has He stretched your commitment?

Aim at heaven, and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth, and you will get neither.

—C. S. Lewis

Resolved, to live with all my might while I do live.

Resolved, never to lose one moment of time, to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

Resolved, never to do anything which I should despise or think meanly of in another.

Resolved, never to do anything out of revenge.

Resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

—Jonathan Edwards

E P I L O G U E



If we ignore the privilege and joy of giving, who is hurt?

Remember this: *“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously”* (II Corinthians 9:6).

During the Roaring Twenties, a man named Arthur Berry became quite notorious as a jewel thief—and a good one. He only stole from the rich and famous, and it even became quite a mark of prestige to have been hit by Mr. Berry. Eventually he was shot three times in a gun battle with police, arrested, and sentenced to 18 years in prison.

After his release, reporters were clamoring to interview him. One insightful young man inquired, “Mr. Berry, you robbed an awful lot of wealthy people in your life as a jewel thief. From whom did you steal the most?”

Without a moment’s hesitation Berry replied, “The man from whom I stole the most was Arthur Berry.”

When *we* fall down in our stewardship, some say we are stealing from God. God, however, doesn’t need our money. Others indicate that Christian work will be handicapped, but God cannot and does not fail. When we fail in our giving, we rob *ourselves* of the privilege, the joy and the blessing that come to those who “excel in the grace of giving” (II Corinthians 8:7c).

