

Riverview Baptist Church  
Sunday School Lesson Guide  
November 30, 2014  
"The Race of the Grace of Giving"

**Memory Verse:**

*"Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means." 2 Corinthians 8:11*

**TEST THE TITHE THIS DECEMBER.** We are challenging every family in the church to begin (or continue) tithing this Christmas season to show our faithfulness to giving according to scripture and to combat the materialism of this season. Please remember this is not an authoritarian mandate for money, but an encouragement to test God and experience the blessings He has promised to those who will give according to His word.

*"What challenges has the "Test the Tithe" emphasis presented to you this past week? What specific changes, if any, has it made in your approach to the beginning of the Christmas shopping season?"*

**The Race of the Grace of Giving**

Paul loved sports metaphors. I have to believe that if he'd been born in Georgia, his letters would have been packed with SEC football stories and comparisons. ("You've managed to bust through the defensive line of the World, you've done good in stiff arming the Devil's linebackers, you ran a smooth quick footrace to the end zone... but next time, wait until God hands you the ball..."). Now that's a little silly, but what's not silly is how serious Paul's race metaphors were. Because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit himself, the stories used examples from running that everyone could understand and applied them perfectly to examples of living a God-honoring, spiritual and physical life. We don't have time to cover all those examples (Hebrews 12, Philippians 2:16, Galatians 2:2, Galatians 5:7, 2 Timothy 4:7, 1 Corinthians 9:24-26, etc...) but suffice it to say, Paul wanted the early churches to know who to run well. Paul is telling them: You've got all the fundamentals down, but make sure that you don't get lax on GIVING, or else you're going to lose this race of obedience. You know how to run, now RUN WELL.

1. **Start well** - *"...Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so." (2 Cor. 8:10)*

By all accounts, the Corinthian church had started off with their hearts in the right place. They were on fire for God. They were filled with a godly desire to give and felt the call to do so right then! They were first to give and first in the desire to do so. Nobody gave more gifts, more quickly or more willingly than the Corinthians did (last year, when Paul was in town.) This happens a lot. When we're first saved, or experience a new, fresh revival, we tend to become very zealous and rigorous in following the Lord, including in tithing. This is the way it should be. God doesn't fire us up just to let us idle our engine and feel good and warm inside. He fires us up so that we can put it in gear and get to work. Let our passion move us to action, to giving, the way it did the Corinthians. The problem comes when we experience such a passion, a godly desire to give, and then we just let it pass without changing our lives. Or even worse, when we talk a good game, but when the rubber meets the road, we give up and tap out at the first sign of trouble...

2. **Run well** - *"But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving." (2 Cor. 8:7)*

According to this scripture, the Corinthian church was well on its way to being a model for service to Christ. Despite a lot of issues along with way, Paul is addressing them and complimenting them as a church that is excelling in everything... but, so that they don't get too full of themselves, he's reminding them that they need to step up their efforts in excelling in giving as well. Now, some have said that Paul might've been being a little sarcastic in saying

that the Corinthians “excel in everything” and implying that they only THINK they excel in everything, but even if you think that was his implication, Paul’s goal is the same: Spurring the Corinthians into action! Correcting their course and coaching them in their race. You’re doing great in so many areas! Don’t mess around and lose the race because you left out this one crucial practice!

3. **Finish well** - *“Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.” (2 Cor. 8:11)*

Ever got really excited and said, “Tomorrow, it’s all going to change!” You were going to eat right, start exercising, clean out that garage, start painting the house, start going to church every Sunday, start tithing... but then tomorrow morning came and it just didn’t pan out the way you thought it would? You had a headache. It was raining. It was too cold or too hot. You couldn’t find your paintbrush. You forgot you had a dental appointment. And so on...

Welcome to the human race. We can get excited at the drop of a hat and then deflated and defeated in the next heartbeat. We are a fickle people. The courage and desire to change ourselves, to better ourselves, to pursue and obey God’s will... these are things that we don’t just naturally have within us. They are gifts from God. Some people may take the strength and desire that God gives them for good things and then turn around and use them for bad, ungodly things, but make no mistake: every breath, every ability to plan and succeed, every ounce of strength is granted to us from God Almighty, even to those who disobey.

The question is, and will always be, what will we do with the gifts of God. How will we spend our time, our lives, our breath, our talents, our money?! We might get all fired up and plan to serve God with strength and conviction, but even Peter said, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You,” yet he was the one to deny Jesus the most. Jesus knew that Peter’s mouth and his pride were writing checks his strength couldn’t cash. (Mat. 26:33-35). Peter wasn’t treacherous. He was just weak. Just like us. Thankfully, after His resurrection, Jesus gave Peter a chance to be reconciled and as the Bible and history have shown us, Peter did finish well. As Paul would say, Peter let his eager willingness be matched by his completion of it. History tells us (as Jesus prophesied) that Peter would willingly become a martyr for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter died for being obedient. He didn’t deny Christ at the end and when He crossed that finish line (on a cross of his own, history tells us) Peter finished well.

4. **TRULY WINNING: Compare your sincerity in giving, not the amount!** - *“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.” (2 Cor. 8:12)*

Paul reminds the church multiple times that our progress, our obedience, is not based on the amount that we give. If we have very little to give, we should not let that keep us from being obedient just because there are others who have been blessed to give more. The Macedonians gave as much as they could and were happy to, but it might’ve just been a small amount when compared to what the Corinthians had... however, their sincerity, grace and joy in being able to give greatly outperformed the Corinthians. While the Corinthians may have been excelling in “faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness and love,” they weren’t holding a candle to those poor Macedonians in giving generously!

Second, if we have been blessed with a lot and therefore are expected to give a greater amount, (but the same proportion... *“according to your means.” 2 Cor 8:11*), then we must not let greed take hold of our hearts, either. If you hold back on giving because you don’t think others are working as hard as you, that’s a sin. If you refuse to help someone because you think they’re not trying hard enough to get a job or pay their own bills, that’s a sin. If you won’t help someone in need because you believe they’ve been unwise with their own money, that’s a sin. The Bible teaches that we are each personally responsible for our foolishness and our sins. It also teaches that Jesus came to forgive us of those sins and if He can lower Himself to take the punishment for our filth and depravity, shouldn’t we model that in our financial sacrifices for those we might not consider financially wise? In other words, *“For you*

*know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Cor. 8:9)*

The thing is Jesus isn't even asking you to become poor like He did. He's just asking you to give up cable TV... or eating out at the steak house once a month... or that boat that you use twice a year, but make payments on every month... or that house that you complain about being too expensive or too big to maintain... or that Starbucks latte you get every morning... or that 5 grand in credit card debt you're about to get into this Christmas... are we listening yet?

Is tithing a sacrifice? Yes. Is it a sacrifice to help our fellow Christians and our fellow men and women in their times of financial need? Yes. Is it as much of a sacrifice as what Jesus gave for us? NOT EVEN CLOSE! So when considering your own giving, Jesus doesn't ask that we model the amount or the degree of His gift (thankfully) but He insists that we model His desire and earnestness in giving!

**Take Home:**

- Are you letting how much (or little) someone else gives keep you from giving as you should? Don't let feelings of inferiority or greed keep you from God's blessings in your life.
- Do you withhold charity to others and to the church because of your self-righteous judgments? Ask God to soften your heart, consider all Christ has done for us, and let God show you the freedom of giving without judgment.
- Do you fear sacrificing financially, or just lack the conviction to follow through with tithing? Ask God to give you the strength to make this sacrifice and the endurance to stick with it. The wisdom and strength He gives will reward you as you apply the same endurance to other areas of your life!