

Because we are entering week 4 of a series on Renewing our Covenant, I would like to take a moment to connect back to the last 3 weeks... Copies of these messages are available on our website in the Worship Archive section if you wish to go back.

We began with the sacrament of Baptism. Through baptism we enter the covenant God has established. Within this covenant God gives us new life, guards us from evil, and nurtures us in love. In embracing that covenant, we choose whom we will serve, who will be our Lord, by turning from evil and turning to Christ. Baptism, the claim “I am baptized.”, is the referent point for our daily lives. For all of us who have been baptized, whether as an infant or later on in life, we will have the opportunity today to celebrate and reaffirm our baptismal covenant with God. If you haven’t been baptized, and would like to make that commitment with God, either for yourself or on behalf of your child, I would welcome the opportunity to talk with you more.

Over the last couple of weeks, two platforms have been used to dig deeper into our understanding of our covenant relationship with God more passionately. The first is 2 Corinthians 9, which we have come to know as Paul’s philosophy on Christian Giving. Giving is one the ways Paul outlines what faithful fulfillment of one’s baptismal covenant relationship with God looks like. The other, which is derived from the spirit and text of 2 Corinthians 9, is the acronym I.M.P.A.C.T. We have broken down Impact in the following way: **I**mpant. **M**ultiply. **P**rovision. **A**bundance. **C**onsecration. **T**hanksgiving. It was too much to try to tackle all of these at once, therefore, they have been introduced 2 x 2 x 2.

We spent the second week looking closer at **I**mpant and **M**ultiply. Doing so highlighted our call to sow, or more intentionally implant, our gifts to God and God’s purposes. You don’t have anything to reap or harvest unless something is sown, or more intentionally, implanted. God has been generous in the sharing of God’s good gifts with each of us, therefore, wouldn’t it only be right for us to share generously with God and God’s purposes? And furthermore, as Paul clearly outlines in his letter, we are to take initiative in our giving to God and not wait to do so out of extortion or compulsion. For when we give to God and God’s purposes, we are encouraged by God’s promises and God’s power that our gifts will be multiplied to serve the needs of God’s kingdom. God is invested in having God’s kingdom be revealed and fulfilled, therefore, we are to trust in faith that God will enable you, me, us as the givers, to give even beyond what we believe to be our ability to God. We are called to make a commitment to give in faith, and trust God to help provide the fulfillment of that gift according to God’s will. If we commit in faith and God doesn’t provide, then we don’t give- not because we can’t, but because it isn’t right for God. We also spoke of the miraculous multiplication of gospel math.

This led us into what we spent last week looking closer at and that was **P**rovision and **A**bundance. As we did, one of the things we encountered was just how much all the letters of I.M.P.A.C.T. are intricately woven with one another. Provision and Abundance both carry on the miraculous multiplication and supernatural God is capable of. In faith we acknowledge that practical Christian living is not a natural thing. At its core, practical Christian living is supernatural, meaning it transcends the natural world. This faith empowers us to bid farewell to the scarcity mindset. Jesus said, “**I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly**” and empowers us to extend the limits of our spiritual comfort zone. It isn’t God’s desire that we live easy, comfortable lives. We must base our promises upon God’s promises. And one of God’s core promises is, “I will provide for you, and I will provide for you in abundance.” And there is a really good reason God provides so abundantly for us. There is a really good reason God’s grace abounds for us. So that, in order that, we can give abundantly in return, to God and to others. For those who have much, much is expected. For those who have much, much is made possible through you. The key question might be how much we trust this against our worldly stresses and temptations to “keep up with the Jones” or get ahead because of what might be coming with the market.

The last 2 letters, “C” and “T”, **C**onsecration and **T**hanksgiving, are also embedded within Paul’s Philosophy of Christian Giving. As we hear 2 Corinthians 9 again, I invite us to hear and consider where consecration and thanksgiving play a pivotal part in our covenant equation.

Read 2 Corinthians 9

In all the ways, consecration and thanksgiving, are the backbone of our covenant equation. The concepts and meanings we have unpacked with **I**mplicit, **M**ultiply, **P**rovision, and **A**bundance put meat on the skeleton that is made of **C**onsecration and **T**hanksgiving. It is fitting then that we conclude with these two before we are then invited to renew our covenant through the reaffirmation of our baptism.

Let’s look first at **C**onsecration. “First, they gave themselves to the Lord”, Paul says of certain Christians whose generosity had surprised him. Without consecration each contributor opposes himself/ herself, for without consecration a man/woman will give, no matter how good the cause may be, only what he/she can spare out of what he/she plans to spend on himself/herself.

This can also be known as giving what is left, not what is right. You may have heard that before. One of the most influential children’s sermons about giving is one in which children are given 10 tickets all connected together. Those tickets are able to be used for and traded to get things like food, clothes, pay bills, go to the game, etc.

The question is posed, what will you spend your first ticket on? Without hesitation, the children respond with things like a new stuffy or ice cream or a new game for the PS5 or switch. As each ticket is presented, something can easily be identified to spend the money on. We, as adults young and younger, might add savings, medical bills, a trip we have longed to go on, or an upgrade in cars. There is no shortage of opportunity to spend money, is there? In the children's moment though, a question is asked at the end whether any of them thought of giving a ticket to God or to the church to help God's purposes? Most don't think of this. Do we think of that? The lesson is then shared that because of our faith in God, and all we believe God has given and blessed us with, whatever that is in small amounts or large, why wouldn't we give first to God? And I am making it an adult moment now and not just a children's moment, but why wouldn't we give our first ticket, or tickets, to God first and then trust God to provide for us in all the rest? Wouldn't that be more in line with living into God's promises to us and what we have been talking about with I.M.P.A.C.T? Or do we, like the early Israelites on the exodus out of Egypt, doubt God to come through, and therefore, give to God what we might have left?

Without consecration, a giver will think, "What can I get by with?" Consecration brings about the need for a spiritual revival first. Giving, to put it plainly then, is a part of the committed Christian life. Put your thoughts, ideas, motives, money, and choices where your mouth is and where you say your heart is. With God? Give to God! Specific to money, however, it can be applied to time and talent as well, "funds for Christian purposes should be given by Christian people as part and token of their personal devotion to the Lord, not raised in ways that contradict the spirit of Christ."

What is the spirit of Christ? Paul's letter uses another "C" word, cheerful to help answer this. "Cheerful" means *more than an absence of grumbling*. It borders on the meaning "gay or happy," and is in fact the root of our English word "hilarious." Paul uses the choice of his words carefully. Paul does not encourage reluctant or forced contributions. He does not mention any sum which the church should supply as its quota, or any average per member, or any minimum amount. He says not a word about tithes. He wants, because he believes it is what Christ wants, free gifts from those who are consecrated to the Lord. When the consecration and the willingness are there, you do not need to worry about quotas.

Let's look now at Thanksgiving. Perhaps you recall verses 11 to 15, "**¹¹You 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. ¹²This 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. ¹³Because 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. ¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Communicating our gratitude to God is crucial because it makes us more reliant on the Lord and it has a profoundly positive effect on those around us. Thankfulness occurs inwardly, in what our heart expresses. Glorifying God happens publicly, in what our mouth confesses.

What has the Lord done for you? You can tell how much the Lord has done for you. And not by looking around comparing your situation with someone else's. God has got an eye on you, and you are in God's hands. God's love and God's grace are gifts to you personally. Are you grateful? Do you have an attitude of gratitude, even if it isn't the month of November and the Thanksgiving holiday around the corner? You are the only steward of the story that only you can tell. No one else can give a first-person account of what God is doing to guide you, provide for you, empower you, and bless you as you serve God. So what? So, be thankful and be a faithful witness.

And if you are someone who likes a to-do list and wants something tangible to do, maybe an art project, or a garden project, or writing (journaling), you can build a memorial of gratitude for God's grace. As you remember each one, each thing you are thankful to God for, your appreciation will grow as your motivation in ministry grows. Reminds me of "Ebenezers". You remember the "ebenezers", or stones of help, we used and reflected on last fall and winter through Christmas? The Israelites used stones to remind them of the help God provided them. When they looked at those stones, just like we could look at our list of thanksgivings, we can remember God's promises and God's power.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God is good! And God provides for each of us not just one but a whole set, a lifetime worth, of indescribable gifts. May we remember and indeed be thankful!