

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

8/24/2025

Sermon Title: Our Giving God

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 4:7

1 Cor 4:7 What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Main Point: God pours out gifts on people who receive his blessings gladly, even as they easily forget the very Giver himself.

Outline:

1. God Who Gives
2. Gifts We Enjoy
3. Gratitude We Owe

Introduction

Back in June, our session called for a congregational meeting. At that meeting, we spelled out for you as the congregation a very serious reality: since the beginning of the year, giving at Evergreen has been far behind what the officers had conservatively estimated it would be – so far behind, in fact, that we are in the process of considering just how we might need to change what we do or how we minister so that we can wisely deal with the shortfall next year. Our church has grown since last year, things are otherwise healthy, but the giving has just drastically fallen off from what we planned around.

I'm going to tell you: it's usually hard to know what God is up to or why he does what he does. But almost immediately I saw this as an opportunity instead of

something to dread. And the reason for that is, I have been here at Evergreen now for five years as your pastor, and I have never directly and intentionally preached on the subject of giving. And the reason is simple: ever since I've been here the giving has been strong and the budget was always met. I think the Lord knows that I would not have preached on a subject that I perceived we were doing well at. Because of this, I do recognize God's sovereignty and power even in this shortfall.

The Lord wants us to grow in our holiness (especially in areas that are blind-spots for us), and he's doing that here at Evergreen by allowing this opportunity to come our way so that all of this church from the youngest to the oldest will be actively and intentionally instructed from God's word so that we will become a congregation that lets go of what we think is ours, and so that we will be free and generous with our giving. God has allowed this because it is something that he knows we need to be taught on as a church need.

Now, pastors are slow to preach on giving. We do indeed live in a suspicious age that has seen that there are charlatans and thieves who fleece flocks and lie to people so that they can drive giving.

And so I think that we as pastors react by just avoiding the topic. We don't want to sound like televangelists. No minister wants to sound money hungry, and so we just don't talk about money. We think, "well if we talk about this, then that's awkward."

But Jesus talked a lot about money. Paul talked a lot about money. The New Testament and Old Testament are very concerned with money because think about what money really is: money is an extension of our very selves and what we value. It's about our priorities, what we give ourselves to, what our time is invested in. Money is bigger than just numbers or coinage or bills or whatever.

And so really I'm just criticizing myself here and my avoidance of this topic: How strange it is that we so strenuously resist a teaching that seems to be so obviously important to the authors of Scripture?

Here is another reason we might be slow to preach on giving: we already know that we ought to give. We know that we should be free with the money God has given us, and we know that it's not good for us to be in love with the world or the

things of the world. We know this already. And ministers are often slow to preach on things that they think the church already knows.

But here is the thing: most sermons should be reminders rather than new instruction. Often, sermons should be about teaching as reminder rather than novelty. Paul is constantly talking about how important it is for people to “remember.” He’s refreshing people rather than giving something new.

So God has presented us with a real opportunity with this shortfall: he clearly wants us as a church to be instructed from his word on the subject of giving. And for this week and next, that’s precisely what I would like us to focus on. This week we’re going to look at this question: “*why* should we give?”

Next week we’ll approach the text with this question in mind: “*how* should we give?”

This week we deal with motivation. Next week we deal with execution.

But this week, though, we’re talking motivation. And to do this I’d like us to notice three beautiful and precious truths which (if we have ears to hear) will be the engine that drives our giving. First, the God Who Gives. Second, the Gifts We Enjoy. Then third, the Gratitude We Owe.

Notice how this works: God is, God does. And only *then* do we respond. And so if we know God, and rejoice in his gifts, the Scriptures will be equipping us to be the sort of givers that he is seeking.

1. God Who Gives

First, we have to know the God who gives.

And we have to begin here because every motivation that Scripture gives us to motivate our generosity begins with God and who he is. In fact, every act of obedience begins with God and what he has done first. That’s how the law begins: God tells Israel who he is, and how he has rescued them. Only *then* does he say, “Therefore, respond by obeying me in this way,” (and then he gives them the law).

And giving is another aspect of obedience and it is driven by the same engine... the same moto: who is God, and what has he done?

In Scripture God reveals himself to us as a giving God. His disposition toward us as his creatures is not stinginess, greediness, or selfishness. Far from it. He is not withholding. He's the opposite. He is generous, kind, merciful, giving, and overflowing like a fountain. The God scripture reveals is ever giving, ever loving, and ever kind.

Listen to God's word just festooning us with these blessings of the God who gives.

The Scriptures tell us that God is love. 1 John 4:8–10: “God is love... In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son...” So John says, there is this thing about God that is prior to the sending of the Son. He is love long before he acts in love. In himself he is love. And love is so fundamental to Who God is that his love predates even the creation of mankind. Between the persons of the Godhead, the Father, son, and Spirit are Themselves love. It is that trinitarian love between the persons of the Godhead which explains the generosity and kindness of God. God loves because it is in his nature and character to overflow toward his creatures in love.

Now, we see this also in Romans 5:8: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Notice how, in Paul's language here, the gifts that we enjoy arise from God and who he is. His love is manifest in Christ's death for sinners. His death does not make him love us, it arises from his love for us. God is love.

The Scriptures tell us that God is gracious.

Exodus 34:6–7: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...” This is how he reveals himself to Israel. This is what he wants his people to fundamentally know about him. Gracious. Full of love. Full of faithfulness.

We see something similar in the Psalms. Psalm 103:8–10: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He does not deal with us according to our sins...” The God who calls us to give is the same God who gives first. He’s not just love. He is “abounding” in love. He’s full of it. He doesn’t give from some kind of emptiness but from his fullness. Which also relates to the next thing Scripture tells us about God, which is this—

The Scriptures tell us that God is rich.

Ephesians 1:7–8 says that “In him we have redemption through his blood... according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us...” So there Paul is saying, the gifts of grace that we enjoy (specifically in Christ) come from the fullness and riches that God already has. He is rich. He has everything. And it is from that “everything” that he gives us blessings and benefits and kindness. In Psalm 50:10, we are told by God, “Every beast of the forest is mine... If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.” Our God is rich.

The Scriptures tell us that God is fatherly.

Matthew 7:9–11 – “If you... know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Think about this: the Son of God, who knows the Father is telling us, “he’s not just my father: he’s your father.” “The heart of God toward you is not merely as a creator to a creature, it’s like a father to a son. Because you are his son or his daughter, he loves you, dotes on you, protects you, provides for you, as a *father*. He is not a reluctant provider, he is a fatherly protector and provider.” Our God is fatherly.

The Scriptures tell us that God is faithful.

In Psalm 89:33 God says, “I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.” He speaks of his faithfulness in absolute terms. God doesn’t say, “I’m more faithful than you.” He doesn’t say, “I’ll be more faithful than x, y, or z.” He says, “I will NOT be false to my faithfulness.” His commitment and faithfulness is absolute. He gives, and gives, and promises to give, and never breaks that promise. He is bound by his very holiness and goodness.

And this faithfulness is not conditioned on our performance or works. Think of Deuteronomy 7:7, where God says, “It was not because you were more in number... but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath...”

What I want for us as a church is that we would be convinced... thoroughly convinced and well instructed from God’s word. This is who he is. This is who he has told us that he is. This is who he has shown us that he is. This is the God who loves us and has committed himself to us. It is from who he is that he motivates us to obey and listen to him. The Word of God presumes that when we know who he is, we will then know who we are and who we’re called to be.

2. Gifts We Enjoy

Okay, that is the God who gives. Nothing comprehensive here, but it’s at least a glimpse of him. But now I want us to reflect on the gifts we *enjoy* from our rich, fatherly, generous God. This is our second point. All of these gifts stem from who God is, but think of *what* God gives to us from his fulness.

The Scriptures tell us that God gives *life*.

This takes us back to our creation: “Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Gen. 2:7).

Job 33:4: “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

Isaiah 42:5: “Thus says God, the Lord... [of the earth...]who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.” The gift of breath. The gift of life. You are here, right now, in this seat, listening with your ears, seeing with your eyes, experiencing this moment right now because the God of the universe gives you breath. Each time your lungs draw in air, circulating oxygen to your body, keeping your organs and limbs alive and moving... all of it a gift from the God who gives life. Not just your breath, but even your physical existence continues on a moment by moment basis because of Christ.

In Colossians 1:16 Paul says, “All things were created through [Christ] and for him... in him all things hold together.” Take time to marvel not just that God created, but that he keeps creating, that he keeps upholding the world around us by the word of his power. God gives us life.

The Scriptures tell us that God gives provision. He takes care of us physically.

In 1 Chronicles 29:14, David says to God in the form of a prayer, “All things come from you, and of your own have we given you... all this abundance... comes from your hand.” David recognizes, yes, we give, but even what we give came from you and belongs to you. But notice that truth: “All things come from you.” All things. Our provision, our food.

Psalm 145:15 we’re told, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.” This Psalmist is saying, at just the time when you need food, God makes sure that you are provided for.

Paul, in Acts 17:25 says, “He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” That is as comprehensive as we can get. Everything, from the biggest and greatest thing like Christ and his life, death, and resurrection, all the way down to our sweat glands that keep us cool when it’s hot out in a hundred degree weather. He gives us life and breath *and everything*. He gives. Even what seem like his little gifts are actually grand gestures that we usually overlook. But there he is still, faithfully giving. God gives us provision.

The Scriptures tell us, not just that God gives us what we need, but that **God goes above and beyond our needs by giving us earthly pleasures.**

Ecclesiastes 2:24: “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God.” I’m guessing most of us didn’t eat gruel today for breakfast. More than likely we didn’t just have a crust of bread and some tepid water today. I had a Canadian bacon and egg white English muffin today, and a cup of coffee. God could have just given me exactly what I need in order to survive, and still remained faithful, but he did more than that. I had an amazing breakfast that tasted good. He gave us more than we deserve, more than we need. He gives us pleasure.

Psalm 104:14 “You bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man...” Think of it. The Psalmist says, “Food provides, wine gladdens.”

He made wine to gladden. Think of that. He didn’t have to make the world so that when a grape is broken, that the yeast goes after the sugars, and the sugars in the grape juice are broken down and turned into alcohol that goes into our blood stream and makes us feel happy when we drink it. God didn’t have to make it that way... but the Psalmist says, He did do that! And he did it to make us glad when we have it! That gladness reminds us that when we have the Lord’s Supper that we are doing something that gladdens the heart. Jesus himself makes us glad, just as the wine that he chose for the supper makes the heart glad.

What a gratuitous and kind gift. Just above and beyond!

But the point is the same: he didn’t have to gladden us with food or drink, but he does. Why? Because he overflows with generosity. Meditate on his gifts. Think of even just the worldly ways that he lifts our spirit, and how unmerited those things are.

The Scriptures tell us that God gives *himself*.

Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also... graciously give us all things?” There’s an argument there from the greater to the lesser. If God gives himself to us, then there is nothing that he won’t give to us.

2 Peter 1:3: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...”

James is all-encompassing in how he summarizes God’s gifts: James 1:17 – “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...”

Now, God does tell us to give in light of these things. But I need to talk about something that touches on some of what we will talk about next week, but I want to deal with this in light of what we’ve just read. Part of why we may resist giving is that we buy into a very specific lie. Two specific lies, actually.

The first lie is this: I am vulnerable.

And the second lie is: It’s up to me to provide for myself.

But the Bible is constantly, endlessly, shooting down both of these lies that are often times behind our resistance to giving. We are *not* actually vulnerable. Every hair of our head is numbered. And it is not up to us to provide for ourselves. Yes, we must act. We must not be fools. But God is the one who takes care of his people.

But the second lie here is especially powerful: it’s up to me to provide for myself.

This confuses God’s provision and the means of his provision. He often uses the work of our hands to accomplish his will. But you could probably profess that he has often taken care of you in ways that were out of your control, too.

I remember when Arryn and I were in college... the first year of our marriage, we were out of money. And we really were thinking, “How on earth do we pay these bills?” and we found an envelope in our mailbox with money. I

don't remember how much it was, but it was enough to pay our bills and then go get some groceries.

God provided for us above and beyond our means. And you may have had experiences like this for yourself. You see, God normally uses the work of our hands to provide for us, but then sometimes he decides to show his provision more clearly by using someone else, or some life event we didn't anticipate or control... and he does it in order to show us his mercy.

God provides. God is fatherly. God is rich. God is generous. God gives life. He gives pleasure. He is generous. And when we internalize and believe these things, here is what will happen: we will be freed up to give, because at no point would we think, "It's up to *me* to make sure my needs are met. It's up to *me* to make sure that I'm secure. It's up to *me* to do everything."

Instead, when we really believe that it's all gift, we will be ready and secure enough in our hearts to now give. Why? Because everything I've ever *had* has been given, and not earned, and because God gives daily bread, but not necessarily weekly or monthly bread. He gives what is needed when it is needed.

3. Gratitude We Owe (Paul's concluding question: why do you boast as if you did not receive these gifts?)

Third, I want us to notice the gratitude that we owe. Think of Paul's concluding question here: "Why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" Paul is showing us that it's all a gift. And yet here he's not addressing something we don't know. He's addressing something we forget.

You receive and receive and then act as if you just took care of yourself. It is God's provision that humbles us so that we know and believe, "It's all from God as a gift." Paul is reminding us here of the gratitude that we owe.

I'd like us to think on this as we draw to our conclusion: There is an important difference between acting from gratitude and acting from duty. I will admit that they do overlap each other a great deal. But they are different in important ways that I think Scripture gives us very clearly. One way that they differ is in their source.

Gratitude springs from a sense of undeserved kindness: “I don’t have to do this, but I want to because of how much I’ve been blessed!” That’s gratitude.

Duty, on the other hand, comes from a sense of obligation or command. It comes from what is required regardless of how you feel about it. “I must do this because it is my responsibility or the law demands it.”

Now again, there is a LOT of overlap here. The thing we do in gratitude LOOKS like what we do when we’ve done our duty. But God cares how we give and why we give. Motive changes the very nature of what we’re doing. Giving from duty or from gratitude are very different. One is an immediate obligation, and one is an immediate response. We will look at this more next week, but the giving that God calls us to is responsive.

Another difference between gratitude and duty as motivations is the difference between someone who has a loving relationship and someone who has a transactional relationship.

All human beings, because God created them, owe Him obedience. That is really and fundamentally what we might call basic, raw duty. That is transactional. Many human beings do things that they think are for God or the gods because they think that what God does is give back to us what we give to him. But the truth is actually the opposite. As we saw above, God gives and gives to people who give him nothing. The pagans were wrong. We can sacrifice all day long and never obligate God to us. The transactional approach is all wrong. It’s a lie. He’s never in our debt. Never.

But Christians, of all people, know that gratitude is different from raw duty because Gratitude is part of a strong relationship. When we love someone and we do something to serve them, we aren’t trying to manipulate them or get something from them. The relationship is the driver rather than what we get from the relationship. In the gospel, God gives himself to us in Christ.

In Christ, we are secure, not insecure. We obey, not from fear, but because of who our Father is, and because we’ve been adopted as his children.

Think of the nature of giving and thanks in Scripture. Psalm 116:12–14 – “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?” The picture here is of a person looking earnestly for some way to respond to the gifts.

You see, God gave the gifts first. And now the Psalmist is searching, looking, trying to find for some way to show his thanks. Do you have that attitude? “God, I’ve got to find some way. How can I give back even a little? What can I do? Surely there’s something I can do.”

In Luke 17, when Jesus healed the ten lepers, only one returned to give thanks. The one who returns, the text tells us, “fell at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks.” This is personal, not transactional. He falls at his feet because he is giving Jesus his very self as a response to the mercy of Christ. Nothing transactional here. Just a response to God’s generous, gratuitous, over the top grace.

Conclusion

Next week we’re going to look at the response that God’s word expects us to render when it comes to these things. What I want us to do this week is simply bask in our father’s riches. Scripture does not present us merely with RAW DUTY as the motivator for the sort of giving that he expects of us. First it is rooted in God and who He is and who he has been for us.

He is our rich father, who loves us, who gives to us, who gives us breath, who holds us together, who never breaks his covenant, who swears to his own hurt, who gives and provides, and never ever stops. This is the God who, when he calls us to give, before anything else, offers us his very self.

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” What an incredible love our God has for us.

Let’s pray.