

# Into the All Sufficiency of Christ #4 - Ministry

by Ed Miller

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*The sermon emphasizes that true ministry arises from recognizing our own poverty and relying on the all-sufficiency of Christ to flow through us.*

**Duration:** 55:48

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1, Jeremiah 23:18, Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 8:9, 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, 2 Corinthians 9:15

**Topics:** "Christian Stewardship", "Grace Giving"

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## Description

In this sermon, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the principle that ministry must flow out of poverty. He uses the example of the Macedonians, who gave generously despite their own poverty. The main point is not about money or stewardship, but about illustrating the principle of giving and overflow. The sermon also highlights the ultimate example of giving in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became poor so that we might become rich. The passage in 2 Corinthians 8-9 emphasizes that in real ministry, only God and Jesus are the true givers.

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## Transcript

We've already applied the indispensable principle, trusting God now to minister the Lord Jesus through his word. In my study, there's a couple of verses from Jeremiah that a brother gave me and they're on the wall in my study. Jeremiah chapter 23, who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, who has heard and seen his word, let him that has my word speak my word and truth.

For what does straw have in common with grain? You know, for years in my life, I just gave straw. And Jeremiah 23 says, it goes on to say, and it profits them not at all. Your soul knows the difference between grain and straw, and so does mine.

And so, let's just trust God to feed us, to give us Christ, to give us grain. Let me just review. I'll ask you to turn, please, to 2 Corinthians chapter 8, if you would.

We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake. That verse from 2 Corinthians 4-5, I've suggested that God wrote in the life of the Apostle Paul. And since that day to the present day and future generations, should the Lord delay, the Apostle Paul has become the model, the example, God's illustration of what it means to have a bond-slave's heart.

A bond-slave toward God and a bond-slave toward men. And in 2 Corinthians, Paul shares with us the process by which God brought him into that, by which God discovered to his heart what it meant to be that kind of a person, a bond-slave. One who would crown Christ Lord and one who would learn to have a heart that was poured out, a life poured out for his fellow men.

If we're serious about finding our slot in the history of redemption, finding our place in God's program of redemption, then we need to be open to the Lord in terms of these principles, what it means to be a bond-slave. Let me just go over again briefly, not to develop it, but just to say it again. We've looked so far at three principles, three simple truths really.

If I'm going to have a heart as the Apostle Paul had a heart toward God, that first principle, God took Paul beyond Paul and into the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus. Through many, many different means, through many ways, God pressed Paul over the line, over the threshold, beyond all of the natural possibilities in Paul. Took him to the place where only the supernatural would do him any good, where he finally cried out, I'm dead.

He learned not to trust in Paul, but in God who raises him dead. On the other side of the line, God opened his eyes to the reality that Jesus is enough, that Christ is all-sufficient, that God is adequate, more than enough. And in the light of that revelation, in that fullness, the Apostle Paul began to see that he was in Christ Jesus.

And he had a new position, not Paul in Paul, but Paul in Christ. Everything began to take form and to make sense as he saw himself in Christ Jesus. For seven chapters, he unfolds all of the things.

We only looked at three. He gives, I've found 14. I think there's probably more than that.

Fourteen things that changed when he saw in Christ Jesus. His whole view of victory changed, his view of ministry changed, his view of liberty changed, his view of work changed, his view of Bible study changed, and so on. Many things changed.

Paul was empty, Paul was filled. And then last night, we began to discuss this principle. Is there anything beyond fullness? The answer is yes.

There's flow. Christ not only must fill my life, but now Christ must be manifest through my life. God has a worldwide heart.

He's always had a worldwide heart. It's always been on his heart to have a generation, a people, in whom he could put his glory, his name, his reputation on the earth, and through that people, that he could flow to the ends of the earth. And so Paul learned that in order to release the life of Christ and to manifest the treasure within, that the clay jar had to be broken.

There had to be brokenness. Emptiness, fullness, brokenness. That brings us to the next principle this morning.

We've come to the end of our little series, not to the end of the truth on these things, but the end of our little discussion about these things. This morning, we'd like to look after brokenness. What? What is the outflow now? What is the outworking? What is the ministry? We're emptied and filled and broken.

We can't begin to experience this. But when God begins, by degrees, to work this in our lives, then we come to what I'd like us to look at this morning. And I don't know how to express in words the importance of this principle we're going to discuss.

I believe this is the crowning principle of all ministry. Whatever else you learn about ministry, somehow it's going to be connected to this. It's got to tie into this.

Because there is no ministry without the principle that we're going to touch on this morning. And I praise God that I don't have to depend upon anything that I say or any communication I try to give. God is going to work in your life and mine what He knows this means, not what I think it means.

He's going to work in our heart everything He knows this means. Whether or not I stumble along on this principle, whether or not I communicate it, God's moving toward this, and you'll get this. Because sooner or later, God's going to write that in your life, if there's going to be ministry.

He has to. And so we're going to look at that principle. Now, when I began a couple of days ago, I suggested just a broad outline for 2 Corinthians.

And I suggested in the first seven chapters, God shows the Apostle Paul what it means to have Christ all sufficient in him. And I suggested that chapters 8 and 9 are the great chapters which show what it means to have Christ all sufficient through him. And we're going to look at that section now.

These two chapters, tremendous chapters, contain, I think, that crowning principle of all ministry. Capstone. This is ministry.

Now, as we come to chapters 8 and 9, I'll remind you of a truth I'm sure you're familiar with, but it helps when you're studying the Bible here or any place. And that is, make sure that you make a distinction, a difference, between the illustration of the principle and the principle itself. God has many illustrations in his Word.

And in those illustrations, he has fossilized age-abiding principles. Those principles are true in every age and generation. They never change.

The truths of God, the ways of God, principle. But sometimes the illustration is either so great or so controversial that we get wrapped up in the illustration, and sometimes we think the illustration is his point. I got so sick of reading commentaries on chapters 8 and 9 in 2 Corinthians that so many people think that now at this point, Paul leaves Christ and gets practical.

They say, that's not practical. You can't leave Christ and get practical. How are we going to come to chapters 8 and 9 and talk about money, talk about stewardship, talk about giving money, stewardship.

Giving is not his point. The illustration is his point. Well, he's going to be talking about giving all the time because he's talking about ministry, giving.

And in order to illustrate giving and outflow and overflow, he selects and very carefully selects one of the most wonderful illustrations of this principle you'll ever find. So many people just get to the surface and all they see is the picture. And they say, now Christ, Paul is practical, see.

He leaves all his heavenly stuff and he comes down and now says, you're supposed to tithe and you're supposed to give and you're supposed to be a good steward and blah, blah, blah. Boy, they missed it. If

you don't see the principle underneath that, you've missed it.

I'd like us to begin to look at that principle. Now, in order to do this, I'm going to do a little donkey work and ask you to be patient with me. I think it's important, if we can get clearly the illustration before our minds, I think you'd be amazed how the principle then will come into focus.

And since the principle is so basic, it will almost seem like I'm laboring it a little bit. Maybe I am. But after we get through with that donkey work, then very simply I want to give you three simple principles that I hope tie this whole thing together.

Perhaps, give us another minute. Our dear Lord Jesus. I don't think there's any question that chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians are the full mention of stewardship in the Bible.

On the principle some years ago from Dr. A.T. Pearson, he suggested that in the Bible there are two Bible principles, one he called full mention, one he called first mention. Every topic is dealt with someplace fully. And when you study that, you need to study that one plan.

Probably the full mention of resurrection would be 1 Corinthians 15. Probably the full mention of love would be 1 Corinthians 13. It's mentioned everywhere, but there's one place it's dealt with fully.

Just so when you come to anything for the first time, pay close attention to first mention. Because first mention generally gives you the key on how that thing is going to be developed throughout the Scripture. I found it so.

Anyway, I believe that you're going to find here a full mention of stewardship if you just take the level of earth, just on the surface. If you're going to ever study stewardship or giving, you'd have to come to these two chapters. Because here you have the full mention.

But we're not studying stewardship. We're really not even studying 2 Corinthians. We've been meditating on that truth of ministry.

I want to be a minister. I want to serve God. I want to be a bond-servant of God, a bond-servant of man.

So, the apostle gives us this tremendous illustration. Let me give you the background of this, and then we'll get into the principle. The background of these two chapters has been called the relief fund or the Palestinian relief fund.

Remember, in those days, everything began at Jerusalem. Jerusalem was where God began to raise up His invisible church. And, in fact, the churches we read about later on, really because of sending out the missionaries and so on, Jerusalem was the mother church.

And Jerusalem had gone through some hard times. And especially at the writing of this epistle, Jerusalem was really going through some hard times. Now, there were at least these four pressures that were on the saints at Jerusalem.

Of course, one just followed through everywhere. It wasn't only Jerusalem. But in those days, and even today, when a Jew became a Christian, he had to go outside the camp.

And to identify with the Lord Jesus, he had to be. He was cast out of the temple. He was not allowed to share in the Hebrew society.

He was disowned. That was one of the pressures. According to the historians, on top of that, the Roman government, who never really loved the Jews anyway, at this time had begun to seize property and to impose heavy taxes on all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, not only the Christians, but all who were not Romans.

So they had that burden on them. And it was right at this time also that the imperial persecutions began to flame up. God's people were being scattered.

Christianity was disallowed. And there was a very good possibility that if you identified with the Lord Jesus, you would have a violent death. A very violent death.

Fire, sword, animal, whatever. One other little piece of historical background that ties into this is Acts 11.28. Acts 11.28 talks about a great famine that struck. It took place during the reign of Claudius.

Josephus describes the famine and he takes special efforts to tell us how it hit Jerusalem. So you put all that together. The Christians there were being ostracized.

They were being oppressed. They were being persecuted. Now they were starting to get hungry.

The famine had come. All that news of the poverty of the mother church, God's people, breached some of these other churches and especially those in Macedonia. There were many churches in Macedonia.

Three are famous. Church of Philippi, Thessalonica, the Church of Berea. And those three fellowships got together.

I don't want to spend all the time on the illustration, but they got together and they began to rally. If you want to study that whole Palestinian relief fund, you'll need to look at 1 Thessalonians 2, 1 Corinthians 16, 1-3, Romans 15, verses 26 and 27, Acts chapter 24 and so on. Anyway, those Macedonian brothers and sisters heard about their other brothers and sisters in need and willingly and joyfully and sacrificially they began to gather up relief, relief fund.

The Bible begins to tell us about this, how they gave and they gave and they gave, not only their gifts but their time, their talents, their lives. They gave themselves to the Lord, food, clothing. They just gathered and gathered and gathered.

The apostles saw these Macedonian churches and this tremendous outflow of generosity and liberality. He said, I found myself an example. I found myself an illustration.

Now you might say that's how it should be. Those who have should relieve those who have not. Those who are blessed when they hear of those who are in need ought to come, ought to rise, ought to dig deep, ought to sacrifice and ought to give to those that have not.

Those that are blessed should supply the need of those that don't have. Except that's not how it was. That's why Paul chose this as an illustration.

This is what impressed the Apostle Paul. You see, the Macedonians who gave, they were in worse condition than the Mother Church after Israel. That's why he selected this as the illustration.

This Palestinian relief fund was created by and distributed through those who were in poverty, who were in more poverty than those they were relieving. They also were in famine. They also were being persecuted.

You know the background of the Corinthian church. Many of these Corinthians were saved right out of the slums. They were heathens.

They were idolaters. Many of them were ignorant, backward. When Paul saw this, he said, I found myself an illustration.

I'm going to illustrate now all giving, all ministry, all flow through these Macedonian Christians. Chapter 8, verse 1. Brethren, we wish to make it known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction, their abundance of joy, their deep poverty, overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty.

The apostles didn't think they should be involved in this because they didn't have anything to give. Begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints. And this, not as we expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

I think you already know where we're headed. As I said, the point of these chapters, these marvelous chapters, is not money, it's not giving, it's not stewardship. Some of my commentators dared to say that the apostle was trying to embarrass the Corinthians.

Trying to show how these folks gave and why can't you dig and why can't you give. Using a gimmick in order to get money out of these Corinthian Christians. Now, there's a spiritual principle in these two chapters and it ties in with the great message of the book and with the message of bondservants of Jesus Christ.

Now, let me spot check this chapter and give other verses that tie into the principle. Little blocks of scripture and then we'll come back and state the principle clearly as God graces us. In addition to verses 1 to 5, which tell us of a people that gave out of poverty, we look at verse 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich.

So he says, I have another illustration of someone who gave out of poverty. Chapter 9 please, verse 8. The all verse of the Bible. God is able to make all grace abound to you all, that you always, having all sufficiency in everything, may have abundance for every good deed.

That's a tremendous verse. All the superlative in that verse. That you all and have all grace abounding in all things for all sufficiency.

Love Kenneth Wheat's translation of that. He said, God is powerful to make every grace super abound toward you, in order that having always and all sufficiency in all things, you may super abound for every good work. Verse 10.

Chapter 9, verse 10. Now, he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. And finally, the way the chapter ends.

Chapter 9, verse 15. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift, for his unspeakable gift. Now in these two chapters, the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul, calls attention over and over again to the same thing, using tremendous illustrations, but making a difference between the illustration and the

principle.

The Macedonians gave out of poverty. Our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich. He tells about having no seed, but God provides seed for the sower.

God, Christ, is the indescribable gift. All right, so much for the background. Let me state the principle.

May God grace us to see what we hear. If there's going to be ministry from your life, from my life, from our life, then there must be this principle, there can be no ministry that does not flow out of poverty. There can be no ministry, none whatsoever.

All Christian giving, all Christian ministry flows out of poverty. You see, the Apostle Paul had been grounded by the Lord in the truth, that Jesus Christ is everything, and he had finally come to see the Apostle Paul is nothing. The Apostle Paul is deficient.

The Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient, all sufficient. Paul saw that in him was no adequacy at all. But God was adequate, and God was made his adequacy.

The Apostle Paul said, in effect, there is no Palestinian relief fund in me. There is no Palestinian relief fund in you. There's nothing in us.

We talk about ministry. Brothers, we have nothing to give. We have no ministry, no service, no assistance, no aid.

See, that's what the Holy Spirit has been pounding into us for seven chapters. Christ says, I want to give myself. That's ministry.

You want to give something? God says, now let me break the vessel and come out. That's ministry. When Christ is released and Christ is touched, there's ministry.

If Christ is not released and Christ is not touched, there is no ministry no matter what you call it, no matter what you name it. See how this ties in so closely to the clay vessel that we were talking about last evening. Such a great treasure we have in these clay jars.

So precious. Christ is the light. Christ is the food.

Christ is the river of satisfaction. Christ is what they need. The world needs provision, no question.

They need ministry. But quite honestly, brothers, they don't need me. They don't need you.

They don't need us. They don't need our little group. They don't need our little emphasis.

They need the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why he ends up with chapter 9, verse 15, thanks be unto God for his indescribable gift. That's the gift.

There's only one gift, and it's Christ. And that's ministry when we release him. Now, there is no releasing Christ and there's no touching Christ if we don't have this heart principle of ministering out of poverty.

So often we just limit this idea of ministry and giving to money and material things and such of that, rent and shelter and food and fuel and so on. It includes that, but this chapter 8 and 9 is bigger than that. This

is all ministry.

I think one of the tragedies of the church today and institutes that are training leaders, so-called, it's all backwards. We are training people to be wealthy and to give out of their wealth. In all of our ministry, the question has got to be answered, have I released Christ? Have they touched Christ? Because quite apart from everything else, if that hasn't happened, there hasn't been ministry.

There's a teacher of the Word of God. He gives out of his wealth, out of his study, out of his background, out of his experience, out of his training. Do you know what you touch? You touch his background.

You touch his scholarship. You touch his eloquence. You touch his training.

You touch the clay pot. There's been no ministry because he's ministered out of his wealth and not out of brokenness. Because it's out of brokenness that Christ is released.

It's out of poverty. I have nothing to give that Christ is released. Here comes a counselor.

He's going to counsel. He's going to help you. He gives out of the wealth of his experience and out of all of the things he's heard and out of his knowledge of human nature and out of his ability to analyze and to put in logical connection.

When it's all over, what have you lost? Touch the human counselor and what has he given you? He's given you a new formula, a new set of rules, another program. There's been no ministry. You might touch his talent.

You might touch his skill. You might touch his scholarship. You might touch his ingenuity.

But brothers, it's not the fancy pot. It's not the refined pot. It's the broken pot that becomes the channel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's ministry. A man might be very wealthy. A group might be very wealthy in this world's goods.

They might be very generous. They might give money. They might give food.

They might give shelter. They might pay for your children's education. You know, it's possible that all of that is just clay.

When it's all over, what have you touched? You've touched their generosity. You've touched their liberality. You might have even touched their compassion.

But have you touched Christ? Have you released Christ? There's only one real ministry. God is the only giver. Christ is the only giver.

God is the one who must give his son through us. He's ordained to do that through the broken vessel. So there's a question we need to constantly be asking before God.

Are they touching us or Christ? Our wisdom or him? Our ability or him? When you've ministered, when you've given, when you've served, when it's all over, they drool over your personality, over your kindness, over your insights, over your cleverness. Then what have we given? What have we given? It's not a little of us, some of Christ. If all they touch is you, they've touched death.

If all they've touched is me, they've touched death. If all they touch is us, they've touched death. There's no life in my wealth.

There's no life in your wealth. There's no life in our wealth. All ministry must be out of poverty.

Basic to the release of Christ is the firm conviction that all we have is poverty. We need to understand that. We need to know that.

Because in all of our givings, what's the use of it? What's the worth of it? Wasted time and wasted energy. If Christ is not released and if the Lord Jesus Christ is not released. You say we want to be bondservants.

The marks of death must be on servants. The marks of death must be on all of our ministry. There's a musician, singer, beautiful voice.

She wants to minister. He wants to minister. They get up.

They sing. If there are no marks of death on that song, there has been no music. You might have touched some beautiful music and you might have heard some skill and you might have touched some talent.

But when that singer, that musician comes before God and that musician understands there's no relief fund in me. There's no ministry in me. Lord, I have nothing to give.

I want to sing unto you. And you'll hear the same notes and you'll hear the same words. But down inside, you'll touch Christ and you'll say, Well, we have words for that.

That's the anointing. The anointing. You know what we're talking about.

God has ministered to the broken vessel. God has released Christ and your spirit touches Christ and you know every time when you're touching Christ and when you're not touching Christ. You know the difference between life and death.

Now, that doesn't make us judges so we'll go every place. Oh, that guy's death. That guy's life.

We're not to do that. That's not my point. If you understand what God is saying, there's a teacher.

I'd have insights. I'd speak with power, eloquence. Use fancy language.

He's resting in his notes and if he's resting in his study and if he's resting in his abilities and his illustrations, good question. I've got to minister out of poverty. I've got to minister out of poverty.

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. All that he was rich and yet for your sakes he became poor. Let me through his power.

A person can be very zealous. Are the marks of death on that zeal? Are the marks of death on that generosity, on that sacrifice, on that dedication? Follow this spiritual principle, please. Many ways to be wealthy.

Money and gifts and talents and friends and so on, training, background. There's no ministry out of wealth. I can hear someone come along and saying, well, this is going to be easy for me because I don't have anything to give anyway.

Giving out of poverty is the principle of the heart, the direction of the heart, and it has nothing to do with what you have or what you don't have. We need to pray that with our gift and with our giving, we give Christ. If you're the poorest person in the world, have no gifts, no talents or whatever, you can give out of wealth.

You could be the richest person on the earth, a billionaire. Generous is all get out. You can give out of poverty.

You don't have to be rich to give out of wealth or you must give out of poverty. The rich must give out of poverty. Poverty is a principle.

It's an attitude of the heart. It's just that lack of self-assurance and that lack of self-confidence and pride and arrogance. I can help so-and-so.

Let me give him a call. I know about that. I've been through that.

We need to come to the end of ourselves, and we need to be filled with the Lord Jesus Christ, and we need to allow him to break us so that Christ is released and people are touching the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, we need to serve. That's what it's all about.

But you need to learn to sing from poverty. You need to learn to teach from poverty. You need to learn to visit from poverty.

You need to learn to write letters from poverty. You need to learn to listen from poverty. You need to learn to comfort from poverty.

And any ministry that you have needs to come from poverty. Now, that's the part I said I was going to labor. I've got to get that across.

Now, as we wrap it up, let me just give you three simple principles. Again, we're overlapping. I've already said most of this in order to tie it together.

First principle, in real ministry, real ministry, we're talking spiritual ministry. In real ministry, only God is the giver and only the Lord Jesus is the giver. Follow these verses, please.

Chapter 9, we begin at verse 6. I say he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly. He who sows bountifully shall reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he's purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And then verse 15, please. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift. Now, I'm just going to tell you about this.

I don't want to take time to get into that verse by verse. But in this section, you glance at verses 6 to 15, God gives another illustration, which is an illustration within the illustration, on sowing and reaping. And he's talking about sowing sparingly and reaping a bountiful harvest.

There are two basic truths on sowing and reaping. The first is, whatever a man sows will be the same in time. You're going to reap what you sow.

So that if you sow corn, you're not going to reap carrots. You're going to reap corn. If you sow beans, that's what you're going to reap.

Whatever a man sows, he's going to reap. And the second is that the harvest is always greater than the sowing. You sow a handful, you reap a field.

Hosea worded that. In these words, verse 7 of chapter 8, they sowed the wind, they reaped the whirlwind. The harvest is always greater than the reaping.

And I call attention to this because God calls the Jerusalem relief fund a sowing. They sowed. What did they sow? Because the harvest has to be the same in time.

Say, well, they sowed money. That's how this is often applied. Give God money, sow money, get money.

Ten times, a hundred times. I could get on a little hobby horse here, but I won't. Look at the end of chapter 9. You know what they sowed because God tells you what the harvest was.

Now look at their harvest, beginning at verse 10. He who supplies seed to the sower, bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing. Now watch the harvest.

Increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in everything for liberality, which is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of the service is not only supplying the need to the saints, but is overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.

Because the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God. You've got the harvest. Harvest of your righteousness, thanksgiving to God, the glory of God.

That's the harvest of their sowing. Now you say, well, didn't they sow money? If they did, they'd have ripped money. They didn't sow money.

Let me illustrate. Let's say that I gave you a gift for Christmas. And let's say that that gift were a fine gadget watch.

These watches nowadays do everything. And so I gave you one of these fine watches. I put it in a nice felt box.

And I wrapped it with wonderful Christmas wrapping paper. And I put a nice silk bow around it. And I gave you this gift.

Someone comes along and says, what did Ed give you for Christmas? You say, oh, you should have seen it. A silk bow. My, that was a nice bow.

And paper. He gave me beautiful wrapping paper. And a felt box he gave me.

Right? Isn't it true, isn't it? You didn't say watch. You missed my gift. These Palestinians, Palestinian Christians, or rather the Macedonian Christians, did not give the Jerusalem Christians money.

They gave the Jerusalem Christians Christ and they wrapped it in money. Do you hear what I'm saying? It's so important because if you don't understand that, you might be giving people wrappings and think you're giving them ministry. God has called us to give Christ and to wrap it up.

If so, how's there going to be ministry? You wrap Christ up in you. And you wrap Christ up in you. And you wrap Christ up in your visits.

And you wrap Christ up in your share. And you wrap Christ up. Those are the wrappings.

That's not the giving. The sowing, this seed, has to be provided by God. God is the one that provides the seed for sowing.

It's a spiritual. All the rest of it. I'll tell you, brothers in Christ, sometimes it grieves me to think about the labor, the work, the sweat, and the programs, the energy that people are expending constantly.

Hours spent, I think, wasted studying, writing books, and teaching, preaching, and evangelizing. I'll tell you, there's no seed of God in there. God's the only giver.

He's the one who gives. Christ is the only gift. All of my teaching and all of my sharing and all of my listening and all of my visiting and all of my counseling and all of my life.

Not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality. Now, once again, I know people take that verse just on the surface and say, now, here's a great passage on proportional giving. And it is.

Certainly, it's a passage on that, but you've got to get beyond the picture and to the principle. Here's what God is saying. It's a little deeper than who you talk to.

Here's what God is saying. It's really simple. He's saying you can't give what you don't have.

Isn't that deep? You can't give what you don't have. And we're talking about ministering to Christ. I minister to Christ.

I can't give anybody Christ as their rest, unless I know Christ is my rest. I can't give anybody Christ as their victory, unless I know Christ has my victory. I can't give anybody Christ as comfort, unless Christ is comfort to me.

Giving is a spiritual matter, and the all-sufficiency of Christ through me is directly proportional to the all-sufficiency of Christ in me. We're serious about ministry. We'd get our eyes off ministry and we'd start running to Jesus.

We'd start running to the Lord saying, Lord, just fill me with Christ so that I would be available to minister Him as this need comes up. It's important to be appropriating Christ. Real ministry is a way to be prepared and not to run off to some sinner.

God might lead you to do that, but you don't get prepared for ministry by studying books. You get prepared for ministry by waiting before God, appropriating a very full Christ. That's preparation for ministry.

One more with me. Chapter 8, verse 13 to 15. This is not for the ease of others and your affliction, but by way of equality.

At this present time, your abundance being a supply for their want, their abundance may be a supply for your want. That there may be equality as it is written. You gathered much, did not have too much.

You gathered little, have had no less. You know, for many years in my Christian life, I thought that meant don't have a saving account. And I live that way.

I believe that that's what God was saying. If you have more this week, give it away. And then next week, someone else will give theirs away and it'll all work out.

Everybody will be balanced. It's far more spiritual. God's not so concerned with your saving account.

That's not what this is all about. God's talking about ministry. God's talking about giving.

God's talking about flow. Money is just the illustration. What God is saying in this chapter, at least one of them, don't think you're always going to be the man.

You know, we're talking body, truth, equality. God says, look, I'm going to fill you with Christ. I'm going to fill him with Christ.

One day you're going to lack and you're going to need the Christ that he has. One day he's going to lack and he's going to need the Christ you have. We're all going to need each other by way of equality.

Don't you think that you've got all the eggs in one basket. Don't let me think I have all of Christ. We need the brothers and the sisters.

God is communicating himself to each one of us so that together we might be edified and together we might grow. And we need the revelation that each of us has received. In order to quench this, I'm going to ask you to turn really to two passages.

And it's really short. I promise you. Luke chapter 4, Peter's mother-in-law.

Let's see if we can tie it all together. Peter's mother-in-law. Luke 4, 38, 39.

And you might want to put a thumb in Matthew 8. I'm going to go there for a minute. Luke chapter 4, verse 38. He arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's home.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever. They made a request of him on her behalf and standing over her to rebuke the fever. It left her.

She immediately arose and waited on them. We have a wonderful passage here on Christian service. I think it's a wonderful summary of what we've been talking about because Peter's mother-in-law is hopelessly useless as far as service is concerned.

You talk about someone with no natural strength. Here she is. Peter's mother-in-law.

Fever. If anything pictures the snapping of strength, the fever done. She's completely immobilized.

Wonderful picture of the bondservant. Fever. I don't know if you've ever had a high fever.

When it's over, you need a little time to convalesce. You don't just jump from a fever to the kitchen. You don't do that.

The doctor says, now stay in bed for a while until you get your strength back. I wonder how high Peter's mother-in-law's fever was. 102? 103? 104? I don't know.

The Bible doesn't tell us. But the Holy Spirit inspired Dr. Luke to say it was a very high fever. I don't think Dr. Luke would throw out that expression, very high fever, in a meaningless way.

I think it's evident that Peter's mother-in-law did not rise from natural weakness to natural strength. All of a sudden she gets up. She starts serving.

I think the record shows that she went from natural weakness to supernatural strength in order to minister. It was in a moment of time. It was not by degrees.

It was not gradually. From a high fever to she waited on them. Marvelous.

Most Christian service, as you probably know, is not supernatural service at all. It goes from natural weakness to natural strength. It goes in fits and starts.

It goes back and forth. It's the life of starts and stops. First you work your head off.

Then you go to bed with a fever. Then somebody comes along and makes you feel guilty because you're not working your head off again. So you rest.

You say, I'm going to get back to it. Then you go out again. You get a new drive.

You go out and after a while you fizzle again. You're back in bed with a fever. Then someone else comes along and says, you know, we really ought to be doing this.

I say, okay. New program. Off we go.

Until after a while we all get sane and quit. Drop out altogether. It was different here with Peter's mother-in-law.

How could she rise from natural weakness to service? Matthew tells us. Turn to Matthew. I've noticed before you leave that, verse 39, she waited on them.

Matthew 8. 14. When Jesus had come to Peter's home, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick in the bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her.

She arose and waited on him. We're going to close, brothers, and I want to close with this thought. May God help us to see it.

Peter's mother-in-law was able to rise from natural weakness to supernatural strength and minister to them, to him, by the touch of God. May I suggest, if we're going to be certain, that we need the touch of God. We need God to touch us, to move us from our natural weakness to supernatural strength.

In order that, waiting on him, we might wait on him, that we might minister Christ and not the rest. Oh, may God deliver us from Christian service to the ministry of manifestation. Our Father, we do thank you that you will work in our heart all that you know this means.

Touch us individually. Touch us corporately. That we might move out in supernatural strength.

Minister unto thee. Minister unto thee. We ask it in the all-prevailing name of Jesus.

Thank you, brothers, for this high privilege.

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