

When my Dad was looking to go to college he and his parents couldn't afford it. So my great aunt Eleanor gave the rest of the money my Dad needed to enroll. This enabled him to get an education. Combined with his education my Dad used his talents. He became successful in business and was able to give a scholarship in honor of his relatives who gave to his college tuition, including my great Aunt Eleanor. That scholarship enables others to get an education today.

"The point is this," our scripture says, "The one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. What we use to give is the result of previous giving. We decide how much to use from what has been harvested from previous planting for the next planting. My great aunt Eleanor and my dad both had to decide what to give.

We are asked to give eagerly, without hesitating. We are asked to give to show proof of love. God gives us talents, time, and money to give. When we give there are results. The results depend on our giving. Let me paraphrase the opening verse of our scripture reading. One who gives little will also see little result, and the one who gives abundantly will see abundant results. The results from giving are directly proportional to the amount of giving.

Our decision is what we give. Corinthians describes a giving that comes from inward resolve and connection to Jesus. The giving described doesn't come from a casual decision or impulse. We give what God has guided us in our heart. We are asked to give abundantly.

A girl with a beautiful voice was reluctant to sing the national anthem because she didn't want to be embarrassed. When she took the risk and used her talent she and all those around her were uplifted.

If we are reluctant to give we betray our uncertainty that anything worthwhile will come from our giving. Christ didn't give himself reluctantly. Giving of our lives: our time our talents and our money, makes a difference. Giving is not just so we feel good, or for a church budget or so someone else can be helped. Our giving has personal and corporate impact. Giving deepens our trust in God. We can acknowledge the talents God has given us as we use them. Giving connects us with others. We develop relationships with others as we give our time. Giving shows our desire to be a part of the ministry of the church. We enable greater service as we give our money.

If we give under compulsion the purpose of giving is defeated. If a gift is not voluntary it is just paying a tax. We don't communicate faith in God by paying the church. We don't grow in love or in thanksgiving for the talents we have when we feel forced to use them. Our cheerfulness for the opportunity to serve God is

lost when we feel forced to give our time. How and what we give expresses our faith and how God is at work in us. We are able to show God's love and grace to others by giving cheerfully and abundantly.

God enriches us for abundant giving. Verse eight says, "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. The first part is literally: God is able to make all grace abound to you. (Grace (god's free gift of love) is what enables us to give. God gives us spiritual and material grace so that we can be generous. God gives us enough money, talent, and time that we can share it abundantly with others.

We are blessed with 'enough' to give abundantly. God may give us contentment with what we have so that while we have comparatively little we have an abundance to share. There are those among us who have abundance because they are called to live simply. (We hear of the joy offered by poor Jamaican Christians. We can read and experience African Christians giving when they have a house with dirt floors.) God also gives some of us more than enough in a clear way. We have extra. We have enough to give in the ways God is asking us to give.

In our society we think we have enough when we don't have to depend on others. People tell us that self-sufficiency makes for true happiness. God offers us a very different idea of what is enough. It is finding our sufficiency in God's grace. True happiness comes from demonstrating God's grace in us through good works, giving our time, money, and talents in ministry.

God enriches us so that we can enrich others. (Illustrate: giving money for vitamins; talent: teaching so I could be minister; Giving time to care for a child to free someone else to use their talent.) When we give our resources they are replenished by God's grace. The greater the giving the greater the enrichment the greater the resources to give, the greater thanksgiving to God.

If this is God's reality then why do we not always see abundant giving? Presbyterian leader Clark Cowden says, "Most people prefer the predictable current situation, even if it's not producing a lot of fruit for Christ, than to try something new where the consequences are unpredictable and might involve some loss for people in the church. We tend to stay with what we know. Many have become cynical and skeptical about trying new things that might make our ministry better."ⁱ

People in the church tend to give just enough to keep things going rather than to give abundantly to enable new ministry. We give enough money that people in the church spend their time worrying about money instead of ministry. The time we are willing to give causes the leaders in the church try and try to get people involved in teams rather than to do ministry in our community. Churches

do the same things, rely on the same talented people, and give the same level of energy to stave off decline rather than giving more, discovering new talents, and expecting abundant results from what they give. Do we expect God to use our talents to try to maintain what is comfortable or to demonstrate Jesus' love?

At first, youth would willingly give their time and people their money for the youth to go on a mission trip, but that was it. It wasn't bad ministry, but not one of abundance. Abundance was seen when the youth coming back from mission trip – wanted to share/give that experience to younger youth. God had enriched them with his grace as they served others. They now had an abundance to give. The youth gave their talents and ideas to create a mission experience for younger youth and adults gave their precious time to walk alongside the youth using their talents and having their faith encouraged. God supplied what was needed to give and God used what was given so that there would be more to give. God will multiply our means for giving as we use them. He will increase the effect so it produces love, unity, thanksgiving.

We can expect results from generous, abundant giving. When we give abundantly: We expect others needs to be met. We expect thanksgiving to be offered to God. We expect our own faith to grow. We expect our love for God to be seen in the church and beyond the church walls. We expect to be connected more deeply with each other and with God in the part of his mission in the world that he has called us to.

In the book of Romans we learn that the Corinthians gave. Now it is our turn to reflect God's abundant giving in our own action so that Bell Memorial will be enriched in every way for our great generosity so that others give thanks to God for his ministry through us.

ⁱ – Clark Cowden <http://www.pres-outlook.com/reports-a-resources/presbyterian-heritage-articles/9288.html>
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