

“Enriched in Every Way”  
Rev. Brian R. Louis  
Faith Presbyterian Church  
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**2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

**6** The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8** And God is able to provide you with every blessing<sup>[a]</sup> in abundance, so that by **always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly** in every good work. **9** As it is written,

“He scatters abroad; he gives to the poor;

his righteousness<sup>[b]</sup> endures forever.”

**10** He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.<sup>[c]</sup> **11** You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us, **12** for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. **13** Through the testing of this ministry you<sup>[d]</sup> glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ

and by the generosity of your partnership with them and with all others, **14** while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. **15** Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Holy wisdom, holy word.

“Timmy didn’t want to put his money in the offering plate Sunday morning, so his mother decided to use some hurried creative reasoning with him. ‘You don’t want that money, honey,’ she whispered in his ear. ‘Quick! Drop it in the plate. It’s tainted!’ Horrified, the little boy obeyed. After a few seconds he whispered, ‘But, mommy, why was the money tainted? Was it dirty?’ ‘Oh, no dear,’ she replied. ‘It’s not really dirty. It just ‘taint yours, and it ‘taint mine,’ she replied. ‘It’s God’s.’”<sup>1</sup>

Over the past couple of months, I’ve observed the cheerful giving of this congregation to donate money and goods for the backpack program. Today we have tk from st. Vincent de paul here at worship. The reason she’s here is to pick up the backpacks so they can be distributed to our homeless neighbors in the community. With your giving, you have

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. George Harris, First Church of Christ (UCC), Simsbury, Conn.; <https://pastorgharris.wordpress.com/tag/stewardship-jokes/>

enriched the lives of people in the community who do not have much. You have enriched the life of this church with the spirit of your giving. You've enriched the life of this community as a whole by being a light here at the edge of town for people to see. You've also enriched yourselves spiritually, by seeing the fruit of your generosity spread goodwill in the community.

Our involvement in the backpack program started with a tour of St. Vincent de Paul in 2015 for the "Church has left the building" program. Our backpack coordinator Pam Winters recently wrote a brief history of the program, and she noted that Sandy Brown, a loyal church member and a deacon at the time, saw a need and something we could do to help people in the community. We could contribute backpacks and the goods that go in them and give them to St. Vincent de Paul so they could distribute them to help meet the needs of the homeless in our community. Sandy was inspired by the needs she saw on that visit to St. Vincent de Paul that day and she decided to act and help fill the void in the assistance needed for the homeless. As Pam wrote, "Sandy Brown is evidence that one person can make a big difference in many people's lives."

The money used to do the shopping for toiletries comes from you, the community of Faith. The donations of the toiletries come from you. This past Wednesday a group of

folks from the church gathered in Stevenson Hall to put the toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, and other items in groups so they could be assembled and placed in the backpacks for distribution. On Saturday, a group of folks assembled the backpacks and they're ready to go now and be given to people who need some extra help.

The first year of the program we assembled and filled 25 backpacks. Now, it is up to 70 to 75 backpacks.

Those who gave, and helped in the assembly did what the Old Testament reading from this morning commanded us. To “not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor.”

These principles of love and caring for the less fortunate were instilled in Jesus throughout his youth and his adulthood. Jesus knew the scriptures better than anyone. He knew that passage from Deuteronomy, and others similar to it, which commanded everyone to take care of those who needed help.

Jesus cared deeply for the poor and downtrodden. We have the story of the rich young man in Luke where Jesus tells him to sell everything he has and give the money to the poor.

Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, who not only provides immediate treatment and aid to the man who was robbed and beaten and was laying on the side of the road, but he also uses some of his own money to pay for the man's care and lodging. And Jesus in Matthew 25, speaks of when we give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, we do that to him. Jesus said: 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'

Christ commands us to live in service to one another; to not only give of our time and talents to help people, but also to give of our treasure to alleviate the suffering of people.

The impact of the love of Christ in our lives is a love that we get to share with others. When we give to the church, we give to strengthen the ministries of our church and of the organizations that Faith supports. The church makes the backpack program happen. Your giving to the church in the past year has supported a local veterans

assistance organization, the Warrior Healing Center. Through the church, we supply the venue and hospitality for the Dixieland Devotionals, which is coming up in the spring. Our Mission and Stewardship Committee chooses which local charitable groups the proceeds should go to. This spring, hundreds and hundreds of dollars went to local organizations who provide support for the less fortunate in our community.

Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians, "You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity." How will you be enriched? What did Paul mean here by enriched? He did not mean that the individuals and the church in Corinth would somehow be flush with a lot of money for their generosity. That is not a theme of any letter Paul wrote.

I cannot think of Jesus ever talking about getting more money as a reward for giving generously to those in need.

The enrichment we receive is not financial enrichment, but spiritual enrichment. Giving of our time and treasure is a spiritual discipline, a spiritual practice. We feel good when we give to the church and our ministries here. It is spiritual enrichment. It is a way to deny ourselves, to sacrifice, and to share what we have with those who do not have much.

The enrichment Paul speaks of is the opposite of what has become known as the "prosperity gospel." I prefer to use the word philosophy instead of gospel because I

think to use the word “gospel” with this line of thinking is wrong, and it cheapens the word which means everything for our faith. This prosperity philosophy argues in part that the more you give to the church, the more rewards and prosperity in your life you will receive. I listened to one of those prosperity preachers recently. The talks all follow a similar pattern. The latest one I listened to said that if you have honored god, been faithful to the Lord, and you are a believer, that you believe in the power of God to do great things, that you will be rewarded, flooded with opportunity, health, and that your dreams will come true. Get ready for a flood of goodness in your life. You’ll meet that person who will help take your business venture to great success, or that you’ll get that dream house, or that you will be healed of the illness that weighs on you.

Be a faithful and good Christian, a good believer, and great things are going to come flooding into your world.

I’m not against prosperity, or health, or opportunity. I’m all for it. I think it’s great.

But this preacher’s philosophy cheapens our relationship with God. It treats our relationship with God as a transactional relationship, where if I do this, I’ll get things in return. In this philosophy there is no thinking of doing the will of God. It becomes about us, and not about God and God’s will.

God's will is to do what Jesus taught, and commanded us to do. We don't give to feel good, although that is a frequent byproduct. We don't give because we want something in return. We don't give because we want a promotion at work, or an extra \$1000 a month in our pension checks. We give because we are followers of Jesus Christ, and he taught that we should give to help those of our brothers and sisters who are suffering. We give for the ministry of the church here on pledge commitment Sunday and in gratitude to God and thanksgiving to God for all of God's blessings.

We're not in it for us. We are in it for God. The giving to the church is for the glory of God and the care of his children. It is not about us. It is to build up the body of Christ.

When we give, the body of Christ, the church, is enriched in every way. Amen.