

FIRST CENTURY FUNDRAISING

Once there was an infant playing on the carpet. She picked up a quarter and stuck it in her mouth. When her mother saw that the little baby had swallowed a coin she became hysterical. She screamed to her husband in the other room...

"Quick, honey, call 9-1-1—our daughter just swallowed a quarter!" Her husband shouted back, "Forget 9-1-1— call the pastor... He can get money out of anybody!"

In chapters 8-9 Pastor Paul intends to get money out of the Corinthians. You could call these two chapters *a first century fundraising letter*.

The believers in Judea had fallen on hard times. Famine had hit the region. Members of the church in Jerusalem were hungry and hurting – and Paul saw their

need as an opportunity to bridge the gap between Gentile and Jewish Christians.

Not only would this offering meet a physical need, it also served two additional purposes... The Gentiles would be acknowledging the debt they owed the Jews in Jerusalem. After all, they were the first church, and had led the way for others to follow. At the same time, once the Jews felt firsthand the Gentiles' love for them and for the Lord - it would help them accept the Gentiles as bonafide believers.

It was a good plan, and Paul had already received a generous offering from the Macedonians in Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea. Now he uses their offering as an example to the Corinthians... He employs a little positive peer pressure!

ABOUT GIVING TO GOD...

THEIR GIFT WAS A GRACE

Paul says 8:1, "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:"

Paul doesn't call their offering *a gift*, but *a grace*. When you receive God's grace you'll want to give in return. Never give to earn God's favor – His blessings are a free gift. Our giving should always be a response to His grace. Give freely, voluntarily, and from a thankful heart.

It reminds me of the little boy who was given a dime to drop in the collection plate. Later in the service, communion was served. He reached for the bread, but his mom whispered, "Son, you can't take it yet – you're not old enough." That's when the little boy shouted out, "Why not? I've already paid for it!"

If your offering is an attempt to buy God's favor and forgiveness, put it back in your wallet. Grace is God's *unwrought, unsought, unbought* love. You don't give to get! You give to say thanks. *Giving to God* and the *grace of God* go hand in hand.

THEIR GIFT WAS A SACRIFICE

8:3, "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing..." they gave "beyond their ability" – their offering was a sacrifice. They dug deep to give to God and help others.

Your bank account may determine the *amount of your gift*, but it shouldn't affect the *act of your giving*. It's a principle. If God has

given to you then you should give to Him. Don't think "*I can't afford to give*"... you can't afford not to!

THEIR GIFT WAS A PROMISE

8:10 indicates the Corinthians planned to give this offering a year earlier, but lacked a good follow-through. This is common when it comes to giving... It's easy to make big commitments until it's time to write the check... Paul says, "as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion..."

THEIR GIFT WAS VOLUNTARY

He wants them to collect the offering, but give with the right attitude... 2 Corinthians 8:5, "that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation."

THEIR GIFT WAS A SEED

Paul encourages the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 9:6, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

Your offering is like a seed. Plant it in God's work and it'll reap a bountiful reward.

It's been said, "You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead." God allows us to invest in His kingdom. Give a little and you get a little in return. Give a lot and you're rewarded abundantly. You reap in proportion to what you sow!

MORE ABOUT GIVING TO GOD...

THEIR GIFT WAS A CHOICE

Paul says in 9:7, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart...” In other words, there’s no longer a law that governs our giving. You decide. It’s up to you... do you want a *little blessing* or a *lavish blessing*? You reap what you sow.

THEIR GIFT WAS A CHEERFULNESS

He adds, “not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” Don’t misunderstand it’s not just the amount, but the *attitude* that determines our return. You can give a lot, but give it from the wrong motive, and it’ll nullify your reward.

If you give reluctantly... or because you were pressured or manipulated... or because you thought God needed your offering - you’re better off not giving. Just keep it. Put it back in your wallet. God wants you to give cheerfully and joyfully!

The Greek word translated “cheerful” means “*hilarious*”. God loves a hilarious giver. Rather than give because we think we have to, or we think God needs it... we should give because we love Him, and get a kick out of joining in His work!

THEIR GIFT WAS AN ABUNDANCE

Verse 8 says God is able to provide you “an abundance for every good work”. When God finds a hilarious giver, don’t be surprised if He continues to provide that person an abundance.

If you’re just a *depository*... if God gives to you, and those gifts end with you... why would He want to give you any more? But if you’re a *distribution center*... and God knows what He gives to you will flow to others, don’t be surprised if God keeps on giving and giving and giving...

THEIR GIFT WAS PROOF OF GOD’S WORK IN THEM

Paul ends the chapter by reminding the Corinthians that their giving not only meets a physical need, but it is proof and witness of God’s work in their lives.

THEIR GIFT WAS A RESPONSE TO GOD’S GREATEST GIFT

The last verse in this chapter on giving reminds us of the gift to which all our gifts pale in comparison... “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” Always remember our giving is simply a response to the greatest gift of all... *Jesus!*

A PASTOR’S APPROACH TO GIVING

Pastors motivate their people to give to God in one of three ways... *they use the flint approach, or the sponge approach, or the honeycomb approach...*

There’s *the flint approach*. Pastors strike the folks with appeals to duty. They ought to be giving. It’s a responsibility. The saints grit their teeth *and just do it*.

Other pastors use *the sponge approach*. They squeeze the

people. Guilt and greed are used to pressure and manipulate. Folks feel ripped off afterwards.

But there are a few pastors who use *the honeycomb approach*. They pollinate the hearts of the people with thoughts of God’s love and grace and goodness, until those hearts overflow with joy and gratitude. An inner sweetness is produced – and it becomes the people’s natural response to want to give to God.

Devotion Box - Minding Your Mind

Paul took a spiritual rather than a fleshly approach to the battles he faced. He says in verse 4, “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds...” Paul understood that since we’re in a spiritual battle, and we’re fighting a spiritual foe – we need spiritual, not worldly weapons.

The way of the world is manipulation, heavy-handedness, clout, intimidation, and pressure – but God’s way is love, gentleness, patience, and meekness. The victory we’re after goes beyond eliminating symptoms, altering situations, enforcing our will on other people. God wants to change a person’s heart. And the only way that happens is through the Word of God and Spirit of God. That’s why our weapons are love, prayer, truth - the blood and name of Jesus. By utilizing a spiritual arsenal – rather than a carnal one – we can topple the work of Satan, and tear down the strongholds of sin and fear and deception.

Verse 5 provides the key to victory, “casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of

God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...” The spiritual battle is fought in the theater of the mind. Eugene Peterson paraphrases verse 5, “fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ.” Imagine the Scripture as a lasso, and the Spirit as a sheepdog - God wants us to use them both to corral our stray thoughts, and make them conform to truth.

Guys, our most lethal mistake is to allow our minds to wander aimlessly. It’s been said, “Open lots and open minds collect trash.” Not *setting* your mind on Jesus is *letting* your mind get pulled and drawn toward the negative and nasty.

Think about it—we don’t let a toddler wander through the neighborhood, or a dog wander around in a grocery store – *so why do we let our minds wander around aimlessly and without direction?*

1 Peter 1:13 tells us, “Gird up the loins of your mind.” That’s a fancy way of saying, “Keep your mind on a leash.”

PAUL'S APPEARANCE

Paul asks in 10:7, "Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?" To them Paul didn't look like an apostle... A third century novel, *"The Acts of Paul and Hecla"*, describes the apostle, "he was small in size with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, bald-headed, bow-legged..." Another tradition says he spoke with a lisp. Paul wasn't handsome, or dynamic, or even a convincing orator... He didn't even have a halo... or glow in the dark... *how could he really be an apostle?*

They even said Paul's bark was worse than his bite. Verse 10, "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." His pen is powerful, but his presence is pathetic. Paul assures his critics in verse 11 he'll be as bold in person as he was in print!

In verse 12, Paul refuses to compare himself with other believers. It's tragic, but Christians do this all the time... Pastors compare themselves to pastors. Churches compare themselves with churches. What matters is not how you stack up against someone else, but how you measure up to the will of God.

Paul sums it up in verses 17-18, "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends."

PAUL'S BOASTING

In 11:16 Paul asks for leeway. He's going to do what he never likes to do... "boast a little". He says in verse 18, "Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast." Other apostles were boasting... so why not Paul? *But rather than boast in his successes he boasts in his sufferings.*

The proof Paul offers for the legitimacy of his ministry are not *the miles he's traveled, or the souls he's saved, or the crowds he's addressed, or the money he's raised, or the churches he's started.* No! Paul boasts in the things he's suffered.

His premise is... If he wasn't sincere why would he have endured trials? If he hadn't been effective for God's kingdom why would the enemy have tried so hard to stop him? This is why Paul takes pride in his infirmities and weaknesses. When it gets down to it... it's *scars*, not *stars* that prove our spiritual mettle!

Phillip Pillsbury, heir of the Pillsbury Dough Company, was seen by company outsiders as a spoiled rich kid. But that wasn't his employees' opinion of their boss. They loved and respected Phillip. He was one of their own... Pillsbury workers had seen Phillip's fingers.

Their young boss was missing three fingertips - the mark of a professional miller. His missing fingertips proved that though Phillip might've been a multi-millionaire, he was a miller at heart.

In the last chapters of 2 Corinthians Paul shows off his missing fingertips...

THE DEVIL'S APPEARANCE

Paul's critics called themselves "*super apostles*", in reality they were "*pseudo apostles*" or false prophets. Paul says in verses 14-15, "And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." Beware! Don't get suckered by Satan...

People fail to recognize Satan, because they expect him to show up in red leotards - with horns, and a pitchfork. But Satan and his agents usually appear in more appealing packages... He uses the beautiful blonde in the string bikini... the clean-cut Mormon missionary talking about family values... the polished preacher in the three-piece suit... the so-called buddy who offers you pills to cure your ills...

Don't buy it... Satan and his operatives are slick and sophisticated - polished and pleasing to the eye - but they are hell bent on your destruction. Beware!

PAUL'S VISION

In chapter 12 Paul continues to indulge in a little boasting... but this time he moves from *incisions to visions* - from *tribulation to revelation*. In chapter 11 Paul was *beat-up for the Lord*. In chapter 12 he's *picked-up by the Lord*.

Paul begins in verse 2, "I know a man in Christ..." Notice, Paul is so uncomfortable with this boasting he speaks in the third person...

"who fourteen years ago - whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows -" Paul wasn't sure if God had used him for a little rapture practice and literally transported him to heaven - or if it was a vision?

"such a one was caught up to the third heaven." The Greek word translated "*caught up*" is translated elsewhere as "*rapture*". Verse 4 says Paul was caught up into "Paradise" - a Persian word for "*a walled garden*." Don't think of heaven as a hospital corridor, or a pit group of cumulus clouds. Nothing in heaven is bland. Heaven is an oriental oasis - a garden full of color and vegetation and fruit.

In Paradise, Paul "heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Notice Paul didn't return to earth and jump on the talk-show circuit, or write a book, or release a video. He didn't try to profit from his heavenly experience. Whatever Paul heard was too sacred, too holy for human ears.

This makes me suspicious of the televangelists who brag about their visions and their weekly transports to heaven. When you really see God's glory it shuts you up. It hushes you, and makes you speechless, and takes your breath away.

Bible Scan - 2 Corinthians 8-13

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - High School Day Trip to Lake Lanier: Friday, June 21st
Vacation Bible School for Preschool—5th Grade: Sunday evenings, 6/23—7/28 @ 6:30 PM
Financial Faithfulness Part I: Sunday, June 23rd @ 6:30 PM
High School/Middle School Retreat: Sunday, July 14th-Sunday, July 21st
Kid's Camp: 1-2nd grade, Tues, 7/16—Thurs 7/18; 3rd—5th grade, Thurs, 7/18—Sun, 7/21
Haiti Mission Trip: August 10th—August 16th

Next Bible Scan - August 4, 2002 - Galatians 1-6

"And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."
Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for
Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." – 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Bible
Scan
Memory
Verse

PAUL'S THORN

With this spectacular vision, God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh. The Greek word translated "thorn" means "a sharp stake used for impaling or torture". Other translations render it, "a stabbing pain", "a dagger in the flesh", "a terrible suffering". All kinds of theories have been advanced to identify Paul's thorn. Commentators say it was an infectious eye disease, or an abrasive personality, or migraine headaches – but this is for sure... it was a pain that wouldn't go away. Paul calls it "a messenger of Satan to buffet me" – or "beat me continually."

I think God is intentionally silent about the thorn's identity because He wants us to know it could be anything – even the thing in our life that causes us pain. Though the identity of the thorn is a mystery its purpose is quite clear. Paul says in verse 7 it was given to him... "lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations..." The thorn kept him humble.

Paul says in verse 8, "Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me." Paul wanted it to go away, but God said "no".

God had a purpose for Paul's thorn, verse 9, "And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul's thorn drove him to God.

Through his thorn Paul learned that God's grace was sufficient for any difficulty that he faced. Grace sustains and empowers. Paul's weakness became an opportunity for

God's strength – His hurt, an open door for God's healing.

Roy Campanella was a standout catcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers before he lost his arms and legs in an accident. Roy struggled with his handicap, until one day he stopped to read a plaque on the wall of the East River hospital...

"I asked God for strength, that I might achieve. I was made weak, that I might learn to humbly obey. I asked for health, that I might do great things. I was given infirmity, that I might do better things. I asked for riches, that I might be happy. I was given poverty, that I might be wise. I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men. I was given weakness, that I might feel the need for God. I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life. I was given life, that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing I asked for – but everything I hoped for. I am... most richly blessed."

This was the Apostle Paul. He didn't get what he asked for – he got something better. That's why he's thankful for the thorn in verse 9, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He embraces his weakness, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Weakness became Paul's ally. His inadequacies became God's opportunity. His weakness produced in him a greater strength.

Devotion Box - The Most Important Examination

Paul tells the Corinthians in verse 5, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified." Take inventory to see if you're still walking in the faith. It's possible to be disqualified as a Christian by unbelief.

It's been calculated that by the time you finish college you will have taken 2600 tests, quizzes, and exams. But the most important test you ever take is to examine your heart... *do you have the inner witness of the Holy Spirit? Do you love your brother? Do you want to do what's right? Do you live an overcoming life?* These are characteristics the Bible says will be true of you if Jesus lives in your life. Examine yourself – prove yourself - to see if Christ truly dwells in you!