

Relationships: The Long-Distance Factor **II Corinthians 8 through 9:15**

I. The Starting Point: Commitment. II Corinthians 8:3-4

The Joy of Giving When we let go of money we are letting go of part of ourselves and part of our security. But this is precisely why it is important to do it. It is one way to obey Jesus' command to deny ourselves When we give money we are releasing a little more of our egocentric selves and a little more of our false security Giving frees us to care. It produces an air of expectancy as we anticipate what God will lead us to give. It makes life with God an adventure in the world, and that is worth living for and giving for. —Richard J. Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life*, in *Christianity Today*, "Reflections," Vol. 44, no. 7.

Giving Back to God Willingly I do not think I exaggerate when I say that some of us put our offering in the plate with a kind of triumphant bounce as much as to say: "There-now God will feel better!" ... I am obliged to tell you that God does not need anything you have. He does not need a dime of your money. It is your own spiritual welfare at stake in such matters as these You have the right to keep what you have all to yourself—but it will rust and decay, and ultimately ruin you. —A. W. Tozer, *Christ the Eternal Son*, in *Christianity Today*, "Reflections," Vol. 44, no. 7.

II. The Secret: Proper Motivation. II Corinthians 8:7-15, 21

Motives for Giving Substituted for the Proper Attitude Have you ever considered the many motives that are substituted for the proper attitude in giving? * General good of the church * Group pressure * Pride or embarrassment * Social approval * Pity * Tax exemption * Conscience salving * Fear * Owing the tithe * Humanitarian ideas * Loyalty * Example of Christ * Rewards * Pursuit of happiness All may be included in the spontaneous willing heart attitude—but none can replace or substitute for it. See: 2 Corinthians 9:7

Real Love Is Measured by What We Give Marquis de Lafayette was a French general and politician who joined the American Revolution and became a friend of George Washington. An influential man in the U.S. and France, Lafayette was also a man of compassion. The harvest of 1782 was a poor one, but the manager of his estate had filled his barns with wheat. "The bad harvest has raised the price of wheat," said his manager. "This is the time to sell." Lafayette thought about the hungry peasants in the villages and replied, "No, this is the time to give." Real love is often measured by our willingness to let go of what we possess. Sometimes the thing we grip most tightly in our hands is the very thing God asks us to hand over to Him.

III. The Strategy: Giving Intentionally. II Corinthians 9:7-8

I Gave It to Jesus A pastor once told the story of a great need his church had for financial support in a crisis. Sunday morning he told the congregation about the need and asked them to bring their gift to the front of the church. The members loved their church and they loved the Lord, and they soon filled the aisles as they brought their offerings. The pastor noticed one giver above all the rest. It was a little girl who was on a pair of crutches. When she reached the front of the church, she removed a ring from her finger, and after great effort she placed it with the rest of the offerings and returned to her seat. After the service was over, the pastor looked through the gifts until he found the little girl's ring. He took it to her and said, "Honey, I saw what you did. It was beautiful, but the response of the people has been so large that we have money left over, so we do not need your ring. I have brought it back to you." The little girl looked up at her pastor and said, "I did not give that ring to you, I gave it to Jesus." —T.T. Crabtree, *Pastor's Manual*, Zondervan, 1985, p. 304.

Statistics on American Churches The U.S. Department of Commerce has recently released statistics on American churches, clergy and church schools. *Church Law & Tax Report* gives some interesting figures: * Number of U.S. congregations—294,271 * Churches with fewer than 100 members—60,300 * Churches with fewer than 500 members—205,556 * Churches with 1,000-1,999 members—21,691 * Churches with 2,000 or more members—13,958 Last year churches received \$49 billion in revenues, of which \$40 billion came from contributions, \$1.4 billion from wills and estates, and \$2.5 billion from fees or charges for services. There are a total of 348,000 clergy employed in the United States, and they have served an average of 15.8 years in each position.

IV. The Result: Praise To God. II Corinthians 9:12-15

Sacrificial Giving The following letter was received by a pastor in Texas: Dear Pastor, In reply to your request to send a check, I wish to inform you that the present condition of my bank account makes it almost impossible. My shattered financial condition is due to the federal laws, state laws, county laws, corporation laws, mother-in-laws, sister-in-laws, and outlaws. Through these laws, I am compelled to pay a business tax, an amusement tax, a head tax, a school tax, a gas tax, a light tax, a water tax, and a sales tax. Even my brains are taxed. I am required to get a business license, dog license, truck license, not to mention a marriage license. I am also required to contribute to every organization or society which the genius of man is capable of bringing to life; women's relief, unemployment relief, every hospital and charitable institution in the city, including the red cross, the black cross, the purple cross and the double cross. For my own safety, I am required to carry life insurance, property insurance, liability insurance, burglary insurance, accident insurance, business insurance, earthquake insurance, tornado insurance, unemployment insurance, old age insurance and fire insurance. I am inspected, expected, disrespected, rejected, dejected, examined, reexamined, informed, reformed, summoned, fined, commanded, and compelled until I provide an inexhaustible supply of money for every known need, desire or hope of the human race. Simply because I refuse to donate something or other, I am boycotted, talked about, lied about, held up, held down and robbed until I am ruined. I can tell you honestly that had not the unexpected happened, I could not enclose this check. The wolf that comes to so many doors nowadays just had pups in the kitchen. I sold them. HERE IS THE MONEY! —David Jeremiah, *Growing Through Giving*, Preface.

Humor: Just One Problem ... One Sunday, in the midst of my church's building program, the pastor made an announcement before the worship service. As he looked at the gymnasium full of people sitting in pews from the old sanctuary, he said, "We have all the money we need to complete our project." A brief silence was followed by cheers and applause. "There is just one problem," he continued. "Some of it is still in your pockets." After a few moans and some laughter, the service began. —Phyllis Herzog, Coon Rapids, Minnesota. *Christian Reader*, "Lite Fare."