



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Now about the collection...

1 Corinthians 16:1–4

Mark Mitchell

September 6, 2015

Vision Sunday

You can see here a photo of what's called the Dead Sea. It's called the Dead Sea for a reason: it's dead. That's because of its salt content. It's the saltiest body of water on the planet, nine times saltier than the ocean. It's so salty no fish can live in it. It's a huge body of water, 10 miles by 50 miles. But sailboats don't sail on it. You'll never see a waterskier or wave runner skimming along the surface of the water. No one builds vacation homes on its banks. It's desolate. The only people who like the Dead Sea are first-time tourists to Israel because they can bob in it. It's impossible to sink in water that salty. So tour buses go there, people put on their swimsuits and go bobbing. It's a lot of fun, until you try to rinse off the salt. It gets in every nook and cranny of your body. You're miserable for days. What's really interesting is there's fresh water flowing into the Dead Sea continuously. The Jordan River and several other streams feed into it. But the Dead Sea has no outlet. And because it has no outlet, the fresh water comes in and just sits there, and the hot desert sun evaporates it all.

My goal today is to keep you from becoming a Dead Sea person. That's a person who receives fresh blessings, fresh resources, fresh provisions from God on a regular basis, but has no outlet. Dead Sea people don't consistently channel their resources to what God is doing in this world. Today I'm going to challenge you to become a person more like a river than a dead sea; a generous person. Rivers take the water from upstream and channel it downstream. I want to challenge you to take the resources and blessings God puts in your lap and channel them downstream into the work of God.

And I want to specifically ask you to consider channeling a significant part of your resources to CPC. If this is your church home—if this is the place you come to worship and to be fed the Word of God, if this is the place you turn to help you to raise your kids to be God-fearing and Jesus-loving adults—then I'm talking to you today. I know many of you already are committed to giving to the ministry of this church. But some of us still need to grow in this area. As a whole, the generosity of this church over the past year has been simply awesome. But as you've heard this morning, the challenges before us are pretty awesome as well, and I believe we're going to be challenged in some new ways this year and it's going to stretch all of us.

I know it's risky for me to talk about this. Someone may think, "Oh, here it comes. Here comes the pitch. He's going to try to get into our wallets." But if that's what you're thinking, you'd have

had a real hard time hanging around Jesus. Jesus never shied away from talking about money. Howard Dayton writes, "Jesus talked much about money. Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions." Is that because Jesus wanted to get into our wallets? Not at all. He talked about money because he cared about our hearts. He knew in the sanctuary of our hearts money is often times worshipped as a god. Remember what he said, "*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money*" (Matt. 6:24).

In 1 Corinthians 16 Paul writes to the church in Corinth and encourages them to channel their resources downstream. In doing so, he gives some very practical instruction on giving. Follow along as I read verses 1–4. Paul tells us several things to help us become more like a river than the Dead Sea.

**Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.**

## Principles of Giving

### Give purposefully

First of all, he tells us to give purposefully. Paul begins by referring to "*...the collection for the Lord's people...*" He's referring to a need the Corinthians were well aware of—a collection Paul was taking up for the believers in Jerusalem who were poor as a result of widespread famine and persecution. Paul had spent much of third missionary journey collecting contributions from Gentile churches for these Jerusalem believers. He wrote the Corinthians about this in 2 Corinthians 8-9 as well. This is the purpose they were to give to.

When we give, we're to give in order to meet needs and we should know what those needs are. We're not asking you to give to an impersonal fund some faceless committee allocates in ways you

care less about. We're asking you to meet real needs! The ministries this budget supports are impacting everyone from high school students in our own back yard to young women trying to escape the sex trade in Bangkok. Peoples' lives are at stake. Where they'll spend eternity hangs in the balance. These are real needs. And they're **our** needs. We're a family. This budget is **our** family budget. It puts real demands on each one of us. As long as this church is alive, acting as salt and light in this community, reflecting the very life of Jesus Christ, it's going to place demands on us. When there are no demands on us, when there's nothing much at stake anymore, we may as well be dead! The demands it places upon us, even the PG&E bills, are real needs because they're the means by which the message goes forth and lives are changed. So we're to give purposefully.

### Give regularly

Second, we're to give regularly. Notice what he says, "*...on the first day of every week...set aside a sum of money.*" The first day, of course, was and still is the day Christians meet for worship. It was on that day they were to give. Paul viewed giving as a part of worship. Imagine coming to church and not singing or hearing teaching from God's Word. We say, that's part of worship. Well, so is the offering.

Our giving ought to be as regular and habitual as going to church is. It's a holy habit done with repetitive regularity throughout our entire lives. This reminds me of a little girl who experienced a major breakthrough in her life when she learned to tie her own shoes. But, instead of excitement, she broke down in tears. Her father asked her, "Why are you crying?" She said, "I have to tie my shoes." He said, "But you just learned how. It isn't that hard, is it?" She replied, "I know, but I'm going to have to do it for the rest of my life."

My hunch is some of us feel the same way about our giving. But, this is the way giving is supposed to be: habitual, regular and systematic. Although we should always be sensitive to the Spirit's promptings, we're not to give in an impulsive, unplanned way. We're not to wait for a crisis or for an emotional appeal. We're to give habitually. The best practice I know of is to simply give as regularly as you're paid. If you get paid twice a month, give twice a month as part of your worship. If you want to make it simpler, set up your giving electronically. Prayerfully make a decision of what you'll give and put that decision to the test by scheduling it whether or not you're in the mood. That way you'll also avoid the temptation of saying to yourself, "I'll just pay these bills first and give to the church later."

### Give personally

Third, we should give personally. Paul says, "*...let each one of you...*" Paul viewed giving as something each person in the body is to do. No one is excluded. It's not something only for the well off. We're not to have the attitude that some day, when I make

more money, then I'll be able to give. There was a time in my life when I put off giving. I was a student and I felt I didn't have the money to give in this way. I rationalized, saying, "Some day..." But that's a cop out. If you're a college student, don't wait until graduation when you get that great job to give. Give now. You should even teach your children to give. Even though it may be a little bit, establish that habit in your life. Giving is for the rich and the poor, the old and the young. There are no exceptions. Giving is the personal responsibility of every one of us.

### Give proportionately

But how much? The fourth principle is we're to give proportionately. Paul says, "*...set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income.*" Literally it says, "As you've been prospered..." We give according to how God has prospered us. There's a strong reminder here that all we have comes from God. And we're to choose how much to give based on how much he's prospered us. Of course, the amount will be different for all of us, because we've all been prospered in a unique way.

When I say giving is to be proportional to our income, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. Neither Paul nor Jesus ever told us what that proportion should be. Yes, in the Old Testament the Jews were obligated to give a tenth of all they had. But, we're never told in the New Testament of a certain percentage we're to give. For that reason we don't teach a strict idea of tithing here; of giving a tenth of our income. What the New Testament does clearly teach is whatever we give, we're to give liberally and sacrificially. Whatever percentage we chose to give, it should be enough to cut into our lifestyle; there ought to be things we're choosing **not** to do because of our commitment to give. For some, that might mean giving eight percent; for others that might mean eighteen percent. For most of us, ten percent would be a good place to start. Whatever level of giving you're at, I challenge you to take another step forward in your giving.

Some of you are probably thinking when you look at your obligations and you look at your salary the "math" just doesn't work for you to give this way. But you can trust God in this. Proverbs says, "*The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered*" (Prov. 11:25). This is a trust issue. God promises to meet all your needs. Do you believe him? You may have to reevaluate your lifestyle. Some of us need to scale it down. We make a large salary, but the more we make the more we spend and there's never any margin. For some, our debt management is so great we don't have anything left over. If you're in that situation, it would be wise to reevaluate your assumptions about the way you live. Debt comes from wanting more than God's current provision for your life and arranging other ways to get it. And we become a slave, lacking the freedom to serve God with our money.

## Give willingly and wisely

The fifth thing is to give willingly and wisely. I put these two ideas together because they both come out of v. 3. We're to give willingly, out of the overflow of God's grace in our lives. We're not to give as the result of pressure tactics. Paul says here, "*...so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*" Paul refused to be present for any collection the Corinthians take because he refused to use the pressure of his presence to sway them in their giving. He wanted their giving to come freely in response to the grace of God rather than in response to his own person. One of the ways we apply this at CPC is our staff and elders don't know what anyone gives. You should know, that's rare. Most churches carefully track their member's giving, especially their highest givers. But we don't want that to be a motivation for anyone. Giving is an issue between you and God. Jesus said when we give we shouldn't even let our right hand know what our left hand is doing! Our motivation should be how God has poured out his grace in our lives. We give because God **gave** to us first.

But if we cannot trust the integrity of those we're giving to, we won't be able to give willingly. That's why Paul also tells us to be wise in our giving. He says, "*I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.*" Paul invited accountability in the stewardship of the resources the Corinthians gave. That's why he says: you pick men you trust and send them to Jerusalem with these letters. Don't ever give to a church or a ministry where there is no accountability and where you're told **not** to ask questions.

Are you more like a river or more like the Dead Sea? God's Word says our giving should be purposeful, systematic, inclusive, proportional, and willing. This is the path to true freedom and joy. Dead Sea people are dead-end people. People who channel their

resources downstream to others are life-giving people. We have so many people like that here. I know one couple who has a heart for Syrian refugees. They're going to do a spending fast for the month of September, not spend money on anything they don't absolutely need, and use the money they save to give to an organization that's helping in that crisis. I also know of a guy for his 50th birthday party invited his friends to donate time and materials to build a playhouse in the backyard of a disabled girl. Listen to this quote by Billy Graham, "God has given us two hands – one to receive with and one to give with. We're not cisterns made for hoarding; we're channels made for sharing."

Today, make a commitment to become more like a river than the Dead Sea. I want to challenge you to obey God's Word in each one of these areas:

- I'll give purposefully: In my giving, I'll respond to real needs both within the body of believers I call my church home and in the community.
- I'll give regularly: I'll give in a regular, planned and systematic way.
- I'll give personally: I recognize that giving is my personal responsibility that I am never exempt from.
- I'll give proportionately: I'll give to the Lord's work in keeping with how he's prospered me.
- I'll give willingly and wisely: I won't give under compulsion but rather eagerly and cheerfully as a response to the Lord's generosity with me.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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*Catalog No. 1417*

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This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, September 6, 2015 at Central Peninsula Church  
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