**Forward 2018: Blessed to Give (2 Corinthians 9:6-15)**

***Senior Pastor Chris Kam***

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. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

# Introduction

The Forward 2018 series of sermons portrays the heartbeat of DUMC for 2018. The theme for the year is “Step In”.

Big Ideas

Forward 1: Be very careful, be wise and be mindful of every opportunity.

Forward 2: The Presence of God is the Blessed Life.

The 4-fold blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant:

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” (Gen 12:2)

1. **I will** make you into a great nation.

2. **I will** bless you.

3. **I will** make your name great.

4. **You will** be a blessing.

When God made a promise to Abram then, He said that this is a promise that He will give to the church of Jesus Christ. Upon receiving blessings from God, then we bless others. Hence, we are blessed to give.

So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:6-9)

We are never too old or too young to obey God. Everyone who believes in God is also a child of Abraham. We are reminded that we are sons and daughters of Abraham because we inherit the blessings of the Abrahamaic covenant. It is not just given to the Jewish people. We are Gentiles who have been justified by faith. This is the prophetic pronouncement of the promise given. The gospel was announced in advance to Abraham. Abraham knew that his obedience to God will bring blessings to the nations of the world.

If we have faith in God, like Abraham, we will all be blessed. The blessing of God is about the presence of God in our lives. This blessing belongs to every Christian. Although two people can be from the same background and have the same opportunities, one can be a blessing to others while the other seems to only mind his own business. When confronted with difficulty, one may say that there is no more hope but the other may say that there is so much hope.

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| **Sea of Galilee** | **Dead Sea** |

The Sea of Galilee is in the north while the Dead Sea is found in the south. The Sea of Galilee is thriving with life and is famed for its fishing industry. Here, Jesus found the fishers of men. Water feeds into the sea from the north and also from underground sources. Water also goes down south into the Jordan River from the Sea of Galilee. The Dead Sea, on the other hand, is also called the Salt Sea. It is located at one of the lowest elevations on Earth. Water flows in but there is no water coming out except via evaporation. Hence more and more salt is retained. The Dead Sea has nine times the salt content of the ocean. Plants and animals cannot grow there due to the salt. The Sea of Galilee is full of life while the Dead Sea is full of woe.

The spiritual lesson here is Christians should be life-giving rather than taking input only and becoming stagnant and lifeless.

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**BIG IDEA: Don’t be like the Dead Sea. Be a Blessing and Serve People**

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Galatians 3:14)

For everyone who believes in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is given to us and the Holy Spirit is a river of life. We receive the promise of the Holy Spirit.

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:37-39)

The moment we become Christians, there is an inflow of the Holy Spirit into our lives which can be a source of blessing to other people’s lives. In order for the river of life to flow through us, we need to have output. Those who receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit and keep it to themselves are only in the receiving mode. The longer you retain it without output or outflow, you can become the Dead Sea. This part of your life needs to be unplugged so that the river of life can flow through you.

Four reasons why people choose to be Dead Sea:

1. Scarcity mentality – They are worried that they will not have enough of the Holy Spirit.

2. Narrow focus – They are focused on themselves.

3. Bad theology – They think that God’s purpose for their lives is only to make them happy. God’s purpose is to make us holy, not happy.

4. We tend to think God is like an ATM machine and we only go to God to get.

The crux of the matter is self-centredness. Receiving blessings only for yourself results in you becoming the Dead Sea. Our lives become stunted and we do not grow. There is a lack of vitality. We may not even realise we are the Dead Sea. Ask God to reveal to you. A spiritual paradox is that the more we hold Jesus to ourselves, the more stagnant we become. There must be a reason why we want to grow. It is counter-intuitive to say that the best use of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not to retain, but to let it out. Serving is one of the best ways to grow because you receive and you give. You become healthy like the Sea of Galilee as a result.

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘**It is more blessed to give than to receive**.’ ” (Acts 20:35)

**Give, and it will be given to you**. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:38)

**Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.** (Matthew 10:39)

Can the Dead Sea find life again? If you dig a trench and allow the water to flow, over time, it will become the Sea of Galilee. Dig that river out of your life so that this life can flow out of you.

**Principle: The more of Christ you give away the more room you have for the fresh flow of the Holy Spirit.**

There are 3 principles of sowing (similar to investing). Sowing seeds can refer to seeds of time or seeds of resources. In the Parable of the Talents, the servants were given different amounts of talents respectively. The last servant hid the talent under the ground and hid it away. His master chided him as he did not invest what was given to him. The other two who invested were praised as good and faithful servants. We need to sow, namely we need to give. The more you give, the more God can give to you in order that you can become a blessing to people.

# 1 Sow generously

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. (2 Corinthians 9:6)

You can only sow generously if you have received the generosity of God. Similarly, our capacity to forgive is a lot higher than someone who has not experienced forgiveness. You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. Whatever we do for God needs to flow out of our love for God.

Do we need to be rich in order to be generous? Generosity has nothing to do with how much you have.

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. **Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on**.” (Mark 12:41-44)

Jesus observed how people were contributing tithes and offerings. Jesus watches you when you give your tithes and offerings. Jesus is not interested in how much you give but instead, God looks at our hearts.

In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. (2 Corinthians 8:2)

We learn to give as we experience God’s generosity to us. When we sow generously into the lives of people, so much more blessings will return to us.



# Sow intentionally

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give…

(2 Corinthians 9:7a)

It is not random giving. God wants us to give intentionally. Our tithe of 10% should be a basic minimum and we should give offerings over and above that. People in the Old Testament gave more than 10%. In the New Testament, giving generously should mean giving beyond 10%. Nonetheless a good Biblical guideline is giving 10% as returning an offering of thanksgiving to God as our Provider. Giving more is a testing of our faith.

# Sow cheerfully

…not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7b)

The word “cheerful” comes from the Greek word “hilaros” from which we derive hilarious (boisterous merriment or convulsive laughter). Giving reluctantly is not the spirit of giving. The Lord looks at the heart. If there is no cheerful giving, we become the Dead Sea.

# Conclusion

We should give generously, intentionally and cheerfully. We should not give manipulatively. One of our core habits is that we have fun, namely joy. We should be cheerful even when we give and when we serve.

As you serve God, it is more than what we can get from God in terms of material blessings or favour. Seeing God work powerfully among people in our midst is a blessing. When you serve, you come away with so much life. Giving is not just in terms of money, but also in terms of time. Allowing the Holy Spirit to flow through us will help us experience God in a powerful way.

Do not be like the Dead Sea. We must allow the channel of blessing to flow through our lives when we obey God. Be a blessing and serve people. Allow God to unplug whatever is plugging you with the help of the Holy Spirit and begin to see miracles flow out of our lives and released into the lives of people. We need to make ourselves available for God to work through us.



Sermon summary contributed by Zhenli.