The Pitch and the Promise
2 Corinthians 9:1–15
Sunday, November 8, 2026 (Stewardship)

Let us pray: Lord, open us to your word, that we might recognize your goodness and grace in our lives, and respond by sharing that goodness and grace with others, in Christ. Amen.

I remember as a teenager watching a Ken Burns documentary on PBS, when all of a sudden, a man appeared on my screen saying that it is only through the support of viewers like me that they are able to keep providing shows like that, and that if I gave them $60, they would send me a t-shirt. He kept coming back over and over again throughout the whole series (and it's a nine-part series, so I saw him a lot). If I gave them $100, they would send me a coffee mug. If I gave them $150, they would send me a tote bag. If I gave them $250, they would send me a DVD of the show that I was currently watching (presumably without the interruptions asking for money, which might actually be worth giving them $250 for).

We get requests like that all the time, don't we? If you donate to the high school football team, we will give you this coupon booklet. We get a letter in the mail from our college in which a current student tells us how it is because of our generous donations that the school is able to provide them with the scholarships they need, so if we give more money, they will be able to keep going to school. Over the past few weeks I was *constantly* getting text messages from political candidates asking for money. "We need your help, Patrick! (Although most of the time it didn't say *Patrick*, it said Stephen or Nancy or something.) The other side is trying to destroy our country, and we can only stop them with your help. If you donate to our campaign, we will fight for you and your freedom!" *Give us money, and we will give you freedom*.

I think that we are used to those kind of requests. "If you give us money, you will receive *this* in return." We will give you a t-shirt or put your name on a plaque." Or maybe it's something less tangible like, "If

you give us money, we will accomplish something good in the world." And sometimes the promise is simply the satisfaction of knowing you have supported a worthwhile cause. And there's nothing *wrong* with that. Most of these things are good, necessary things that rely on donations, otherwise they wouldn't be able to happen. We understand that, and a lot of times, we *support* these things. So that got me thinking, and if you pledge $1,000 next year to St. John's, we will give you this coffee mug. If you pledge $5,000 next year, we will give you this tote bag with a coffee mug and sticker in it. If you pledge $10,000 next year, we will give you your own designated parking spot. If you pledge $25,000 next year, I will give you this signed certificate stating that all your sin has been forgiven. And if you pledge $100,000, we'll rename the church after you!

We're used to that kind of transactional exchange in other aspects of our lives. If you give a certain amount of money to the YMCA, they will give you your own parking spot with your name on a sign. That's how it works other places. First comes the pitch, then comes the promise. "Here's what we need, and if you do this for us, we will do this for you in return." But we don't expect that in the church, do we? It feels *weird* here. It feels kind of *wrong*. And that approach has definitely been used and abused by the church in the past. Televangelists saying that if you give them money, then God will heal you of some infirmity. Prosperity Gospel preachers saying that if you give them money, then God will bless you with even *more* money! And this is not just a modern phenomenon. There were priests in the Middle Ages saying that if you give them money, it will reduce the punishment that you have to undergo for your sins. "If you give us money, then we (or *God*) will give you something in return!"

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The funny thing is, Paul *seems* to be using this exact same approach in his letter to the Corinthians. He has been organizing this big offering for Christians in Jerusalem who are experiencing hardships. He has asked the Galatians to help. He has asked the Thessalonians in the province of Macedonia to help. And he has asked the Corinthians in the province of Achaia to help. These are non-Jewish Christians that he is

asking to provide financial support for Jewish Christians who have been *skeptical* of non-Jewish Christians. So one of the things that Paul is saying here is, "If you give us money to help them, it might change their opinion of you. They might actually see that you are *real* Christians."

But the way that he's going about it *feels* kind of manipulative. He says, "Hey, we told the Thessalonians over in Macedonia that you guys have had your offering ready since last year. That got *them* really excited. But if they come with me to collect this offering from you and find out that it's *not* ready, think about how embarrassing that would be for *me*, not to mention *you*!" That's quite a fundraising pitch! *You don't want to embarrass me or yourselves do you?* He goes on to tell them that if they *do* give, they will be enriched in every way for their great generosity. They will be provided with every blessing in abundance, so that they will always have enough of everything. That God who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply their seed and increase the harvest of their righteousness. It sounds suspiciously like Paul is saying, "If you give, then God will give you even more!"

But that is *not* what Paul is doing here. Paul is not saying that our generosity leads to God's blessings. He's saying that God's blessings lead to our generosity. He talks about God as the one who provides the seed that the farmer plants and the bread that people eat. God is the source of what we have in the first place. God is the source of every good gift, every blessing that we have known. And he ends this by talking about the grace that God *has given you* (not *will* give you), and he says, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" Not *their* indescribable gift, but *God's* indescribable gift. And while he says this at the *end* of his pitch, it's actually where the whole thing *begins*. Before we ever give anything to God, God has already given *everything* to us.

Paul is not following the formula that we are used to, where the *pitch* leads to the *promise*. *If you do this for us, then you will get this in return*. For Paul, the *promise* leads to the *pitch*. Because God has already

given to you, we are asking you to give. Because God has already provided for *you*, we are asking you to provide for *others*. Because God has already demonstrated extraordinary generosity toward you, we are asking you to be generous to others. God's love and blessing is not the *reward* for our generosity. It is the *reason* for our generosity.

When Paul tells them, "You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity," he is not saying, "You will be enriched in every way *because* of your great generosity; *in exchange for* your great generosity." He is saying, "You will be enriched in every way *so that* you can be generous; in order to make your generosity possible." The purpose of God's generosity is not simply to make *our* lives better. It is so that we can help makes *others'* lives better. It is to make us participants in God's generosity toward others. God does not bless us so that we can accumulate more and more. God *has blessed us* so that we can be a blessing to others.

The promise is this: God has already blessed us and provided us with everything we need to live. And because God has done that in the past, we can trust that God will continue to do that in the future. So we don't have to hold on to our blessings out of fear that they might run out and we won't have enough. We can open our hearts and our hands and share with others, because we trust that God will give us everything we need to do what God is calling us to do. *Because* God has taken care of us in the past, we can *trust* that God will take care of us in the future.

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And this is not just about *money* and giving to the church. I say this every year – stewardship is about everything we do with everything we have, as a grateful response to God. It *is* about our money. But it is also about our *time*. We can share our time with others, even when it is inconvenient for us, because we trust that God will give us all the time we need to do what God is calling us to do. It's about our *abilities*. God has given you the ability to sew, and because of that you can make pillowcases for sick kids in the

hospital. God has given you the ability to build things and fix things and work with your hands, and because of that you can work with Habitat for Humanity or just take time out of your day to help someone else with something that's broken around their house. God has given you the ability to sing and play music, and because of that you can play music in worship that helps us glorify God, or you can go play piano or guitar at a nursing home for the residents. There are so many other ways that we can use the abilities that God has given us. And we *all* have some. Stewardship is about how we *use* the abilities that we have.

It is about how we take care of this world that God has entrusted to us and how we use and protect its resources.

Stewardship is about our love. Because God loves us, we can love others. It's about our *relationships*, how we take care of the people that God has given us to love. It's about our forgiveness. Because God has already forgiven us in Jesus Christ, we don't just hold on to that forgiveness and keep it for ourselves so that we can feel good about ourselves. We open our hearts and forgive others. And we trust that even if that act of forgiveness blows up in our face, God will take care of us and give us everything we need to move forward.

Stewardship is about everything we do, every choice we make every single day, with everything that God has given us. It's about choosing to *share* what God has given us, because we are *grateful* for what God has done in the past, and we *trust* in what God will do in the future. The *promise* has already been fulfilled. God has already preserved our lives and gotten us to this point. God has *already* demonstrated God's great love for us in Jesus Christ. Before we give a single dollar, before we perform a single act of service, before we do anything to "deserve" it, God has already loved us.

Paul begins by talking about the Corinthians financial contribution, and he ends by talking about God's extraordinary generosity. He begins by talking about what they have *promised* to God, and he ends by reminding them of what God has *already* given. We are not asked to give in order to persuade God to bless us and be generous to us. We are invited to give because God *already has*, and we just want to say, "Thank you!" The promise doesn't depend on the pitch. The pitch depends on the promise.

I'm not going to pretend like I'm not making a pitch here today. I am. Next week, we're going to ask you to make a financial commitment to support the life and ministry of this church. And yes, we *need* your financial support to do the things that God is calling us to do. But here's the difference. I'm not going to promise that if you give, God will give you more in return. I'm not going to promise you that God will love you more or bless your family more or that your life will somehow become easier. Because God has *already* promised to love you. God has *already* promised to sustain your life. And God has *already fulfilled* that promise. God has already given us more than we could *ever* repay. And so my pitch isn't that you should give in order to receive God's blessing. My pitch is that we should give because we already *have*. And *thanks be to God* for this indescribable gift. Amen.