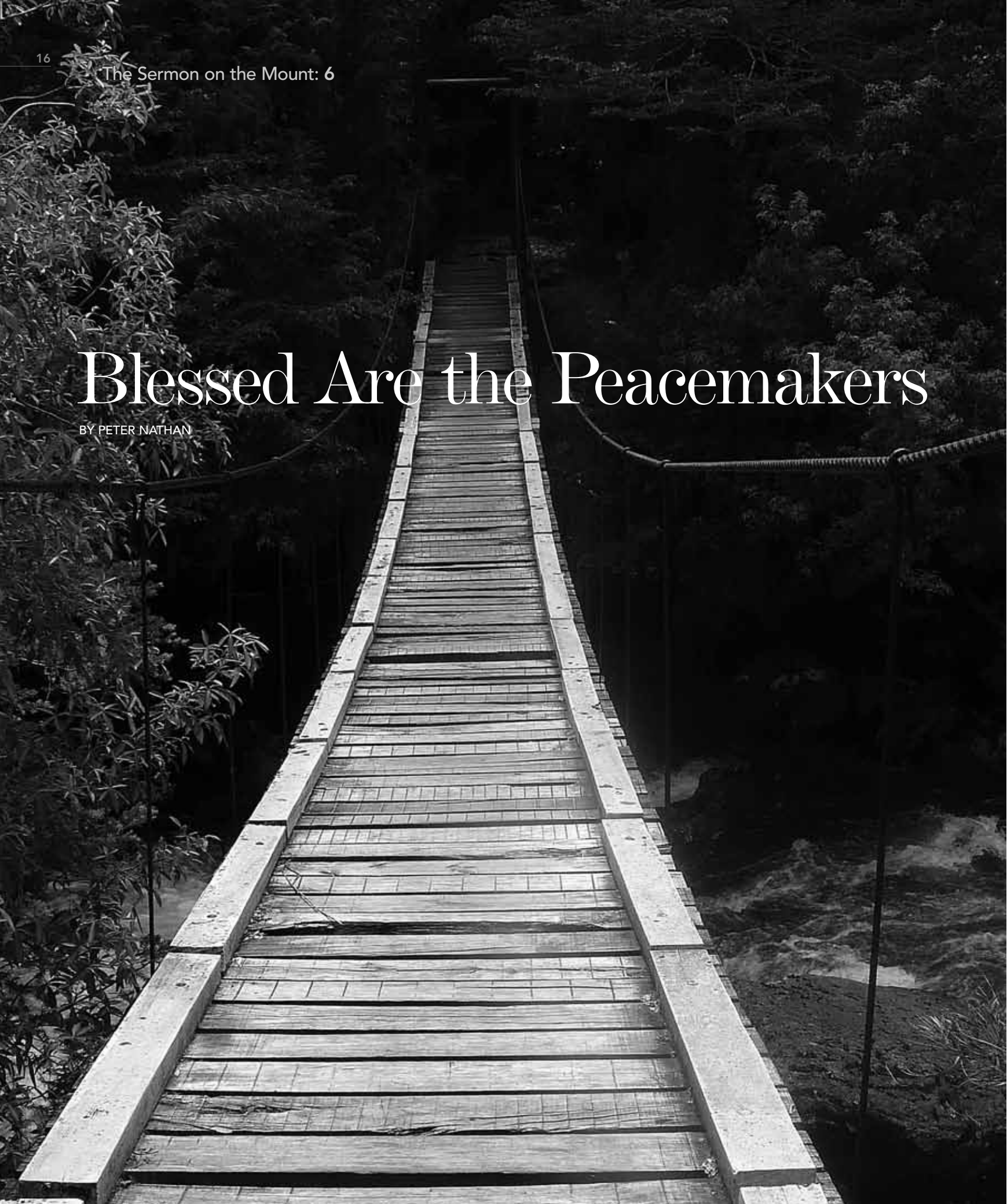


Blessed Are the Peacemakers

BY PETER NATHAN



God's way to peace, on the other hand, is to tear down walls between people and replace them with bridges—to build relationships.

The Nobel Peace Prize is one of the most prestigious awards known. It is awarded annually "to the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between the nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."

Recipients are chosen by a committee of five persons to be elected by the Norwegian *Storting* (parliament). The prize presently stands at SEK10,000,000 Swedish kronor (US\$166,000), but the acclaim, stature and position that follow, together with the speaking fees and other engagements, increase the value enormously.

To join that elite group is considered by many to be a very great honor. Yet a far greater reward awaits those whose names will never be submitted to the Norwegian committee for consideration. We find out what this reward is in the sixth beatitude.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9).

What greater calling is there for any human being than to become a son of God—literally a member of God's own family?

This is a position and reward that can't be purchased. It can only be achieved by accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, submitting ourselves to His Father's purpose, and leading the way of life that He sets out. The result of living that life of overcoming the self, with the aid of God's Holy Spirit, will be the creation of holy righteous character—one quality of which is being a "peacemaker."

Let's take a closer look at this subject and find out what it means to be a peacemaker as we continue our series of articles on the Sermon on the Mount.

Instruction for Today

It is easy to look forward to the kingdom of God as a time of peace. Many scriptures convey the concept.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace*. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end ... (Isaiah 9:6–7a, emphasis added).

The outcome of the government of God is going to be peace without end!

Details of that government are provided for us in a section of Scripture that we understand as millennial. It provides an insight into that peaceable kingdom:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. ... (Isaiah 11:1–4a).

Today we use the term "equity" in a legal or financial sense. But in the Hebrew, it means that something is made flat and straightforward—without convolution and easily accomplished.

... He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist (verses 4b–5).

He will be girded, attired, with righteousness and faithfulness—godly qualities. As a consequence of that, this is what life in God's kingdom will be like:

Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places (Isaiah 32:15–18).

Isaiah 54:9–15 and other scriptures convey similar thoughts. Even the wild animals will be at peace with one another, and with mankind (Isaiah 11:6–9).

But for us, the concept provided in Matthew 5 is *not* only for *the future*. Like all the other beatitudes, the demand is for the here and now, while the reward is ahead. It's an instruction for *today*, in this world and society in which we live. Jesus highlights this by showing that we are to be peacemakers in the current world of persecution:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:10–12).

So it is the peacemakers who exist and learn their craft in a world that is full of persecution and tribulation that are blessed. It is a challenge! We are not called to be peacemakers in ideal circumstances!

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The problem is compounded for us because Jesus also told us:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household' (Matthew 10:34–36).

Jesus' standards produce hostility in the powers that be, and those powers will persecute His followers.

Active Peace

Psalm 37 forms the basis of much of Jesus' instruction in what are called the beatitudes.

But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. . . . Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace (Psalms 37:11, 37).

The NET Bible has an interesting way of putting verse 37:

Take note of the one who has integrity! Observe the godly! For the one who promotes peace has a future.

What is this peace that we are supposed to be making? And how does it contrast with the way that humanity looks at peace?

This world generally looks at peace as something passive—simply the absence of hostility or war. This is evidenced in typical dictionary definitions of "peace":

1: a state of tranquility or quiet: as a: freedom from civil disturbance; b: a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom

2: freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions

3: harmony in personal relations
(Merriam-Webster, Online Dictionary).

Similarly, the same dictionary defines "peacemaker" as "one who makes peace especially by reconciling parties at variance." But we know that peacemaking is a dynamic process that goes much deeper than that.

The Hebrew *shalom* is the word translated as "peace" throughout the Old Testament. (In the New Testament, the Greek word most often translated as "peace", *eirene*, is modified by the understanding of the meaning of *shalom*.) *Shalom* is a very wide-ranging word that ultimately speaks to well-being—or a sense of completeness. One commentator records that the primary

meaning of the word can be characterized "as the healthiness, or the completeness, or the intactness of a community"; while another notes that it conveys the concepts of "to have satisfaction and to be content-ed" (Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament). *Shalom* is an active, not passive, word because it requires something of those involved.

The world's approach to peace is to erect walls between belligerents—to separate them—which compromises them so that they achieve completion. For instance, a parent may separate fighting siblings by sending them to separate rooms. That simply creates quiet for the parent and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. God's way to peace, on the other hand, is to tear down walls between people and replace them with bridges—to build relationships. Peace, ultimately speaking, is the replacement of evil! Notice how these concepts are juxtaposed in Zechariah 8:11–12, 16–19 (English Standard Version, emphasis added):

But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, declares the LORD of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. . . . These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD. And the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace."

So peace is living in harmony with the will of God and not according to our own purposes. Or to put it another way, *sin* is the enemy of peace.

Learning From the Peace Offering

To highlight the relationship-building aspect of peace, the Eternal instituted an offering known as the peace offering. The details are set out in Leviticus chapters 3 and 7. It is called a peace offering because the term derives from the Hebrew word *shalom*. But it is an abstract noun and another one of those difficult Hebrew plurals—like *Elohim*—that create challenges in translating.

The peace offering is also described as a fellowship offering in that it was shared with the Eternal by the priest and the person making the offering. It's also described as:

A sacrifice for alliance or friendship; peace with God; fellowship between God and worshippers (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, emphasis added).

Some have tried to link the aspect of salvation to the meaning of the term as well.

So we have a sacrifice that portrays godly peace. The parties sit down to a meal together—a sign of friendship and hospitality, and/or a sense of wholeness in the relationship of the parties. We are talking about "slow food" here, not "fast food"! It could be an all-day affair, so those involved would want to be on very good terms.

The relationship aspect of peace and peacemaking—restoring a person to fullness, etc.—is amplified for us in Matthew 5:21–48. Here, Jesus corrects six common misconceptions the populace had regarding relationships and teaches the only true way to peacemaking.

First, He warns about the attitudes—anger, insults and epithets—that constitute the spirit of murder (verses 21–22). Then He instructs:

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (verses 23–24, ESV).

Here is a concept very few people employ, but it is within the role of a peacemaker! The tendency is to say that if somebody has a problem with us, it's *his* problem, not ours. Not so. Jesus says it is ours and that we must deal with it proactively.

Next He addresses the lustful thoughts of the heart that lead to adultery (verses 27–28), a sin that is violently destructive to the marriage relationship and destructive to the peace that should prevail in a marriage.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. . . (Matthew 5:27–30a, ESV).

His antidote is not to literally mutilate our bodies, but He uses such graphic terms to impress on us how imperative it is that we stop at nothing to root out those harmful thoughts.

He also said that divorce is not, with very limited exceptions, an acceptable solution to marital problems (verses 31–32). We are to be faithful to our marriage covenant and work out any difficulties to the extent it is within our power to do so.

With regard to swearing (verses 33–37), His instruction is simple: peace is enhanced by simply keeping our word.

The fifth wrong practice that Jesus addressed was that of seeking revenge. His well-known admonition is to “turn the other cheek” instead (verses 38–42).

Consider the example of David and Saul in terms of this last instruction. David didn’t resist Saul or seek to get even with him. Rather, he built up the borders of Israel so that Saul had a more peaceable time as king.

Finally, rather than hating our enemies Jesus says to:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father. . . (verses 44–45, ESV, emphasis added).

This is the same reward promised in the beatitude on peacemaking (verse 9).

In each of these six areas or examples, there is a way that leads to peace and to the maintenance of peace with others. Each is ultimately based on the Law of God, and each requires that we consider the other as much as we do ourselves. We can take stock of our own progress by reviewing 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 as another example of peacemaking.

Peacemaking Forever

True peacemakers, therefore, are those who see others from a godly perspective and seek to reach out and help them. In doing so, they are preparing themselves for the kingdom, when they will be able to help those who can’t be helped today.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called. . . (Colossians 3:15a, ESV).

We’ve been called to be peacemakers in the family of God—here, now and forever. ■

Our Offering: What Is Appropriate Generosity?

BY GRAHAM HOUGHTON

“How much shall I give in the offering? How generous should I be in contributing to God’s Work?” These are questions that probably occur to us all. Yet, when it comes to giving an offering, God doesn’t tell us how much to give. Instead, He leaves it for us to decide. However, He gives us His thoughts about *generosity* through the writings of the apostle Paul.

In a letter to the Corinthian church about a gift they had promised to give to the Judean brethren during a time of famine, Paul writes:

Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you . . . Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your *generous* gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation (2 Corinthians 9:1, 5, emphasis added).

The Corinthian church in southern Greece had promised to help the Judean brethren a year earlier (see 2 Corinthians 9:2), and Paul now asks them to make sure that their *generous* gift is ready for him to collect when he comes to visit them.

Paul’s focus here, of course, is on providing relief for the Judeans during a time of temporary famine, but his words reveal some important principles that can guide us in our own giving of offerings.

The first principle we learn about generosity from Paul is that:

• We are to prepare ahead of time

Keeping the festivals and giving offerings are part of God’s pattern of righteous living that we are to uphold. To remind us, and help us prepare, the Church publishes the holy day calendar in advance. We are also taught the principle of giving offerings at those times. This means that we can make

financial plans in advance of the festival seasons—even as much as a year ahead. This can help us look forward with joy to supporting the Work over the coming year.

An offering isn’t meant to be rushed into just before a holy day. It is something to be thoughtfully planned. By planning our offerings in advance we give ourselves time to consider the next principle:

• We should give from the heart

As we plan, think ahead, and anticipate the holy-day seasons, our offering can then be:

. . . ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation (2 Corinthians 9:5)

Other versions phrase it this way:

. . . this way it. . . will be a genuine gift, not something extracted by pressure (Complete Jewish Bible).

. . . Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given (NIV).

There’s a contrast here: a generous, genuine gift versus a grudging obligation, extracted under pressure, or only because we are commanded. Our offering is to be a gift from our willing mind and heart—from *inside*—not one forced by prompting from *outside*, as Paul continues to explain:

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Vine’s Expository Dictionary comments that “purposes” here (Greek *proaireo*) relates to choosing or preferring; and “cheerful” (Greek *hilaros*) “signifies that readiness of mind, that joyousness, which is prompt to do anything; hence cheerful.”

We need to give ourselves time to think: about our finances, and more importantly about our spiritual involvement in the Work that God has called us to—to literally and spiritually, from the heart, “count our blessings.” This brings us to the next principle revealed in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians:

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