BELPRES CHURCH

There Is Enough

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (additional reading 2 Corinthians 8)

Speaker: Anthony Ballard

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Good morning, my name is Anthony Ballard. I'm the Director of Discipleship here. Thanks for being here on the time chain Sunday. You guys are, shout out to you guys, special Christians here. Thanks, Josh, thank you. This is great, this is like small church stuff. When someone brings you water, they don't do this in big church. Usually you have your, I forgot my water bottle, and my throat was dry from just preaching. So, sorry, let's get into it.

If you guys don't know me, some of you may know this, some of you may not, but I grew up in a city called Compton, California. And who's that? Shout out? You're from there? Oh, sorry. Who's from Compton back there? Anyway, if you don't know it, you can Google Compton. It's pretty cool. But it's also on the lower socioeconomic side of town, which is putting it nicely, okay? And my family, we lived in a little two-bedroom apartment there. And I would say that we grew up in a dual-income house. And what I mean by that is, my dad worked two jobs. And my mom, I mean, and my dad also sometimes would work three jobs, and my mom would stay at home. And we, he did that, but we, that was just to get us by. We weren't like thriving or anything in that way. And that was if our car also didn't have neat repairs or break down in any kind of way.

And so my dad worked at LAX, and he would receive cash tips on his job. And this is before tipping got weird. And everyone makes you tip everywhere you go. This is back when tipping was cool, okay? And so each day, my dad would count his tips from the day on the side of the bed. And I remember him placing the tips in like a file system that he had. And he would put cash for some for my mom to use, some for my siblings and I to have as an allowance for rent and for bills and all those things. And he had one particular file in there that said the word tithe. And that word tithe means 10 percent. So 10 percent of everything he got, cash or from his paycheck, he would put in a tithe that he would then give to our church.

And my parents were, and they still are, faithful tithers. And this is a quality about them that I did not always appreciate. In fact, I didn't like it sometimes. Because we did not have much money. And we weren't destitute or anything like that, but there was things we could not do because my parents didn't have the money to do it. Things that I think would be common and normal around here. And I used to ask my mom for money for McDonald's or something like that. And she would say, oh, we don't have it. And I'm like, mom, I can see the money right there in your purse. Why can't you get some McDonald's or a Happy Meal or something? And she would say, oh, that's tithe money. That's going in the church.

Can you believe these people? They would actually take money away from me as a kid, and they would give it to God. Doesn't he have everything? Doesn't he own all the money? Why does he need ours? And so this was a Christian principle, though, that my parents just instilled in us. And not really through teaching or force. It was what we saw in their daily practice or weekly practice. And there were times where my parents wouldn't have money for me, but they always had money for the tithe.

And so currently, we are in a sermon series about living sacrificially, which, as Pastor Scott puts it, is not deprivation, but it's letting go of something, often good things, so that we can experience God's better, more valuable things. And nothing can have a grip on us, a grip on our hearts, quite like money. And so if you're wondering, yes, you did come to church on the Sunday when we were talking about money, guys. That's it, yeah. Usher's locked the doors, quick. Just kidding. Just kidding. Take a deep breath, though. We're gonna be all right.

Let's read our scripture. So 2 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 6 says, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided to give in your heart, 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. Amen."

Money, as I think all of us can agree, can be a sensitive topic, especially in a church like ours. And all of us have different experiences with it. Some of us here in this very room have a lot of it. Some of us here in this room also have a little of it. And the Bible teaches many different things about money. There's some parts where it gives warnings about the perils of money and greed. And it even goes so far to call out, specifically call out, I should say, rich people, and to not put their trust and their hope in money. And it's constantly teaching that those who have a lot of money should give it away to those who are poor and don't have it.

And Jesus himself, he goes so far as to say that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. But at the same time, there are many proverbs that teach you how to make money and how to steward it. And there are numerous examples of God blessing people with financial rewards. And their wealth was actually a sign of God's blessing and his favor upon their life. So, Abraham, Solomon, Job, Boaz, and so many more. These were wealthy men. They were not perfect, but they were wealthy, and they were deeply, deeply favored by God. So, which is it? Are Christians supposed to be rich or not? Well, stay tuned. We're going to find out.

So, for me, preaching about BelPres, preaching about money here at BelPres, I was a little timid or nervous, I should say, about stepping into this. Because as a congregation, we should know that a lot of us have, many of us have a lot of money. There's rich people here in this church. We're a rich church, guys. It's not a secret. Like, there's a giant pipe organ in the room over there, if you guys haven't seen it.

They're not giving those things away for free, alright? And the thing about you and Modern, like, you guys don't even listen to that pipe organ. It's just a spare pipe organ in the other room. Like, that's rich people stuff, okay?

So, generally speaking, though, at BelPres, we are a generous church. We would not be able to do some of the things we do in our worship services and in the community and around the world if we were not a generous congregation. And so, that's you. That's the resources that you give to this place that allow us to do these things. And so, we also have to be honest, though. Not all of us are doing this. We're just not. But the call for generosity isn't for a faithful few of us. It's for all of us to do. The scripture says that each of you should give what you have decided to give in your hearts.

And so, let's be clear, though. Every penny that we have, every dollar, whether it's a little or a lot, belongs to God already. And he asks us to give 10%, which is our tithing. And that's 10% of our income given to your church for the work of God's kingdom. And 10% is just baseline. But if you're just starting out and you're new to this, your starting line may be 1%, 3%, 5% or whatever. And then generosity is above and beyond the tithe. There are no percentages because it's limitless. And it could be as much or as little as your call to give in a moment, at any given moment as well.

So to be a tither and especially to practice generosity requires some sacrifice. And some Christians and pastors will disagree on whether or not you should teach tithing or generosity because the New Testament only talks about one or the other. Well, we believe the whole Bible here at Bellevue Presbyterian Church, and so we actually teach and believe in both. And so as we've been learning, living sacrificially is letting go of a good thing so that we can experience God's better thing.

But there are some things about money that just generally are never good, and they're not the good things. And greed is one of those things. Greed is not something that we want to sacrifice. It is something that we want to destroy and rid ourselves of in our lives. And greed grows in us when we believe a lie that there is not enough and that everything I have is mine. But the full message of the gospel actually teaches something totally different. The full message of the gospel teaches us that there is not just enough, but there is more than enough.

In the chapter before the one I read, Paul is trying to teach, urge the Corinthian church to contribute financially to a gift to Christians living in Jerusalem. These would be the Christians living in another part of the world or next state over. And several of these earlier churches had agreed to support their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem because these Christians in Jerusalem were actually poor. And there were other churches that had agreed to this, and the Macedonian churches in particular, they were facing all kinds of trials and they were in extreme poverty. And yet, they still managed to rally and raise support for their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

And this was not charity, this was not donations, this was how the economy of the kingdom of God is to operate. And the goal is that there would be no needs among God's people in the church. That's God's purpose for tithing and for generosity. It's to steward the wealth or even our lack of wealth to support his people, the church and the poor. And the icing on the cake is that we actually get something out of it when we give. When we give something, we get something. But we don't give to receive, but there is something that we do get. Because in verse 9, or in chapter 9, verse 6, it says, "Remember this, whoever sows sparingly, reaps sparingly. Whoever sows generously will also reap generously."

So what are we reaping? There's many different things. In the kingdom, it works as that when you sow a financial seed, what you get back, though, is not always financial. Sometimes it's something that money can't buy, something spiritual, because we serve a God who is rich in many different things. So we're giving a physical thing to a spiritual God, and what we get back may be spiritual in nature. So we sow money, but the reaping might be peace, it might be mercy, it might be joy, it might be love, and we can't get this kind of exchange on the stock market, everybody. So don't try it. They won't give it to you.

Verse nine tells us, though, that the purpose of Christian giving is to give to the poor. It says, "freely they scattered their gifts to the poor." And so while I did say we, generally as a church, are a rich church, some of us here, in this room even, struggle to make it month to month. Some of us struggle financially. And so what if you are the poor person? What are you supposed to do? Do poor people have to give? I believe the answer is absolutely yes.

Because remember, the other churches that Paul was collecting from, they were poor, yet they still gave to their brothers and sisters. And I think we can also look at the story of the widow's might in Luke chapter 21. And it's the story of Jesus is sitting in the temple, and it says Jesus looked up, and he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury, and he also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. And he said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth, but she gave out of her poverty and put all she had to live on."

I find it interesting that Jesus doesn't actually stop the widow from giving her money. He doesn't say, "Oh no, no, no, you poor lady, you keep it, you should keep that for yourselves, that's all you have to live on." He lets her put it in. And he has no, we get no indication that Jesus gave her anything back other than high praise for her faithfulness to God. And so the poor can and should also give to the poor.

And I understand in a church like ours, it's tempting to sit back and maybe let the rich people do all the fundraising and giving, and we can just kick back. But it's for each of us to give. And giving in the church, giving to a church, if you are poor, can be a huge sacrifice. And so I also think the churches have a huge responsibility back to let the congregation know what is going on with their giving. Many critics of the church complain that the churches say give, give, give, and they never tell you what in the world is going on, right?

So we believe, though, we have a responsibility to the congregation. In chapter 8, verse 21, it says, "We are taking great pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord, but also in the eyes of man." And there's three ways that we try to live this out here. First, we tell you stories. We try to tell you stories twice a month about what's going on in our world and in our community and how Bellevue Presbyterian Church is directly involved and how our giving is impacting that. And we as a church entity, we tithe an above and beyond percentage of our income. 11% of everything we get goes out the door to mission work locally and globally. And we try to share those stories with you for your trust, but also so we can show our faithfulness to God.

And then two, we share our finances openly. We publish a yearly financial report, and it's available in our offices. And also after services today, we'll have a finance elder and staff out in the lobby who will answer any questions you have about the church finances. Right out there, they'll have a lanyard and everything. Don't ask me, ask them, because I'm not going to know. So, no mud. I'll know a little bit, but not a lot.

So, the third thing we do is that we will begin discipling you financially. So we are working to bring a program of financial discipleship here to this church, and it's going to take some time, but it's something that will work, because it's something that will work for all levels of income, no matter where you are. And we want to do this because we don't want to be a church that just asks for your 10 percent. We also want to help you manage and steward the 90 percent. And this is not an official announcement. It's a teaser, okay? But it's something that I'm personally committed to, because I'm going to be the first one to sign up, okay? This is something I need for my own life.

Tithing for me is something that I've been practicing since I was a kid. As I said, my parents passed it on to me, and I learned it. And it's not always easy, okay? Because I like buying cool stuff, like a normal person. I'm not some unusual person. I like cool stuff, all right?

But the best time, I do believe, to start tithing, to start to give generously, is when you're young. When the amount's low, it's easier to give. There's a lie that we believe that we might tell ourselves: oh, when I make more, I'll give more. No, you won't. When it's low, that's the time to do it. Because the more money you make, the harder it is to give away.

And I get it, young people, especially if you're just beginning a career or you're in the middle of a career, this is hard to do, because you're just trying to get by and build some dreams and goals.

I think it's specifically hard for young men in particular, because there's a lot of pressure on young men in society to earn a lot of money. It makes you attractive and look good. No one wants their dating profile to say, "I don't have any money." You're not going to get any swipes or anything like that.

When I was engaged to my wife, I thought a lot about money and I thought a lot about what I needed to do to try to make more of it. And when I was engaged, a man in this church gave me a book that was about a thousand places to travel. And in this book, he wrote a note to me.

He said, "If I could start over, I'd spend less hours at work and I'd spend more time with my wife." I thought that was really beautiful.

But this man was very successful in business. He was very successful in making a lot of money in the business world. To be honest, when I first read it, again, I thought it was beautiful. But then I was like, yeah, of course, after you make all this money and reach these levels of success and everything, now you want to tell me to work less.

Okay, right. Because as young guys, we see these older guys, you know, you get able to travel, retire, have all this financial freedom, give away money at fundraisers and stuff. And that's what we want to be like. And you can't do this because you worked less. You do this because you worked more, right?

So for me, it wasn't adding up. When I shared this with the man who told me, I said, "Help me connect these dots." He said, "Look, he didn't try to change my mind. He said, 'Listen, I understand, but it can get out of hand fast. And so you have to decide what's enough and then stick to it.'"

So simple, but super profound. Because how we answer that question will lead us either down the path of greed or will lead us to the path of generosity. John D. Rockefeller is considered to be the wealthiest man who ever lived. It's estimated that his net worth was $418 billion with inflation. And it's sort of an urban legend in an interview that a reporter asked him, "How much money is enough?" And he replied, "Just a little bit more."

I'm not trying to vilify Rockefeller because I think that's all of us, actually. When we look at our finance, we might say, "Just a little more, just a little more, just a little more." And it's always a little more. That's how greed gets started.

Now, if I contrast this to a modern business story, some of you may know, especially if you're in my generation, Arizona Tea is one of the coolest companies right now. This one knows, you know this over here. Yeah, I saw your head nod.

The internet began to realize that Arizona Tea, as all the prices went up, Arizona Tea's prices remained the same for 30 years. They began to catch on with this and have their tweets and stuff.

Netflix would raise their prices, and Arizona Tea would tweet, "Arizona Tea's still 99 cents." And then eggs may be $7, and Arizona Tea is still 99 cents.

So I was watching an interview with the CEO of this company, and the reporter asked him, "Why not raise your prices? No one will be mad at you. This is what business people do." And he said, "You know, we're privately owned, we have no debt, and we're valued at $4 billion."

The reporter pushed him some more like, "But still, you could get more profits." And the CEO, I don't know if the CEO is a Christian or not, but I do believe the answer he gave is like the most Christian answer possible. He responded with just three words: "We have enough."

And yeah, I mean, that's clap-worthy. That's amazing. Again, don't know if he's Christian or not, but imagine if in our personal lives, instead of saying "just a bit more," we said, "We have enough."

It might be even shocking for some of you to think that a businessman could say something like that, but it shouldn't be. This is how, as humans even, we are supposed to trust God with everything.

It reminds me of Psalm 23, the most famous Psalm, which says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." But a different way of saying it is, "The Lord is my shepherd, and that is enough." Or another way of saying it is, "The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything that I need."

Wow, imagine that. So, the reason we don't tithe often or practice generosity is because we believe this lie: that there is not enough. And that leads us to our action step. Sometime this week, when you're about to hustle a little harder or you're going to buy something, practice saying, "This is enough." I don't need an extra quantity, I don't need to work an extra hour, this is enough. And I'm cautious to say just for the week because it's going to take way more than a week for this to get deep into your soul.

That leads to the second step: to prepare. We've given a guided prayer out, it's in the lobby, and you can use that prayer to help you identify something in your life or in your family's traditions that maybe needs to be sacrificed so that you can experience God's better thing.

By the end of this sermon series, we are all going to have an opportunity to name one thing and commit to sacrifice that thing that's holding us back from experiencing God's better thing. Because we're not just going to be hearers of the word, we're also going to be doers of the word.

I think one of the coolest parts about being married is that if you're both working, you get dual income. It just like boosts your monthly. You're able to spend and do all kinds of cool stuff.

So when my wife first moved here and she started working, we were able to save money. We were able to keep our credit cards paid off every month. We could tithe, give to fundraisers, and also have fun and eat sushi whenever we wanted. And that was exciting for us.

When our daughter was born, was about to be born, the question came to our mind about childcare, right? Childcare is expensive, if you don't know. But Sarah also had this strong desire that she wanted to stay home and raise our daughter, Hannah Nia. While I wanted to support that, I did have some fear. My fear was that we would have to live financially restricted like I did earlier in my life.

And the difference this time is that I would have people that I was responsible for. I wondered how we were going to reach some of our financial goals, like buying a house or anything like that.

Wouldn't you know it, at the same time, when all this fear is playing around in my head, our apartment sends us a letter that says, "Your rent's going up." They always do that, don't they?

I realized this fear, this unhealthy fear, was surfacing in me when Sarah changed her mind and said, "You know, I'm going to keep working." And I knew then that I was not trusting God and I did not believe that we had enough. We needed just a bit more.

We've seen God's provision for us before. We've been blessed before tremendously, and we've even been blessed by people here in this church. But we still didn't believe that there was enough for us.

So, in January, in an amazing act of faith, Sarah, who was really good at her job, people loved her, she quit her job. This cut our income in half and it's going to affect how we manage things. But more than anything, certain dreams are just going to be delayed in our life. When we pray now, when we come together and we pray and seek God, we don't pray for more money.

Now I feel like I understand God's heart a little better. We pray instead, "God, keep us generous." Because if God can keep us generous, then he's going to make sure we have seed to give away.

So now we've committed to a version of generosity that fits our income level, where we can manage. And this looks like us simply covering the cost for food whenever we're out with friends, having people over for dinner, buying good birthday presents for people. So they're like, "Wow, I wasn't expecting this from you. This is pretty good."

And lately, I've had friends ask me for Bible recommendations for themselves or their kids. Instead of sending them the link to buy it for themselves, I will ask for their address and buy it for them. All of this costs us something. It's small steps that we're taking to remain generous in our lives. And we're only three months into this journey of trusting God.

While our loss has been income, our gain is that we get to be present in the life of our daughter for a time when she's not going to be like this forever. And that's important for us.

That may not be everyone's case, but that was important for us. We are trusting a scripture like this: "He supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, and will also supply and increase your store of seed, and will enlarge your harvest, the harvest of your righteousness."

We believe that if He's going to provide seed for us, we can give it away. Then He will give us more seed, and we will give it away again. But it's like open hands—you can receive, right? And open hands can also give easily.

Cutting our tithe has never crossed our minds. We're in a position now where we can't afford not to tithe. Too much comes with it.

To close, I was racking my brain this weekend, trying to think, how am I going to close this thing? How can I get creative and flashy? But the Holy Spirit said, "Don't do none of that. Just share this." And it's a testimony that my family has experienced unusual joy, unusual love, unusual protection in a city that wasn't always safe, unusual provision when we didn't have it—unusual.

I do believe it's because my parents were faithful in tithing. I believe now, me and my wife are experiencing this because we've been faithful in tithing. It is one of the best things a Christian can do. It is also one of the hardest. And the Bible is clear when it says this: Never put God to the test.

But there's one verse here I want to read in Matthew 3:10, and it's God speaking. He says, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house." And He says, "Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

Some Bible trivia for you: This is the only place in Scripture where God says to test Him. Nowhere else, only in regard to the tithe, does He say, "Test me, try me. Try me if I won't do this for you."

And that's what I'm resting on. That's what I encourage you in your life, wherever you are financially, to rest in that. Whether you're a multimillionaire, or whether you only make a few hundred dollars a day driving Uber—test Him in this. Try Him. Let's pray.

God, we all here need something from you. God, we need your presence. Some of us may need money. Some of us may need peace in our homes. Maybe we need reconciliation in our families.

God, help us to step into the great exchange that you have, where we can give a tithe, and you give us something that money cannot buy, whatever that may be. So, Jesus, we trust you, and we trust your word, that you're honest, and that you're truthful, and that you would never tell a lie. So, Lord, help that happen in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- How have you experienced God's generosity in your life?
- What are some barriers to living a generous life? If you're comfortable, try to share personally, whether current or past examples.
- In the fullness of God's Kingdom, everyone will have enough. What small practice can you take to live that reality now?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.