

What are the keys to securing a good harvest? Some might mention quality seed, good soil, or appropriate moisture, and the list could continue. The apostle Paul gives an even simpler indicator. A good harvest depends on how much seed you plant. If you don't put seed out in one of your fields, you don't expect anything. If you put all the seed out there, you are giving the best opportunity for a good harvest. How we sew our gifts to the Lord and to help others is a key indicator of our spiritual worship and as we sew we reap a harvest of both physical and spiritual blessings. Paul focuses us:

You are enriched in every way by He who supplies.

1) Sew generously in Trust and Thankfulness.

2) Sew generously and see all the harvest blessings for others and yourself.

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.

Sew generously in trust and thankfulness. The Corinthians were gathering an offering for their needy brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem. But from the very beginning of time, God's people gave offerings to the Lord to say thank you. Cain and Abel gave from field and flock. Noah slaughtered some of the precious few animals that came off the ark. Abraham was willing to sacrifice one of the most precious things in his life – his own son, Isaac. Then from Moses on Mt. Sinai in the 1440's B.C. until Jesus' resurrection, God placed the training wheels of the Mosaic Law upon his people to show them what and how they were to give as they lived in the land that awaited the promised Savior. They shed the blood of animals for forgiveness, thankfulness, fellowship. They brought tithes (10%) from different areas of their life. They forgave debts, returned land, freed slaves. Yet in all these things what did God care about? Their hearts. (Jeremiah 7)

From the very beginning God cared about the heart of the giver. He accepted Abel's offering of the firstfruits of his flock – the best and the first. Abel offered them in thankfulness for God's blessings in his life and trusting God would continue to provide. Cain offered some of the produce of his fields, but not in the same spirit (Gen. 4/Hebrews 11). Sunday School artists pictured this for the child to see when picturing the brothers prostrate before their respective sacrifices and the smoke from Abel's offering going straight up to heaven as if to say, this is acceptable, and the smoke coming from Cain's offering going sideways into the distance, as if to say, God would not accept it, no matter how much produce was on there.

God chided his people in the promised land for bringing the leftovers – the blind, the lame animals to him (Malachi 1). And he also chided his people no matter how many animals they brought because he saw their hearts were not in it (Jeremiah 7/Malachi 1).

How about our offerings? There is no tithe demanded of us in the New Testament. God gives great freedom in our gifts to him for his work and for helping others. But do we feel it's not our responsibility to bring an offering? That's for the rich, and the people who have a lot and everything goes right for, isn't it? Yet Jesus was not impressed by the offerings of the rich that day in the temple when they brought the extra, what was left, but he praised the widow and her mite because she gave in thankfulness and trust. Give. All of us. Give as part of our worship – showing thankfulness and trust. *"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."*

Yet it is hard, isn't it, even as Christians. We see the responsibilities and the opportunities, and our old sinful nature rises up as we pull out the checkbook, and we think, if I withheld some of this offering or halved the number I could get that thing I wanted that others have and I should really have betraying our selfishness and greed, or I'd feel a lot better of what might happen this coming month or year – betraying fear that God won't provide. The devil tries to rob us of the *cheerful giving* God loves. And when we do give, he tries to make us regret it or give it "out of grief" *"grudgingly, out of compulsion."* Maybe you've been like me and you've had the offering basket go by and you looked in your wallet or purse and dodged the big bills on one side and kept moving down till the bills get to a smaller one to put in the plate. Why are we tempted to sew sparingly? It doesn't make sense. Sin never does. Our sinful nature doesn't want us to trust God to provide all we need, and it only cares about ourselves first and others second or maybe not at all.

It makes us think we earned it, and we don't have to share a thing. We are tempted to *sew sparingly*. How different God is in this.

God has always cared about your heart. In fact, God has always cared about you, fallen, sinful, an enemy by nature, dead in sin. He did not withhold. He did not hold back and *sew sparingly*. He *sewed generously* the most precious thing anyone could fathom – his only begotten Son, *with whom he is well pleased*. He watched a world full of selfish, greedy, worried sinners reject him, persecute him, work tirelessly and underhandedly to have him put on trial and convicted to die. All the while Jesus sewed generously, doing everything in his power to reach even the worst of us, turning hearts one by one back to God. It must have seemed like a losing effort when the crowds chanted, “Crucify him. Crucify him.” But not to God. God didn't spare his own Son. He placed on his Son all of our selfishness, all our worry, all our greed. God took out his anger, rage and wrath upon his Son, making him suffer the hell earmarked for us. Jesus *became poor so that we through his poverty might become rich*. And we are rich. Forgiven. Freed from guilt and shame. Richly blessed just in the fact that we know we are reconciled to God, and heaven awaits. The psalmist said profoundly, *“The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.”* It's true. Look at how God sewed generously for you and **Sew generously in Trust and Thankfulness.**

The Corinthians wanted to give. They had planned to give to help their brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem who suffered because of famine and persecution. The Corinthians knew the Gospel had come from them and now they knew how rich they were because of it and could share their financial wealth to help those through whom such blessings came to them. This was a privilege of God's grace. Paul tells them that God would bless those in Jerusalem through the gifts. God would bless the givers too. **Sew generously and see all the harvest blessings for others and yourself.**

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.

Paul just kept repeating it – God is able to bless you all times, all things, all that you need, abound in all good work. God gives us *all* of it and whether we have a little or a lot, he loves when we scatter our gifts like seed, and let our lights shine. Our *“righteousness endures forever.”* He will supply the seed to sew and *“enlarge the harvest of our righteousness.”* We have been declared righteous by God through Christ's suffering for us, death and resurrection. That righteousness shines as we live in a righteous way and give our gifts freely, with joy. Thankfulness abounds, and blessings abound for us as well. *We'll be enriched in every way so that we can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

Your gifts to the poor and to our **Love of Christ Fund** here at church result in many people thanking God and recognizing his hand as they are helped with physical needs or mental health needs. Your gifts **to the church** for the work here result in us getting to hear the Gospel and receive the Sacraments regularly for our growth and healing. We are thankful and many others are coming here to hear the good news that they have a God who loves them and they have forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Talk to a new member and hear their thanks for what they receive here. The Spirit has been growing faith in our hearts and those of others. Your gifts to St. Paul's **school**, Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, as well as our Synod Schools – Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Luther Preparatory School, and Michigan Lutheran Seminary are providing excellent education in God's Word so that the next generation knows the wonderful truths of Scripture, stands on them and proclaims them. Your **mission offerings** have been going to build a seminary in Vietnam, support mission starts here stateside and around the world that the Gospel goes out and people are trained in the truth of God's Word and pulled away from paganism and also false doctrines which would seek to contradict Scripture, rob the repentant Christian of comfort, and rob Christ of his glory. So many praises of thanks are rising up to our heavenly father because of your gifts. Not to mention your **minister's needs**, the **staff's needs**, are taken care of through your gifts and for that we say Thank you to God and thank you, his people.

When I first got to St. Paul's I sat down before service with one of our ushers who is now home in heaven. He spoke of how when times got tough early on in his life and business ventures, he and his wife continued to put the Lord first in their offerings – knowing it was the Lord that blessed them and would continue to bless them. He then spoke of the tremendous blessings God poured out on him beyond what they could have imagined. Another member here regularly reminds me as they talk about the things they get to do for the Lord, that it's all God's anyways – their money, tools, and very self. Farmers are bringing in the harvest. That is the result of seed having been generously sown. Your gifts to God and others because of Jesus are the same. **You are enriched in every way by He who supplies. 1) Sew generously in Trust and Thankfulness. 2) Sew generously and see all the harvest blessings for others and yourself.** Amen.