Growing Stronger in your Giving

*Building Core Strength*

By Rob Green

**Bible Text:** 2 Corinthians 8-9

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**Faith Church**

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:**  www.faithlafayette.org/church

**Online Sermons:**  www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette

Last Sunday was the beginning of stewardship month and pastor Oakwyn kicked off the series by explaining not only the definition of stewardship, but also the four key principles of biblical principle and that is God given responsibility with accountability. And it is a part of this series is helping us to remember that God owns everything and I own nothing, that God entrusts me with everything that I have and that therefore I am responsible to increase what God has given me and that he has the right to call me into account at any time, including today.

And then pastor Oakwyn explained how the spiritual disciplines were a part of our stewardship before the Lord, part of the process of developing core strength, how issues like Bible reading and prayer are vital to our stewardship before God.

Today we are going to discuss the issue of growing stronger in our giving. And I realize there is a number of ways in which people could view a topic like this. They would respond with anger or frustration and say the church is like Disneyworld. You just invent as many creative ways as possible to separate you from your cash. A person could say, “Well, I am not going to be that much of a cynic, but what I am going to do is I am going to say, ‘You know what? The church just talks about money way too much and I wish they would stop.’” Or it is possible to respond this way. With thankfulness that the church is willing to talk about a very important area of our life and to provide biblical instruction so that we can manage what God has entrusted to us for his honor and glory. And I hope it is that latter that you will take this morning, that this is a time for all of us to be equipped and to think carefully about what the Word of God says about how to use our resources and to give a good account at the judgment seat of Christ.

With that in mind, I would like you to turn your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter eight. That is on page 143 in the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. Let me also add that it is a privilege to serve in a church where there are so many faithful givers. Many of you are here this morning that are able to say, you know, praise the Lord that God has helped me get to a good place so far in my life.

Also as you are turning to 2 Corinthians chapter eight there is a situation going on here and that is there is a great need. There are a group of believers in Jerusalem who are suffering greatly and so what the other churches have done is gathered together a collection in order to help them. And these two chapters provide instruction to the church about how this giving should occur. 2 Corinthians chapter eight beginning in verse one.

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.

But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality — at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."

But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord. We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being ministered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness, taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we — not to speak of you — will be put to shame by this confidence. So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." Now 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; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift![[1]](#footnote-1)

Now that is a long section, huh? I could summarize this sermon in two words. Are you ready? Are you excited about the fact that dinner table discussion today can be about two words? Sacrifice and joy. Sacrifice and joy, the two words that summarize everything that I have just read. In order to grow in our giving, our giving must be sacrificial.

And I read the text. I hope you notice that percentages weren’t given. Instead, there were just heart attitudes and they were flowing all over the place. Sacrifice and generosity was one of the ... in fact it doesn’t just permeate in one section. Instead, it is all over from 2 Corinthians 8:1 all the way to the end of chapter nine.

Consider this, the sacrifice of the Macedonians themselves. Historically speaking, Corinth was the bustling metropolis. It was the Chicago or New York of our day. It was also the place where wealth was concentrated. The Macedonians would have been the more rural communities where incomes would have been lower and hardships would have been more server and the natural reaction would be to say to the Macedonians, “They don’t need to contribute. In fact, they have enough problems and hardships already.”

In fact, look at how God’s work describes their hardships. The great ordeal of affliction, their deep poverty. Notice the reaction of the Macedonians. Their giving is described by the wealth of their liberality and beyond their ability. It reminds me of the time when the widow gave two mites in the temple and Jesus calls his disciples to himself and lifts her up as the righteous one for she gave all she had. Surely she didn’t do that every time, but on that occasion she did. and it demonstrated her sacrificial heart to the Lord. And that is what we see in the Macedonians. And of the past 2000 years believers have been reading about a group of people who gave sacrificially.

You know, we are never told what they are giving. All we are told is that they were given giving more than what they really could afford. In other words, God understood and he does understand when our giving is sacrificial and when it is done out of our abundance.

We also see this same concept showing up in God’s desire for each to contribute their sacrificial share. From verses seven all the way to verse 15 there is a concern that God brings to the table that he says, in essence, one of the thing that he does is he wants those who have a lot to share with those who have a little because that is what he does. He is interested in caring for all of his people. And so he begins with the example of Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross. And so before the Corinthians are writing any checks, he says, “I want you to remind yourself of Jesus. Before you write that check, I want you to think about the sacrifice of Jesus and then do it with that in mind.” That is why the New Testament is about grace giving.

Did you notice in this passage the number of times grace and gracious comes up, verse one of chapter eight, verse six, verse seven, verse 19, verse 20, chapter nine verse eight, chapter nine verse 14? In other words, all of this is motivated by the grace of God. Then God’s word moves to the hearts of the Lord on the matter, from the beginning that God desires all of his people to be cared for.

Verse 13 Paul anticipates an argument and the argument is, well, wait a minute. if I give you just want me to be afflicted so that somebody else doesn’t have to be. Is that right? And the text is no. This wasn’t done to make you poor so that someone else could be rich. Instead it is just reflecting what I do and notice in verse 15 there is a quotation from Exodus 16.

"HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is a reminder of the Exodus generation where God provided manna to everyone. And the amount you gathered was a certain measurement for everyone who lived in your tent. And so if you had a big family and one of our seminary students has got 12 kids. I mean, they would have been picking for a long time. Some of them don’t have quite so many. It wouldn’t take as long. But everybody had enough. God’s provision was that everybody had enough.

So here is how this works practically. You know, it always takes a certain amount of funds to live in a culture. There are expenses associated with shelter, with food, with clothing, with electricity and all the other things. But it is also true that within each category there are lots of options. We have got lots of options, don’t we? I mean, just take the car, for example. You can get something from very inexpensive to something that costs more than the average house. And you can buy clothes that are pretty cheap and clothes that aren’t so cheap. You can purchase shelter that is very extravagant and that which his more basic. You can find a vacation or a hobby to fit or fill any budget whatsoever. In other words, we have essentially an unlimited amount of things and almost an unlimited amount of options within those things. What this passage explains is that some were given abundance, that is the Church at Corinth, for helping those who had need. That is how God designed his people to function. It is how we follow the example of Jesus who took the penalty for our sin. Though he was rich he was made poor. When we have a heart to give sacrificially, we follow in the footsteps of our leader, our Savior and our King Jesus.

Now I want to tell you a personal story. This goes back a number of years go. It had a huge impact on my life. My wife and I were married in 1993. And our first year of marriage here is what we lived on. We lived on love, because we didn’t have anything else. We still live on love. We just have more stuff now. Our grocery budget was 25 bucks a week and I know what it takes to eat on 25 bucks a week. You get two pounds of chipped, chopped ham, a couple of loaves of bread, a gallon of milk, a box of cereal and maybe some stuff for dinner. So I packed a lunch for school. I packed a lunch for dinner for my evening job and, you know, here is one of the funny things. I haven’t seen chipped, chopped ham available very often any more. I am seriously wondering what that long term impact on my health will be for the amount of that I ate.

But here is the point. During that first year we had our deacon hand us an envelope. We assume that somebody put it in their box, in his box and he just kind of found us wherever in the church and in it was 50 bucks each time. Fifty bucks, man, that is two weeks of groceries. That was pretty exciting. And in July of 1994 when I got a job that would certainly supply all of our needs, m y first day of work my wife and I had 107 dollars to our name, just do the math. We had been given three times 50 bucks. Outside of someone’s sacrifice we were bankrupt. And, you know, as we have thought about that over the years someone decided to say no to some things so they could say yes to that. Somebody decided that they had money for something that they could have, but they decided not to because they wanted to sacrifice for someone else.

You know, sacrifice is also seen and organized through careful planning. You know, from 2 Corinthians chapter eight verse 16 all the way to chapter nine verse five we see a kind of organization to this whole thing. Titus is going to be sent. Someone who they know is going to be sent so that there is a plan, a careful organization.

Just in these few verses from verse three to verse five he says:

But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we — not to speak of you — will be put to shame by this confidence. So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.[[3]](#footnote-3)

They had been working on this for a good part of a year. The Corinthians have known about it and wanted to pursue it. But here was the danger that Paul was trying to address with them. Sometimes when all is said and done there is more said than there is done. And what he didn’t want is that to happen to them. The danger is that when it came time for the offering to be made the excuse bus would roll in. You know, the I forgot my wallet. I accidentally spent it on other things. I would have given, but I spent it and I don’t know where it is.

In other words, instead of the bus that was needed to care for the offering, they were going to have an excuse bus come instead. And Paul wanted them to be prepared. He wanted them to have thought, to have prayed, to have planned well into advance so that the Corinthians could actually fulfill the good word of their generosity.

You know, that is one of the reasons why we believe it is so important that a person has a budget. It is just a planning tool. It is just designed to help all of us not squander the resources God has given, but instead use them to please and honor him. And there are loads of people around here who would be happy to help you. If you say, man, I haven’t lived on a budget. I don’t even know what a budget is. Then there are loads of people around this ministry that could help you with that. There is something else that is at stake here. That is Paul and his companions, if they arrived and there was no collection then everybody was going to be put to shame. In other words, giving has, of course, a vertical dimension where we are recognizing God’s wonderful grace and therefore it is a wonderful privilege. But there is also a horizontal dimension to this. And when the excuse bus rolls in there just isn’t anything to get all that excited about. When the bus that is loaded comes in, everybody is cared for.

And so one of the things that this passage reminds us of is that sacrificial giving is organized through planning. Then we also see sacrifice in this, with the understanding that reaping is based on what a person sows. But the text is very clear that reaping and sowing are related and this doesn’t mean that if I give 100 dollars then I will suddenly receive 1000 dollars in the mail. It is not the health and wealth Tom foolery that we read about or hear about on TV. You know, so 100 and reap 1000. But it is a reminder that when God provides the harvest, whatever that harvest is, he provides it proportional to the way in which the person sowed.

Instead, it is thinking like this. I believe I can get more accomplished if I only use 90 percent or less of what God has entrusted to me with is blessing, than I could if I used 100 percent of it without his blessing. It is a recognition that I can actually accomplish more with less. The logical implication is that it is better to sow more. It won’t be too much longer before we are all receiving our giving statements through the year and it is at that time we will have the opportunity to ask ourselves the question. Am I sowing bountifully? Am I sowing a whole field that God has entrusted to me? Or am I just sowing a small portion of it? How is it that I am sowing? Am I sowing with the intention that there is going to be a great harvest some day or am I just simply content to sow a little portion of what he has given?

The argument presents in this text is one of the reasons why we teach that 10 percent or a tithe is a great starting point. But it doesn’t represent the end of our Christian growth. In this passage there are a number of times in which the words grace come up, grace. The grace of God, the grace of Christ. In other words, it is grace giving. And as we mature in our walk with Christ we learn to cap our lifestyle and choose to invest in kingdom concerns. So just as we are seeking to grow in our communication or our battles against lust or commitment to raising our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, so we are interested in growing in our giving.

You know, sometimes it is helpful to hear a testimony of a person who has learned to do that. And this morning we wanted you to hear from Dr. Bob Smith and his wife Leona. They have been a part of our church for 40 years. And Doc and Leona have been very generous, very quietly and very faithfully for a very, very long time. And we wanted you to hear from him how the Lord has helped them get to that place. So, Doc...

Change of Voice: During my medical school years Leona and I learned the necessity of getting along on a very limited income. We were both required to work for me to get my education. While I was getting my M. D., Leona was getting her PhT, putting husband through. We lived on love, too. If Rob lived on love in the 90s, we lived on love in the 50s. And it was so significant that even when I spent some of that love, I asked for change for pennies, because it was so tight. And on such a limited income we lived comfortably and we thank God and we were able to tithe during all those years. We thank God for his blessings and his mercy on us. It was a joyful privilege to share God’s blessings on us. Upon entering my internship I began to get an income. And compared to what it was in the earlier years it was a huge change. And then I went into practice and the income made another huge jump because many of the expenses were paid for by the practice. And as we reflected on our income and our ability to do well with much less, we decided that our lifestyle would not be reflected by our income and would not be a guide to our income. We decided to live within our income and, as a result, we were able to tithe above 10 percent all our life. This has been a joyful privilege and a blessing to us and God has blessed us with a good income and we have desired to be a blessing to God’s ministries in the process.

This last capital campaign has given us an opportunity to reevaluate our giving. We had an 18... a 19 year old car and a 16 year old car. Finding parts became a problem due to manufacturers stopped making new parts. So we were having problems because our cars were old, not because of many miles. Before the capital campaign I had been planning on us getting a new car. It was my plan to get a new car and because of my age it would last the rest of our lives. However, the Lord had a different plan for us and he helped us in the process. The car I wanted was no longer manufactured. In fact the car that they replaced that car with was discontinued as well. And our experience with an old car was one of the things that we were guiding us in the process. And we decided that we would not buy a used car that was no longer made. We decided we would have more to give to the capital campaign by buying a different used car with low mileage and that is what we did. And so we... as a part of our plan and as part of the big picture of the ministry of Faith church meant that we could even sacrifice a car that we would like to have and that sacrifice was really a joy and a privilege.

As I look back, I don’t see that we have been.... we have done anything more than many believers. We have... our regular tithing has been continued during those years and when special things come along we have been able to meet ... give to some of those. Since our income has been good, there has been no reason why we could not tithe over 10 percent. Our goal was to live within our income and not to exceed our income. And we saw it more as a privilege than a sacrifice. We were very concerned to stay within the income and not go exceed it and even to stay below it like we had in the training years. We had spent our money carefully and now we wanted to be able to use it give more.

Because of the way we handled our money, pastor Good used to give me a hard time about my spending by saying that whenever I spent a quarter the eagle squeaked. But even though we were characterized by living frugally, we lived comfortably and all our needs were met. Leona has been a tremendous companion in all this, a special companion. She has done a fabulous job of managing our finances. She has often ... she has used the family ... she has been the family comptroller and I have been the president. In other words, we make a decision and we make up guidelines for how we are going to spend our money and then where there is a decision we work together as a team.

I hear men express fear of sending their wife to the mall with a credit card, but I have never had that fear. In fact, I have rather gone to the mall without my wife because of her way of holding things back, but I knew that if I went and spent she would find out anyhow. She has been an excellent cook. She does such a good job with leftovers that I have often said it would be a shame to waste her on a good provider.

The lifestyle has enabled us to be able to make special gifts to special needs at times. We have sacrificed some things in the process, but the joy of being involved in the ministry of our church made it a privilege. Again, I don’t see that we have done anything different than many other believers. The details of our lives may be different from many others, but by following the four principles of stewardship we have been able to give more. We thank God for those principles. They have helped us with our own giving and what we have so that we can cheerfully honor God with our finances.

Now that we are retired and are winding down in life, God has blessed us so that we can still give. We plan to do this as long as we are on this earth. All that we have done and will do is by his blessings and his mercy and his grace. When I think of the spiritual needs of our culture and how faith church is meeting those needs, our giving is really a privilege and an investment in the spiritual future of our country.

Change of Voice: I mean, you know, you have driven a car a long time when not only it is discontinued, but so is its replacement, right? Well, that is a wonderful segue into the second word. Remember the first word is sacrifice. Number two, joy. The second way in which we are encouraged to be giving is our giving must be joyful. And that joy is seen in the attitudes of the Macedonians. I just love this and this passage... They are like, look. You are going to give us a pass. Are you crazy? We don’t want a pass. We want to participate. It says they gave of their own accord. They were willing. They were begging us with much urging. They were passionate for the favor of participation. They looked at it as a blessing and they gave themselves first to the Lord. They viewed themselves as dependent.

I am quite sure I have not always had that attitude, but what a wonderful example, the irony of the Macedonians is that Paul and others viewed them as poor, needing help. They viewed themselves as rich and blessed, wanting to provide it.

You know, friends, some of us are doing really well, handling this wonderfully. Others just struggling with this and if you are in that struggling category can I just encourage you to do what the Macedonians did? Give yourself to the Lord first. Ask for God’s grace. Express your dependence in real and genuine ways.

We also see joy reflected in the fact that God loves a cheerful giver. He loves a cheerful giver. One of the great things about this passage is they are not arm twisted into anything. It is simply, look, we want you to give joyfully. We want you to give happily. It is one of the reasons grace giving is so important. And while we think 10 percent is a good place to start, ultimately what happens is a matter of what people will purpose in their hearts. And many like Doc happily give more. And the reason is because God loves a cheerful giver. And so they want to give cheerfully, not just with part of their field, but the whole thing. And that results in a blessing to others as well as a blessing to us. That is one of the reasons why we want to teach on giving, because there is a wonderful blessing associated with this.

Now let’s talk about a couple of takeaways from this. The first one is to take one step because big goals begin by taking the first step. In other words, a friend of mine once old me, Rob, you eat an elephant one bite at a time.

So if you are thinking, man, alive, I could never live up to the example of the Macedonians. I could never live up to the example of Bob and Leona Smith.

Can I just encourage you to take one step at a time? Let’s get a first step going, just one step at a time. The second is to seek resources if necessary, for there are many resources here to help. We have a financial peace university class. We have individual counseling for the church. You can even talk to one of the pastors or from someone from the congregation. There are a ton of resources available to help you. If you are struggling in this particular area.

Then the third thing—and I would like you to go ahead and grab your stewardship commitment cards here for just a second. It looks like this, growing stronger in stewardship. It is in your bulletin. I would like you to take a look at that and one of the things we are asking you to do is to fill this out and to turn it back in by November 18th. The first part was really the message last week. That is personal growth. And then the rest of this inside page there are three blocks for giving and I want to go over them quickly. The first one ,our regularly annual giving that is the first category and this is the amount that you are committing to provide to the general fund of the church, just part of the normal ministries of what goes on around here. The second section called designated additional offering. In this section we are asking that what we do is commit and extra 100 dollars a month over and above our regular giving for the purpose of funding some of these additional ministries. In other words, over the years as the ministry has expanded, we knew there would be some additional costs associated with providing that level of service to our communities. And we gladly accepted that responsibility because it is part of the privilege of serving.

We think of things like this. Free counseling to our community, vision of hope which certainly doesn’t charge what would be required in order to fund that ministry, community center activities, many of which are free, master of divinity training to our students which we give free of charge and on and on we could go. We are simply asking that you would be wiling to commit a total of 100 dollars a month if you are able to do that. And then the third section is Faith West. And I realize that many of you have already committed and you have been giving to that already. Thank you for doing that. The are two cases in which this section would apply to you. The first one is this, that maybe you in your first initial commitment kind of shot low. You said, you know, I am going to be conservative. I am going to plan to give less than what I could possibly do that and now you are just looking at your resources to say, you know? I think I could do a little bit better than that. This section would be for you. If you said, you know, the Lord has blessed me and I really want to be a blessing to others and so this is going the be a part of how I do that.

And if you were to increase your commitment, that would be a tremendous help to those who are sacrificially giving as well as those who are bringing this project to completion.

And then the second group is maybe some of you weren’t even here. Pastor Viars has been talking about the fact that at some Sundays there have been as many as 200 additional people here from last year. And so there are many who never got the chance to make a commitment, never got a chance to participate. And you might be thinking, you know, I want to be like the Macedonians. Like, don’t exclude me. I want to be a part of it. I want to participate. I want to experience the blessing. So this section would be for you.

You know, friends, this is not Disney. This is not about finding as many creative ways to separate you from your cash as possible. This is about us learning how to grow in our giving, both sacrificially as well as joyfully.

1. 2 Corinthians 8:1—9:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2 Corinthians 8:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 2 Corinthians 9:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)