

THE JOY DIFFICULTIES OF GIVING

Now, friends, I want to report on the surprising and generous ways in which God is working in the churches in Macedonia province. Fierce troubles came down on the people of those churches, pushing them to the very limit. The trial exposed their true colors: They were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts. I was there and saw it for myself. They gave offerings of whatever they could—far more than they could afford!—pleading for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians. (The Message)

Paul wrote the above in 2 Corinthians 8. Later in chapter 9 he writes how "God loves a cheerful giver." I admit in these difficult economic times, I struggle for that cheerfulness. I thought I was cheerful giver in years past when the economy was better, but now I wonder how much of that was pride. In the current economic downturn giving seems more of a duty, especially when I see the church's financial needs. I begin to feel guilty for not helping more which does not seem to be an emotion in line with the Gospel.

One of my favorite verses is:

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. (2 Cor 8:7 NIV)

"...This *grace of giving.*" Giving is a grace - an unwarranted gift. The God of the Universe, who created all things, controls all things, to whom all belongs, and knows all things, *allows* us the privilege of giving to His name. He does not need our money, it is all His anyway. As Dave Ramsey said, "If God wanted your money, he would just take it and there would be a grease spot where you were standing".

The important part of giving is not what effect the money has on the recipient, but the effect it has on the giver. During these uncertain economic times, looking to one my least favorite verses provides me guidance.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. (James 1:2 NIV)

Maybe during times such as these, and maybe always, giving should be looked upon as a way to reorder our priorities in search of the joy of the Lord. And as our faith increases, our relationship with God is strengthened, and our joy is increased in Him.

Giving is a tangible discipline that shows, and increases, my reliance on God. Every time I hold onto "my" money, I am again showing how little I trust in Him. So I continue to attempt to give weekly, sometimes with joy, sometimes with difficulty, but always longing for the day to be like the man in Jesus' parable who realized how a relationship with God far surpasses any security in this world.

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.
(Matt 13:44 NIV)*