

An Investment That Always Works

II Corinthians 9:1-11

By [Dr. Douglas F. Kelly](#)

Well, again, it has been a very great personal joy for me and for my wife Caroline to be back with you in such a well-loved place where God has blessed us so much in worship and with your fellowship over the eleven years we were here, and we think of you so often. I believe the Holy Spirit has been with us this week of the Missions Conference, and I believe He still has a little more that He'll be doing tonight; and so, in that confidence I look to Him and ask you to open your Bible, if you have it—or at least listen to the reading—II Corinthians, chapter nine, verses 1 to 11:

For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia..." [that's where Corinth was] "...was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we, that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. (As it is written, ... [quoting Holy Scripture] ...He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: His righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.

And I want to speak tonight on the subject that is brought before us by this text, and it is, you could say, the best possible investment, or an investment that always works. I know in most cases some of you have done reasonably well, and

you don't come to church to get investment advice! I understand that! But hear me out a little bit. You might be glad you did.

The best possible investment—I remember my father and uncles and great-uncles indeed telling me years ago when I was a very young man several things to beware of. One thing to beware of would be someone who said we have a surefire investment...it will probably increase by about fifty percent in the first year, and we need you to make a decision this week or you're going to miss the opportunity. They said if it were that good, they wouldn't let you know, they would keep it for themselves; so don't go there with that sort of investment.

When I was coming down here on the plane Tuesday afternoon from Charlotte to Jackson, I cut out of the flight magazine (it's legal to do that!) two offers that I would consider very bad investments, and I'm going to give them as sort of a panel so I can then tell you what is a good one. Here's a bad one...in my opinion it's bad.

This particular article said that in ten days...if you go pay the money to go to their foundation, in ten days they could teach you either Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Modern Greek, Russian, and so forth. Ten days, and you will be an expert in Greek. Well, I took Classical Greek for seven solid years, and every day or two of my life I'm looking up words in the dictionary. I have no idea what some of those words mean...and then, can I even find where it is in the dictionary? I don't know! So I'm not...these may be good people, although I doubt it...I am not going to place any investment with the 'ten days and you know a hard language.' You certainly wouldn't know English in ten days! Indeed, I had spoken English twenty years, and I remember going on the ship to France when I was going to do my senior year abroad in France, and this American woman (she was not from the South) stopped me and asked for directions on the ship. And it so happened I knew where she wanted to go, and so I carefully explained exactly how to get there from where we were standing. And then she gave me a compliment. She said, "Young man, you speak excellent English for a foreigner." And I replied, "Any time I can help you, I'm glad to do it." So that's English in ten days!

Well, then, there was another one in this same flight magazine that said if you would pay the money to go a certain place (I'm not going to tell you where...in fact, there were ten different places) for a weekend, you could become a millionaire...learn how to become a millionaire in one weekend. Now, it may that some of you have done that; if so, I want you to give very generously tonight to the missions! But for myself, I wouldn't make that an investment — to go to this expensive seminar to learn how to become a millionaire in one weekend...although maybe it has worked for somebody. I couldn't know it happened.

But now here's one that God, who is nothing but truth, says will work for you, and

you cannot lose. And large numbers of people who are in need in the world stand to gain, and most of all Jesus will receive pleasure if you invest in this way that the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, talks about first of all in chapter 8 of II Corinthians, and then in chapter 9.

And I just want to pull out for our time together a very few principles of investment that the Holy Spirit gives us through the inspired Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 9.

I. A willing mind is good, but it's not enough.

The first four verses tell us something very important, and it's this: A willing mind is good, but it's not good enough.

I imagine nearly everybody here would feel in very close sympathy with the missionary aims of First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, and of all true Christian churches of whatever denomination. You would affirm that God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life, and that this Jesus, who left the glories of heaven and came down here and humbled Himself to death, even the death of the cross, for all of God's elect, shed His blood to make us clean, we believe; then He says "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." It probably would be hard to find anyone in here tonight that didn't more or less feel that that's right. But now here's the rub. A willing mind is good. I suspect we all feel the mission of the church really is a good thing. But to feel that way is not good enough unless we actually take steps to get involved and to invest in it and to help in it.

There's a funny story they tell, and it's a true story (that's why it's funny) up our way of two very distinguished families...three very distinguished families...about the year 1900. One of the men, a fine Presbyterian Christian who later became governor of North Carolina, and he was interested in this attractive young woman of a distinguished family. And there was another man who, it later turns out, was interested in her, and he was from a fine family. So the man that would become Governor of North Carolina in the 1920's went to this very eligible young lady, young Christian lady of the most distinguished family, and said, "I would like you to be my wife." And she agreed to do it. The other man, from an equally outstanding family, was told that So-and-So was going to marry So-and-So, and he said, "I can't believe she would do such a thing as that and let me down. I had intended to ask her to get married in about a year and a half. I was going to propose." Well, he presumably had a willing mind. I don't doubt he was sincere...in my grandparents' generation. But it wasn't good enough, because he didn't go to this young woman and tell her his intentions.

Now you might say, "Well, have you become a marriage and family therapist?" Well, you can ask my wife and find out I haven't! No, not at all. But I want to say

to you, in the Christian life we can have very good intentions that are never translated into action, and the work of the church goes forward when the Christians love Jesus enough to dig into their pocketbooks, figuratively—going to the checkbook, whatever they can do—and say, “Here it is, Lord. It's Yours, and I want to be a blessing to those that need to know the same love and glory that is transforming in my life.” You've got actually to do something; not just to feel good about it, but to take the actual step of giving.

Now I want us to look at two important principles in this text. There are more than that, but I only want to talk about two. Both of them are related to the fact that God is very, very generous. We speak about the attributes of God — His qualities, His characteristics. He is all-powerful, and He is holy, and He is all-wise, and He's all-loving — these wonderful attributes, and they're true. But there is this attribute of God that you hear discussed a little bit less often (although nobody's ever denied it): it is the generosity of God: that God is extremely generous; that He treats you massively better than you could ever deserve. Even when you do a little paltry thing for this generous God, as it were He (excuse me) bends over backwards to bless you.

Now, we serve a very kind, loving, and generous God. Some way my family conveyed to me — I don't know how, but I definitely perceived and internalized and believed at a very early age that the Lord God Almighty...I knew He is holy, I knew He doesn't overlook sin, and I knew Jesus' grace is sufficient to forgive us...but they conveyed to me that God is very generous and kind and good, and knowing that God is generous certainly encouraged me to be in His service, and it has certainly helped me in winning souls to know that God is generous and will help anybody whatsoever that will let me pray with them that wants His blessing. Now that is what God is like. Let's put it this way: God is so generous that He will out-give you every time.

I've only known in my lifetime a handful of people that are like that. I do know one man—believe it or not, one man's a preacher. You don't normally think of a preacher as being financially generous because a lot of times they don't have the money. They're struggling and so forth, and maybe you don't think of them as being the first in line to give, although some of them are. But I know one preacher that's a United Methodist, and I have never seen such (if I can use the word) 'apostolic' generosity in all my days. He's the kind of man you wouldn't dare let him know if you had a need, because he'd do everything he could to take care of it. What you'd rather is...if the Lord wanted to tell him, that's one thing...but somebody like that, you don't tell him you've got a need.

I know another man who is a Presbyterian elder and a medical doctor, and he gives away so much.... The Internal Revenue won't let you give with credit but fifty percent of your income. I've never had that problem. I'm glad to give, but there's never been a year when I gave fifty percent of my income. Maybe that year will come; I hope so. But this man gives well over fifty percent of every

penny he makes. Again (in inverted commas) an 'apostolic' spirit of generosity. Now these two men I know well, both of them. Different parts of the country. They have reflected something of the generosity of God.

And we're told here in verses 8-11 of II Corinthians 9, that when we are giving—let's take it in the Missions Conference—you decide you will make a pledge. If the Lord sends that in, you'll give such and such. Maybe it would be more than the year before. My wife and I said that we'd give through this church (in that way, anyway); we want it to be more than last year. And some of you will be far more generous than that. But when you are ministering seed to the sower, making it possible for these missionaries that have been giving these very encouraging reports to do what they believe God has called them to do, God will take care of your needs. He will out-give you every time. God is not stingy; God is not niggardly; God is not harsh. Some people think that of God. What a shame! The God who sent His Son to die for our sins, and raised Him from the dead, and pours out His gracious Holy Spirit in our formerly foul hearts...that generous, loving God, He will out-give us every time.

II. Investment Laws.

You might say that there are here two laws that are mentioned in these verses. One is the law of the harvest. It's mentioned elsewhere in Scripture: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap": that what we're doing now has consequences both in this life and in the one to come. The law of the harvest.

And then there's another principle of investment (in God's kind of investment we're talking about eternity), and that is the law of increase: that God gives higher, does more, out of whatever you made available than you could have imagined. He increases it. Not merely the "whatsoever you sow, you reap," but He overdoes it. He's so generous He gives back more. Well, I think it's wonderful here in verse 8. This about God: "And God is able...God is able to make all grace abound towards you."

We're not paying off God for anything that we give. It's a grace. He gives us an opportunity, it's another grace. And then in this giving, this sharing, this praying, this going, this sometimes sacrificing—some of us may need to sacrifice a little bit—I say this: Heaven will be a very, very wonderful place, both the intermediate heaven when we go with the Lord and the saints, and then the final new heavens and new earth...unspeakable glory and joy. But one thing we will not be asked to do in heaven is to sacrifice. This brief time on earth is the only period of time in your life when you have the opportunity to make a sacrifice for Jesus, who gave everything to you. Isn't He worth it? Don't you get down to pray in His name and you believe God will deal with you graciously because of Jesus? Aren't you going to come one day, you and I, to face the last hour of our life and the cold river of death, and our confidence is in Jesus that took away our death and turned it into

an open door into His Father's house? Our confidence is in this Jesus who sacrificed. Oh! What He paid! And He is able to make all grace abound towards you. When you give, it's a grace He offers you and says 'I want you to entrust Me with this; I'm going to make it abound and take it much further than ever you could imagine.' God is able.

I want to turn you to the last book in the Old Testament — Malachi 3:10. I've sometimes said this to people. I'm often speaking in various universities and other settings where the people wouldn't be like here, where we're Christian brothers and sisters and we rest on the word; we believe it and we want to hear it, and we hear it gladly. But I go to many places where they don't know what's true. Some may be antagonistic, others are perhaps honestly seeking; and I sometimes get the question...they say this: "Well, it may be that you know these things about God, and we're not going to go so far as to suggest that you are definitely wrong in what you're saying about God. Maybe it's right. We just can't be sure. But then, how could we know? You're making large claims—claims on our lives. How can we know?" And depending on the situation—I don't ever have a canned speech, but I do say this in many cases: "Well, there are at least two ways you can know. There are others, but at least two things. One thing, you can start praying in the name of Jesus to God, even if it's bad prayers, selfish prayers, not much of a prayer...if you're seeking God's face in the name of Jesus, God will get in touch with you. And a second thing, if you want to know God is real, you start giving and see what He does. See if He's real or not."

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me..." ["Prove Me!" God's willing for you to know if He's real or not. Of course He is! Sure!] "...Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

I have a classmate that was with me first grade through high school, and sort of a unique person...a different kind of person...and he visits us regularly. If you saw him, you'd say he's different. It's true. But he doesn't have the social graces, never has had...but he's had a brilliant mind in investment, and has made massive amounts of money perfectly honestly, brilliantly, in common shares of stock. And I noticed one time, with all this (and he shares what he's done and what it is, and so forth)...I noticed one time he was with us, and he showed me some stock report, and the next five minutes he had a glass of water...orange juice...out, and he was pouring packets of something in it. And he saw me watching, and he said, "Well, you wonder what that is. That's..."—I don't remember what he called it, but—"...that's my depression medicine." So here he is with all these millions, honestly gained, brilliantly mastered, and he is having to take a good bit of depression medicine. (I'm not saying it's wrong to take anti-depression medicine. I approve of it. The doctor says you need it, it's fine. Doesn't mean you're not spiritual.) But I'm saying in his case I just felt like maybe there could be another way that he could be helped, because I've witnessed to

him over the years. He knows my stand, and he comes to church when I preach. But I said to him later, "You tell me you feel down much of the time,"—and so forth and so on—I said, "I don't know exactly what to say to you. You know how I believe about the Lord, and He would help you. But why don't you start giving?"

"You mean, to you?"

"Definitely not! Definitely not! But why don't you start giving to something that's good? Help in the Lord's work, help some folks that need it, start writing some checks."

He was horrified for that trip. But the next trip, he kind of got used to the idea.

Well, believe it or not, he started giving. (No doubt he thought it would kill him: it didn't!) And I must say—now, he'll never be everything right. That's not possible before the resurrection. But I must say there's been a tremendous change and a lifting of spirits, and he really feels like it's worth still living, and he's giving and giving more! As far as I know, he's not even saved yet, although he says he accepts God and Jesus and so forth as being true. But he's moving in the right direction.

And I want to close just telling you that God is able to make all grace abound toward you, if you'll trust Him and give in this tremendous missionary enterprise for the church. What an opportunity!

I remember in my early ministry, we had a man who had very serious problems with being able to feel assurance of salvation. I talked to him. He was very well read; read all *The Banner of Truth* stuff and all these things...good. But I couldn't get anywhere with him, and my heart would sink when I'd look out the church window and see him walking down the sidewalk to come talk to me. I thought, "Oh, me! He's back." But anyway, I talked to him again. Couldn't get anywhere. Well, two or three years down the road he decided to start tithing, and he began tithing. And he told me one Sunday morning, minding his own business, sitting up in the gallery of the church, back of the church, back in the back, suddenly the Holy Spirit warmed his heart and he knew the immediate love of God. Assurance of salvation! He'd longed for it for years, and I had talked to him until I was blue in the face and got nowhere with him, but God did it. And I can't be sure, but I believe that it was related to the fact that he decided to trust God enough to give to His work. And verse 8 of II Corinthians 9 became true for him: "He is able to make all grace abound."

I remember another situation in a little later ministry of a man who was superintendent of the public schools in such-and-such a place. As far as I know, his wife was a real Christian...I'm sure of that. He was an honorable man, but not an evangelical believer. Had a good bit of sort of intellectual baggage that didn't comport with the Holy Spirit, but he sat under the preaching. His wife was praying

for him. Anyway, one autumn he decided he would start tithing. Never done a thing like that in his life. So he began to tithe a tenth of his income from the school system. I don't remember how long it was. It was only a period of a very few months when that man found the Lord—or the Lord found that man—in glorious salvation. Now, he didn't pay God to save him. The blood of Jesus saved him. But he opened himself up to God, and not merely having a willing mind. Believing Christianity is a good thing, but he put himself on the line and God made great abound towards him.

I'll close with this one little story (some of you have heard it before) about ourselves when we lived here in Jackson, several blocks down, in Belhaven. It was one autumn, maybe about late October or early November, and there had been various...I was paid enough, it was fine...but there had been some crises. I don't know...some medical issues, maybe, with some of the children, and mechanical things of the car. I don't remember what. But we were close on money, much more so than usual. And my wife said to me one day.... (There were four missionaries that we gave a little bit of support to...it was minimal support, beyond the tithe...and those particular missionaries were all single. They'd never been married, and we knew from letters that the last remaining parent of those four missionaries in different parts of the world had died during the calendar year.) And Caroline said, "Why don't we send a check to each of the four, and not send it through the agency but send it directly to them as a Christmas present? Their parents are dead. They probably won't get any Christmas presents. Let's send them some money. All four of them." I replied, "I think that's a good idea. It may well be of the Lord. I'm not sure. But I want you to understand..." (I was the one that handled the checking account and the bank and so forth.) "...I want you to understand there's not much money in the bank." I would get paid on the 25th of the month, and it would be another two weeks until I got paid, something like that. I said, "I've paid every bill honorably, I've left out enough for gas and enough to pay the maid. But if I write four checks, even modest checks, it will take us way down and I wouldn't be able to give you the money to buy groceries. If you're willing to take the chance of not having money for groceries for two weeks, I'll write the checks." She said, "That is fine. I've got plenty of extra rice and potatoes in the outside pantry..." (there was a little door, and kind of a little outside pantry) "...and that will be fine. You write the checks." So I did that and left Belhaven to go to the seminary, Clinton direction, in the morning, and teach that day. I got back...(We never locked the door, because the children were in and out all the time, and she'd gone to take the children to music lesson or sports or something, and she always put the mail on the kitchen table. You'd come in the hall, and then the kitchen.) ...and I saw this letter, and it had my wife's handwriting on it in pencil. And it said in pencil, "See what the Lord has done!" with an exclamation mark. So I opened the letter from a particular source that could not possibly have known of our need, because we never intimated it. And this man had sent a check. He said, "The Lord told me to send you this check." It was exactly one hundred times the combined amount of what I had sent those four missionaries that morning. And then I had a sinful thought:

“What if I'd given more?!?”

Anyway, I found out that day, and it has worried me far less to see the account get down low sometimes to do something I know God wants me to do.

Some of you, God may be telling you He wants you to do something bigger than usual tonight. I know this: I share it with you, and I'll quit. II Corinthians 9:8 — “And God is able to make all grace abound towards you.” He will do that. Try Him, trust Him. God says, “Prove Me and see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing upon you.” And that blessing will be shared with many a needy soul. Amen.

Thank you. Be seated. We've had a great conference; one of the best, I think, we've ever had. We've been blessed richly by Dr. Kelly, his preaching, and our missionaries. They've challenged me and I hope they've challenged you by their lives to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses and follow Jesus as they have done. And Dr. Kelly has challenged us several times to pray more, to give more, and to go. God is a gracious God. He gave us His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says we are not our own; we've been bought with a price. We've been bought by the blood of Jesus, and by His death on the cross, we now belong to God. We're His. So it's not a matter of what I want to do or what you want to do, it's what God wants to do through us and how He wants to use us.

The Lord Jesus has given us the Great Commission to take the gospel to the whole world. Now the question I want to challenge you with tonight: Will you do what God has led you to do to help reach our nation and the world with the gospel? Will you take those steps that Dr. Kelly has challenged us to do? Will you give? Will you make a Faith Promise? We have our Faith Promise cards...we're going to turn those in, in just a few minutes. We have more at the exits.

God may be leading some of you to give more. You made a Faith Promise, but He's leading you to increase that Faith Promise. Trust Him for more. Believe Him to do more. You can do that. You can put in an extra amount on your Faith Promise card tonight or when you go home. Take an extra card and bring it back to the church or mail it to the church this week.

Some of y'all, God is leading you to make a Faith Promise. You've never made one before. You've never trusted God like this. And all the Faith Promise money goes to missions — home and foreign missions. We had 354 cards, Faith Promise cards, given last year. Assuming that's a card for each household, that's only about thirty percent of the households in our church. We can do a lot better than that. We can do better than thirty percent. Some of you God is leading to make a Faith Promise, and you've never made one before. I encourage you to do that.

I have missionaries calling me and writing me. Many of the missionaries we support, their accounts are in a deficit. They need us to help them more. There are new missionaries going out to the field who need help, too, so let me encourage you to give, and God will bless you. As Dr. Kelly said, He's a generous, gracious God. He'll bless you far beyond anything you can hope or imagine.

Some of you God is calling to go. He's calling you to go on a short-term mission trip this summer. We've got several trips to go to different places, doing a lot of different things, and God is calling some of you to go with us. Will you go with us? Will you take that step? We'll be meeting in Patterson Hall after the service. Our team leaders will be there to meet with you and talk more about their trips. You can find out more about the trips and pick up an application form if you'd like one then.

God may be calling some of you to go on a one- or two-year mission, or maybe a career mission. I'll be glad to talk with you about that and help you in that regard. So will you do what God leads you to do as far as going?

And then, pray. Dr. Kelly has really stressed praying for missionaries. Now missionaries, as they talk to us and they report, over and over they say, "We need your prayers. We need your prayers probably more than anything else." Will you pray more for missionaries? God is leading some of you to pray more, and if you'd like to be assigned a missionary, you can fill that out in the card: "I'd like a missionary assigned to me", and we'll give you a missionary to pray for. Or maybe pick one of our faculty who has been with us this year. And maybe God is leading some of you to pray more for missions, and we need more prayer.

So my question to you and challenge is will you do what God is leading you to do to help reach out with the gospel across our nation and around the world? And as you do, as you take those steps, as Dr. Kelly is saying, you will be blessed abundantly. And not only that, more importantly, God is going to be glorified, because as we get the gospel out, as the kingdom of God advances, souls are converted, lives are changed by God's Spirit. People begin to follow Jesus and love Him and serve Him and worship Him. God is glorified, and that is what we want to see — God glorified in our nation and in the nations around the world. We can have a part in that as we go, as we pray, and as we give through our church.

If the ushers will come forward, we're going to have our tithes and offerings, but also you can turn in your Faith Promise card tonight. If you're not ready to do it tonight, pray about it. God may want you to increase it — the amount you put on the card. We have extra cards at the exits. Take those home, pray about it, and you can turn them in later this week. But let's do! Let's be obedient to Jesus! Our lives are not ours; they belong to Him. And let's follow Him as He leads us to what our part should be to help reach our nation and the world with the gospel.

Let's pray.

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