**

*The Generous Life: Message 2*

***Sermon Outline:*** *Giving Freely*

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| **Topic:** | Giving with the right attitude |
| **Main Point:** | God is pleased when we give with a cheerful and joy filled attitude. |
| **Intended Response:** | To give with feelings of joy and faith |

**Introduction**

Giving is meant to be a normal part of life for Christians, but many feel reluctant to give. How can we give with a cheerful heart? How do we maintain an attitude of thankfulness and not one of loss? What does it mean for giving to be an act of worship?

This sermon reflects on two different givers mentioned in the Book of Acts. One gave freely and ended up on a great mission trip; the others gave with mixed motives and ended up with disastrous results.

1. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

* The early church was filled with generous people
* We need to let go of our monetary gifts properly
* God looks at the state of our heart, not the size of our gift

**Point One:** When we give to the church and those in need, we give to God.

1. 3 small steps to cheerful giving (2 Cor 9:1-11)

* Step 1: settle the matter in your heart, not in church
* Step 2: avoid feeling compelled and reluctant
* Step 3: give without a sense of return

**Point Two:** We need to have a cheerful heart when we give.

1. Barnabas (Acts 4:36-7)

* He sold his land and gave all to ministry
* The first missionary trip was back to his home land
* We don’t lose anything when we give to God

**Point Three:** Giving doesn’t harm our future, it enhances it.

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| **Teaching Illustrations and props:** This sermon talks a lot about the state of our heart in giving. A simple illustration used in this message is that of two different types of sandwiches, one healthy, the other unhealthy. Prepare these ahead of time and bring them up the front, holding them up for all to see during the illustration. For fun, you may even want to see if there’s someone in the audience willing to eat them.  ***More*** *resources for this sermon, including PowerPoint slides are available at* [www.SArmy.org.au](http://www.SArmy.org.au) |

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***Sermon:*** *Giving Freely*

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| Introduction: | Good morning everybody, and welcome to our Sunday service.  We are up to our second sermon in The Generous Life series. I hope you found last week’s message encouraging and have learned some new insights into handling finances in a godly way.  Today’s message is called, “Giving Freely”. Together, we’ll explore how we can give of our finances with a cheerful heart.  I’d like to start by jumping straight into Scripture this morning. If you have your Bible, can you please go to 2 Cor 9:1-11. If you are visiting us today, I’d like to extend a warm welcome to you. The Bible verses we are going to look at today will appear on the screen, so please follow along.  We read in 2 Cor 9:1-11,  *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.  Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*  *As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*  As we can tell from this Scripture, giving with the right heart attitude is really important. |
| Transition | So to understand this more, we are going to look at a story in the Bible of different people who gave, but gave with completely different attitudes.  One gave freely and cheerfully, the others, well they gave with mixed motives and ended up with disastrous results. |
| 1: Giving to God | Our story begins in Acts 4:32  …*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had (Acts 4:32).*  Last week we mentioned that a proper foundation is key to handling our finances in a godly way – and that foundation is found in Psalm 24:1 “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.”  The early church understood this concept. They were not claiming ownership of their possessions but understood it as the Lord’s so they were able to give it freely to ministry.  We read on…  *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.*  (Acts 4:33-5)  How incredible, the people of God were so generous there was a time when there was no needy person among them – wouldn’t that be great to say of our church. That there is no need internally and that we could be 100% devoted to reaching the outside world for Christ. It’s possible.  Now over to Acts 5:1-11.  *…A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet.*  *So, Ananias and Sapphira had land they owned. The Spirit was clearly moving in the church as others were selling property and land, and laying all the money they received at the Apostle’s feet for them to decide what to do with the finance.*  It’s a good side lesson here, when we give, we are not only giving finance to the church but also giving control of how that finance is handled. Part of giving a gift is to truly let it go and trust God that it will be used wisely.  But Ananias and Sapphira decided to keep a portion of the money they received hidden from the church. They wanted to keep some of it for themselves. So they decided to lie to the church about how much they had received from the sale and how much they were able to give. They didn’t let it go.  *But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart?* ***You have not lied to men but to God****.” And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.*  In verses 7-11, the same thing happens to Sapphira – she lies about the amount they sold the property for, and she too is struck down dead!  I’m sure from that day on people in the early church were dying to give so they didn’t die giving ☺ Now there’s a great offering message – your money or your life! ☺ That’s a pretty full on outcome isn’t it. It sounds a bit extreme.  Obviously, Ananias and Sapphira were reluctant givers, they were holding back and not giving freely. But it’s deeper than that. From a spiritual perspective, in holding back from the church in a deceitful way they were lying to God. Giving isn’t a simple transaction between the church and people who attend, it’s an act of worship unto God.  When we give, we are not giving to humans but to God.  It’s good to remember this in our tithing - when we give, we are not giving to people but we are giving to the eternal and living God (Heb 7:8). |
| Point 1 | When we give, we give to God. |
| Transition | The overarching lesson from Ananias and Sapphira is that God is watching our giving. God does not look at our actions alone, He looks at our hearts:  *…But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”*  (1 Sam 16:7). |
| Illustration | *Insert pt 1 Make a sandwich with fluffy white bread and have terrible ingredients on the inside – be creative (careful that it doesn’t fall out onto the floor). This sandwich represents the state of Ananias and Sapphira’s heart - unhealthy. The point is, though it looks good on the outside, it’s what’s on the inside that counts.* |
| 2: The heart attitude of acceptable giving | We don’t know why Ananias and Sapphira chose to lie and act in such a way. Peter makes it quite clear that this was their choice to sell the land. The money was in their control, they could do with it what they wanted.  Perhaps the take away for us is to remind ourselves not to give under compulsion as the Scriptures teach.  Maybe they felt like they should give. Maybe they felt embarrassed that others were giving and they were not? Perhaps they hadn’t prepared themselves spiritually enough – maybe their prayer life had run dry, maybe they didn’t stop to check in with God and see if this sacrifice was something He wanted them to do?  We will never know. But let me encourage you here today, you are under no obligation to give if you are not ready. God doesn’t look at the size of our giving, He looks at the state of our heart.  *Giving is a blessing not a curse.*  If you feel like God is speaking to you during this series about giving or your finances please, go and spend some time with God praying through where you feel God is leading you. Talk to us. We want to support you in your giving, not force you at all.  Whatever the reason Ananias and Sapphira fell into sin, it was not due to God or the church twisting their arm – it was a heart issue.  To avoid making the same mistake we can take the three small steps that we read before from 2 Cor 9:1-11:  **Step 1:** Settle the matter in your heart, not in church:  *Each of you should give what you have* ***decided in your heart…***  Spending time in prayer, asking God what to give is great start.  **Step 2:** Avoid compulsion and reluctance:  *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give,* ***not reluctantly or under compulsion****, for God loves a cheerful giver.*   * Not reluctantly – another translation says, ‘not begrudgingly’: We give without sadness, heaviness, or sorrow in our heart. Again, giving should not be a burden but a blessing. * Not under compulsion: We are not forced to give, nor are we under obligation.   **Step 3**: Give without a sense of return:  *…Freely you have received, freely give.* (Matt 10:8 NIV)  *…You have been treated generously, so live generously.* (Matt 10:8 MSG)   * Give freely: this means with no strings attached. Without a sense of return. No thinking of self, or ‘because I have given, this will make God want to do this’ or ‘now that I have given, I’m off the hook and don’t need to do any more’. * Joyful and cheerful means: already satisfied. We are blessed because we can give, not blessed because of what we give.   When we give, we should give with a heart that is full of joy, not one that is full of guilt or obligation. |
| Point 2. | We need to have a cheerful heart when we give. |
| Transition | Now, let’s contrast Ananias and Sapphira’s heart attitude towards giving to another person found a few versus earlier… |
| 3. Giving freely | Acts 4:36-7  *Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.*  So just before Ananias and Sapphira are mentioned, the Bible records Joseph gave of his land (perhaps this is where they got the idea from?).  What I find amazing about this story, is Joseph, whom we know through the Book of Acts from this point on as Barnabas, is from Cyprus. Now this might not grab you straight away, but fast forward a few years to Acts 13:2-6:  *While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”*  *Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews…*  The Bible goes on to say that Sergius Paulus the Proconsul, a leader in the Roman empire and the delegated authority in Paphos, a town in Cyprus, sent for Barnabas – and got saved! (Acts 13:12)  This is incredible! On their first mission trip, God sent Barnabas back to his hometown, back to his own people, maybe even to his own family. On this mission trip, he got to travel the whole island proclaiming God’s word.  I find it amazing how one man gave up his land for the work of God and was later used mightily by God in ministry in the very land he originally came from, whereas another couple kept their portion of their income to themselves and were cut off from the things of God.  *Insert illustration pt 2: Make a sandwich with grainy bread and healthy ingredients on the inside: lettuce, and cheese and ham (careful that it doesn’t fall out onto the floor). This sandwich represents the state of Barnabas’ heart - healthy.*  I wonder if in selling his land and giving away his money, Barnabas felt like he would never see his family again? Never visit his hometown or see the friends he grew up with? It’s amazing how he gave up his land, only for God to send him back to his homeland with true riches – the gospel message! When we give to God, we do not miss out on anything.  What might have happened if Ananias and Sapphira had given freely? Did God have plans for them? Was there a mission trip waiting for them in their future?  I’m reminded of a similar Bible story from Joshua 7 and 8. God told Joshua that no one could keep any of the goods from Jericho, but a man called Achan stole some goods. As a result of his greed, the whole community was effected by his sin and they lost their next battle. After they corrected this, and sadly yes – Achan also died, they won.  But what’s striking is that the next town they conquered, God said they could take anything they wanted. There was more for Israel in the future. Achan would have been able to take goods from the next town. He would have been able to have what he wanted if he had been an honest man and obeyed God fully. But his greed and lying cost him his life and his future.  When we give freely and cheerfully, God blesses us. When we give, we don’t lose out on anything. If God wants us to have something He will give it to us. He is a good Father. He is happy to bless us. But we need to give freely and cheerfully.  Sometimes we don’t give because we are afraid of what we will have to give up, what we will miss out on. But friends, if we truly need something, and we are faithful to God, I believe God will bring it into our lives.  *Insert a story of God’s provision for your life or a story of hope when someone received help and ministry from The Salvation Army.*    When we give freely and cheerfully, we will not miss out on what God has for us. |
| Point 3 | Giving doesn’t harm our future, it enhances it. |
| Call to Action | As we close today, let me set us all a challenge: For the next week, let’s pray every day for God to help us give with a cheerful and joy filled heart.  This really is a work of the Spirit. As we give to God, cheerfully, knowing we won’t miss out on anything, we want our hearts to be right. Heart work is Spirit work.  When we give, we give to God. When we give, let’s do so with a cheerful heart. And let’s be full of faith, because giving doesn’t harm our future, it enhances it.  Would you pray with me… |
| Prayer | Father, we thank you for what we have. It may be a little, it may be a lot, but we know that giving with the right heart is the most important thing.  Father, we ask that you lead us in our giving, and help us give cheerfully and joyfully, in Jesus name we pray – Amen. |

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***Scriptures:*** *Giving Freely*

**2 Cor 9:1-11**

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

**Acts 4:32**

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

**Psalm 24**:1

“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it”.

**Acts 4:33-5**

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

**Acts 5:1-11.**

A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet. So, Ananias and Sapphira had land they owned. The Spirit was clearly moving in the church as others were selling property and land, and laying the money they received at the Aposlte’s feet for them to decide what to do with the finance.

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

**Heb 7:8**

In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living.

**1 Sam 16:7**

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”.

**2 Cor 9:1-11**

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

**Acts 4:36-7**

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

**Acts 13:2-6**

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.

**Acts 13:12**

When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

**Further Study**

Read Joshua chapters 7 and 8.