

Life: Work your plan

March 17, 2014

• *The Bible Studies for Life* lesson for March 30 focuses on 2 Corinthians 9:6-13.

As a student at Wayland Baptist University, I had a part-time job. It gave me enough money to put gas in the car and go out to eat on occasion. As a young adult learning to follow Jesus, I began to consider the whole issue of tithing.

Looking at my meager paycheck, I pondered if I really had enough to give. Sometimes my plan for giving went something like this, "If I have anything left over after I've paid my bills and done everything I want to do, I will give." Sometimes I determined to give before I paid anything else.

It was amazing to see how God supplied my needs if I gave before I spent money on myself. The defining moment in establishing my giving plan came when a bill arrived I knew I could not pay. Laying the bill before God, I asked him to provide what I needed.

God did an amazing thing. He met my need through an act of service. It was unexpected and almost to the penny what was needed. Someone followed God's leadership and blessed me. Praise was in my heart and on my lips for the generosity of God's people and a faithful God.

Decide in your heart

The act of giving begins long before the check is written or the dollar bills are placed in the offering plate. The Apostle Paul says the first step in giving is a decision of the heart. When asked to give, do you consult your bank account or your heart first? If we begin with our bank accounts without already deciding in our hearts, we are likely to be less generous or

not give at all. A decision made in the heart will lead to a plan for giving.

Paul is encouraging the Corinthian church to get back to their original plan to give. Using the analogy of sowing seed, he reminds his readers you reap what you sow. Sow very little; receive little in return. Sow generously; reap generously. Is generosity part of your giving plan?

Notice the terms used in 2 Corinthians 9:7 that shape a giving plan: “give what you have,” “not reluctantly” nor “under compulsion.” God does not want us to give unwillingly, unenthusiastically or half-heartedly. We should not be coerced or pressured into giving.

Instead, Paul says to be a “cheerful giver.” This is just the opposite of the description above. A giver whose heart is fully committed to God is enthusiastic, willing, eager and quick to give. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Trust the Giver

God already has all the resources needed to accomplish his work. We flatter ourselves if we think God is dependent upon us. We are told in 2 Corinthians 9:10, even the seed used in sowing comes from God.

Spend several moments considering 2 Corinthians 9:8. Read the verse several times. Allow the word of truth to penetrate your heart and mind. “God is able” brings praise and thanksgiving to our lips from grateful hearts. What we believe about God is critical to our generosity. Do we truly believe God is able to take care of us if we are generous?

Consider the “all” statements in verse 8: All grace abounds to us so we will have all things at all times so we can abound in every good work. We can be generous because we serve a generous God. What possesses our hearts—trust in a generous heavenly Father or the things of this world?

Jesus saw in the rich, young ruler (Mark 10:17-27) someone who could keep the law without a changed heart. He had kept all the commandments Jesus put forth, but God still did not have full possession of his heart. When Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor, he wouldn't do it. He wouldn't sow generously. The problem wasn't with his bank account. The problem was in his heart. He couldn't trust the Giver.

Give God the praise

Cheerful givers help others in Jesus' name as an act of obedience and a confession of their faith in Jesus. Those who receive give thanks to God. In 2008, Hurricane Ike damaged much of Texas' Gulf Coast. So many who had lost homes, churches and businesses said they weren't depending on the government to help them. They said the faith community would come and make a difference. Deep gratitude was expressed over and over for the many who gave time, talent and resources to help strangers get back on their feet.

Plan your giving. Work your plan. Jesus tells us the end result in Matthew 5:16: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."