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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

I invite you to open your Bibles with me to the book of Romans. Romans 15. We're going to start reading in verse 23 in just a moment. I heard the funny story about a man who asked a lawyer, "How much would you charge me for me to ask you three questions?" The lawyer said, "Oh, \$100." The guy said, "\$100, don't you think that's kind of expensive?" The lawyer said, "No. That's two questions, now what's your third?"

I want to ask you a question, and it won't cost you or me anything: "Where are you going to be when the calendar clicks over from 1999 to 2000?" You say, "I'm going to be at some New Year's Eve party." I want to remind you that I invited you in January to the New Year's Eve celebration we're going to have right here in this room called "Celebrate 2000," New Year's Eve, starts at 9:45, Celebration Choir and orchestra is going to be singing, there's going to be great music, great fellowship. And believe it or not, I'm going to teach the entire book of Revelation that night. I'm going to do it, trust me. Even with that, when midnight hits, we're going to be praying. We're going to pray in the year 2000.

There are a lot of places you can be on New Year's Eve, and if the Lord tarries, there is a lot of time for you to have New Year's Eve parties, but where you are I think when the calendar goes to 2000 is going to say a lot about your priorities. So I hope you'll be here that night. I'm going to be inviting you all during the next few weeks to remind you about it.

The text we're looking at today is this. "Blessings are to be shared, not stored." This passage of scripture today, the last part of chapter 15, is all about the connection between spiritual blessings and material blessings. It's going to be a lesson today on Christian stewardship, about how God wants to increase you in terms of your financial assets.

Throughout the years, experts have proven themselves wrong. Let me read to you what some experts have written about different things over the years. In 1840, a transportation expert wrote in a leading newspaper, "Anyone who travels in excess of 30 miles an hour would surely suffocate from the speed." They were saying that nobody would ever travel faster than 30 miles an hour. Then the trains arrived. 1878, a leading scientist wrote: "Electric lights are unfeasible and not worthy of serious attention." Well, of course, he was wrong. In 1901, a leading scientist wrote, "No possible combination can be united into a practical machine by which men can ever fly." In fact, just a couple of months after he wrote that, the Wright brothers *did* fly at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Even in 1926 a leading scientist wrote, "It is a foolish idea to consider shooting a man to the moon, because it is basically impossible." As you know, it's been done. In 1930, another leading scientist wrote, "To harness the energy locked up in matter is impossible." But of course, Albert Einstein disagreed, and today we now have nuclear energy.

I say that, because through the years, experts have been wrong. You know what an expert is? It's somebody from out of town with a briefcase. That's the definition of an expert is. Today there are a lot of financial experts who are telling you how you can invest, how you can increase your assets, how you can take some money and make it grow. The leading experts of the world basically have this philosophy. "Get all you can, can all you get, sit on the can, and poison the rest." In other words, "Just get for yourself, accumulate, accumulate, and don't worry about

anybody else.” Well, today we’re going to see about the blessing of sharing. Look with me here in chapter 15:23 of Romans.

He writes, “But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions [meaning Greece or Corinth] and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for awhile.”

Put your finger there for just a moment. Paul is in Corinth, in Greece. Kind of imagine that on a map. He wants to head west to Spain. On his way, he’s going to stop by in Rome, which is about 500 miles from Corinth. But instead of heading west, the next verse tells us he’s going to go in the opposite direction. He’s going to make a 2,000-mile detour. Why? Keep reading.

“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem [due east] in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution.” In other words, he’s carrying a financial offering for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. “They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.” Spiritual blessings and material blessings. “So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.”

Then he kind of changes direction here and talks not only about a blessing, he shares a burden, verse 30. I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all, amen.”

That’s the end of the letter. You say, “Wait a minute, we’ve got another chapter.” That’s the P.S., the postscript, and we’ll bring a couple of messages in the next couple of weeks from the P.S., but that’s basically how he ends the letter. Look again at verse 27, and I want us to discuss the correlation between spiritual blessings and material blessings, then we’re going to talk about burdens.

I. CONSIDER YOUR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

First of all, I’m going to ask you to consider your spiritual blessings. Just stop for a moment and consider your spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1:3 Paul writes, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” You know that hymn that we often sing that says, “Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.” If there’s anybody in this room who is a believer and you don’t consider yourself to be blessed, well, friend, the truth is you just don’t understand who you are in Christ.

I wanted to share with you at least three spiritual blessings we enjoy.

1. You have received a new nature

If you are a Christian, you have received a new nature. You see, you were born with a sinful nature. You were born with a tendency and a propensity to sin. Have you ever noticed that nobody ever had to teach you how to lie? People had to teach you to tell the truth. You started lying naturally. We all had this nature towards sin. But when Christ comes into our life, He gives us a new nature, a redeemed nature. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any person is in Christ, they are a new creation. Old things are passed away, behold all things have become new." Here's blessing number two:

2. If you are a Christian, you have received a new home

That's right. You have a new home that is promised to you. That home is called Heaven.

Now, did you know while you're living here on planet earth, for ever how many years God lets you live here, whether it's 70, 75, 80, 85, whatever it is, this is temporary. When you look at this temporary home in light of eternity, it passes that quickly, because the Bible says we have an eternal home in the heavens not made by human hands, but made by God himself. In Luke 10:20, Jesus made this remarkable statement. He said to the disciples, "Do not rejoice because demons are subject to you in my name. Rather rejoice because your names are written down in heaven."

Isn't that good news? If you are a Christian, if you have truly been born again, the moment you received Christ, you know what happened? Your name was written down in the Lamb's Book of Life in heaven. And that is your down payment, that is your reservation, your blessed assurance of a new home when you die. Here's blessing number three:

3. You have received a new family

When you become a Christian, you receive a new family. You see, we were all born into the wrong family. You know, people today often talk about the family of mankind on planet earth as if we're all one family, and that sounds good. But the truth is, Jesus said there are two families, and there are two fathers. In John 8:44, Jesus said to some religious pagans, "You are of your father, the devil."

But when you become a Christian, you change fathers and you change families. By the new birth, you are part of a new family and now you have a heavenly father and you've got a bunch of brothers and sisters. 1 John 3:1, the Bible says, "Behold what manner of love the father has given unto us, that we should be called the children of God." In other words, when you become a Christian, you're different, you're changed; you're a new person. That's just three; I could go on and on and on and on about spiritual blessings.

Many of you know how much I like to play golf and like to follow the golfing world. I told you several weeks ago about Payne Stewart and his conversion to Christ a couple of years ago. Then he was in that jet and perished a few weeks ago. Just this week, I heard Mike Hicks, who was his caddy, giving an interview. Mike Hicks said in that interview that he should have been on that

jet. He always traveled with Payne Stewart. It was just almost amazing that he wasn't on that jet, but because of some last minute change in travel plans, he wasn't on that jet. As he was concluding this interview, the person said, "Do you have any final words?" This is what Mike Hicks, Payne Stewart's caddy, said as a tear rolled down his cheek. He said at the memorial service for Payne Stewart, I invited the Lord to come into my heart." Then he said this. He said, "Now I am a brand new man."

II. SHARE YOUR MATERIAL BLESSINGS

That's the testimony of every Christian. We ought to be able to say if Christ is in our heart, we are a new person. Now, we have been so blessed. And in verse 27, it says spiritual blessings come from God, and because of that, there's something we ought to do with our material blessings. Here's what we do. Number two, not only consider your spiritual blessings but also secondly, share your material blessings. If you have been blessed spiritually, you ought to be willing to share your material blessings.

Now, as you know if you've been watching the news, there is an economic conference taking place in Seattle this week called the WTO, the World Trade Organization. There are more and more world economists who say we're moving toward a global economy, toward a one economy, a one monetary system. They think it's something new. It's nothing new. All you have to do is read the book of Revelation, and it talks about how the Antichrist is going to have a one-world government, a one-world economy, so it's nothing new. But there are people today who think if you want to be a savvy investor and on the cutting edge, you have to understand the catchwords "global economics," the global economy.

Today I want to share with you something from the word of God that is much more expansive and much more massive than global economy. Here it is. It's God's economy. Because the Bible teaches that there is something called God's economy, and if you want to get in on what God is doing in this world, you've got to understand God's economy. There are three pillars to God's economy, and we are introduced to them through this discussion that Paul makes about this financial offer and these material blessings. Here's pillar number one:

1. All you have is a gift from God

All you have is a gift from God. You won't go any further until you understand that every material blessing that you have came from God. It's real easy for you to disagree with that. It's really easy to say, "I disagree, what I have, I got everything I have the old-fashioned way. I inherited it." Or you say, "I worked for it. I went to school, I got an education and I worked hard, and by the sweat of my brow, I've earned what I have. Or it was something that I had done by wise investing through the years." Well, I want you to call your attention to Deuteronomy 8:17, because if you think that what you have, that you've got is because of your own intelligence, read this verse. "You may say to yourself, my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. [That's what most people think] But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth."

Underline that and underline it again. Anything that you have that you think you've earned, God gave you the ability to do that. God is the source of everything. By the way, that will change your whole perspective, when you understand that every material blessing in your life has come from God. It might have come through your job, it might have come through some other challenge, but it came from God; suddenly God becomes your source. It's not your job that is your source. It's not your investments. It's not your inheritance. It's God who is your source, and it changes your whole perspective.

Too many people are like the little boy I heard about. He was on his way to Sunday School. His mother gave him two quarters. She said, "One of these is for you to put in the offering in Sunday School, and the other quarter you can use to buy an ice cream cone after church." So he was on his way to church, walking along, and he drops one of those quarters, and it rolls down into the sewer. He says, "Too bad, God, there goes your quarter." That's what a lot of people are like. They think, "I've got some and I've got others, and some of what I have I'm going to give to God. It's all mine, but I'm going to give some of it to God." Wrong. Here's the truth. It's all God's. It's all God's, and he allows us to keep some of it.

We honor him by giving him the first and the best, not the leftovers. You know how a lot of people give? You know how they do. They write all the checks for all the bills during the month, and then they get the football tickets and the toys and hobbies and everything else, and then look and see if is there anything left over for God. Not much, God, but here it is. I'm giving you some of mine. Oh, no. It's his to start with.

Now, I want to call your attention to another verse of scripture. It is 1 Chronicles 29:12. When Solomon was dedicating the beautiful temple in Jerusalem that had been built by the sacrificial gifts of the people, like we're doing on our building, this is what he says. Listen to this. "Wealth and honor come from you, O God. You are the ruler of all things." Then he says in verse 14, "But who am I? And who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand." Can I say that again? "Everything comes from you, God, and we have given only what comes from your hand." You say, "Now, wait a minute, this doesn't make sense to me. You mean, God gives me what I have?" That's right. And then he wants me to turn around and give some of it back to him? That's right. Why does he want me to do that? Well, a couple of reasons. He's commanded it, number one and number two; he wants you to use it to express your love to him. Let me illustrate it.

I remember when my two daughters were so young that they didn't have any money of their own. They were always holding out their hand wanting me to give them money. That's true today actually, still. But when they were real little and Christmastime would roll around, we would take them shopping to buy Christmas presents for me and Cindy and other family members. I would give them my money to buy me a Christmas present. I could have taken the money and bought something for myself, right? Instead I gave them the money. Then they went and bought the present. On Christmas morning when I opened up a present, I didn't say, "You used my money to buy this." I opened that present and I received it as a gift of love from my daughters. You know what? It blessed my heart. Now, if that's true of me, a carnal human father, how do you think our heavenly father feels when you, as his children, take what he has given you

and you give it back to him as an act of love? You're a blessing unto him. That's pillar number one. All you have is a gift of God. Here's financial pillar number two of God's economy:

2. What you give is a seed, but what they receive is fruit

What you give is like a seed, but what God does with it is fruit. Now, this nuance I want you to see in verse 28. He says in verse 28, "So after I have completed this task [what task? Taking the offering] and have made sure that they have received this fruit."

Now, what God is interested in doing is for you and I to take the possessions, the material blessings he's given us and consider it as seed that we plant. What God is interested in is the fruit that is produced by what we give or what we plant. Look at 2 Corinthians 9. I printed it for you there. By the way, you can be assured when Paul wrote to this church at Corinth; he is speaking about the very same offering to which he is referring in Romans 15. It's the same offering, same one. Look at what he says:

"Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. This service that you performed is not only supplying the needs of God's people but it's also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God, because of the service by which you have proved yourselves men will praise God, for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else."

This is what Paul is saying to them and this is what the Holy Spirit is trying to say to us. If you have been blessed spiritually, and you have, you are to share your material blessings. It's like planting seed. Now, what can you do with your seed? Well, you can do lots of things with seed. You can take your seed and you can store it. You can hoard it. You can stockpile it. You can put it aside. By the way, that's what a lot of people do with what God gives them. They store it and save it somewhere. "You know, I've got to save it for a rainy day." I like what Jack Taylor used to say. "If you say you're saving for a rainy day, sometimes God will make sure you have one." Jesus said where your treasure is, there your heart is. The reason some people's hearts are dead and dark and dull is because their heart is in some safety deposit box somewhere. Really. So you can store your seed, or do you know what you can do with your seed? You can eat it, because seed is edible, and it will give you immediate gratification. And yeah, you can spend what God gives you on yourself, and that's the end of it. Or you know what else you can do with a seed? You can offer it to God's soil and you can plant it, and when you think you're letting go of it, actually what you're doing is you're investing it in God's economy, and what comes forth is a harvest. Much fruit to the glory of God. So you see, what you give is a seed that you plant, but what God does with it is beautiful fruit. Here's the third pillar in God's economy:

3. Unselfish giving brings more blessing

When you give unselfishly, when you plant a lot of seed, it brings more blessing. Can I read again from 2 Corinthians 9:10-11? This is God's promise to you. In fact, you may want to write in the margin there, "God's promise to me." Now He who supplies seed [resources] he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will also not only supply, and will increase your

store of seed, and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” We’ve got to stop for just a minute. Who is the “He?” It says, “Now he.” Who is the antecedent of that pronoun? Is it the guy that runs the Seed & Feed Store? Is it the grocer? Is it your boss that writes your paycheck? Is it your investment firm? It’s God. God is the one who does that.

Keep reading now. “God who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase and your store of seed and enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made r-i-c-h.” What does that spell? Rich. You’ll be made rich in every way. Some people think rich means just having a bunch of money. That’s only one way. He says you’ll be rich in every way. Why? So you can spend it on yourself? No, so you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. What Paul is talking about here is a beautiful pattern, a beautiful cycle that occurs. I tried to present it there for you graphically if you look at it. It starts at the left side. When you give a little bit, God blesses you. When you plant a little seed, God gives you a harvest. When you plant more seed, he gives you a greater harvest. You give more, and he blesses more, and you give more and he blesses more, and you give more and he blesses more. That is an unending pattern. The problem is, some people stop somewhere in the middle of it after God blesses. They say, “I’ve given enough or I’ve been blessed enough.”

GIVE → GOD BLESSES → GIVE → GOD BLESSES → GIVE → GOD BLESSES

Now, would you look at verse 29? Verse 29 says, “I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.” Is there anybody in this room who would say, “I would like to have the full measure of the blessing of Christ?” I can’t imagine anybody saying, “I just kind of want a half measure or give me a quarter measure.” If you want the full blessing, Paul says, “The only way I can do that is by being faithful to deliver this offering.” That’s what he’s talking about. When you give, God blesses. When you shovel out, God shovels in, when you shovel out, God shovels in, and His shovel is a lot bigger than your shovel. You cannot out give God. That’s what he’s talking about here. He says, “I want to make you rich.”

You know what it means to be rich? It’s not talking about independently wealthy or anything like that. You know how rich you are? Here’s how you can tell how rich you are. You add up everything money cannot buy and death can’t take away, and that will tell you how rich you are. Somebody else has said, “You know a good definition of being rich? It is having all of your needs met and having the capacity to enjoy life.” I know some people who have tons of money, but they’re not rich. You know why? They don’t have a relationship with God; they don’t have a good relationship with their family. They’re miserable. They are *miser*-able. They’re so *miser*-ly that they’re *miser*-able, miserable. I know a lot of people who don’t have much money and they are wonderfully rich, because they have all their needs met and they’re enjoying life. God says when you plant, there will be a harvest, when you plant, there will be a harvest, when you plant, there will be a harvest.

III. SHARE YOUR BURDENS, TOO (30-33)

Well, that's what he's talking about, the connection, the correlation between spiritual blessings and material blessings. Number one, consider your spiritual blessings. Number two: Share your material blessings. And then number three, share your burdens, too, because this passage also talks about not only blessings but also a burden that Paul had. Look at verse 30 again. He says, I urge you, I beg you, brothers, by the Lord Jesus and by the love of the Spirit to join me in my struggle by praying for me.

Let's talk about what it means to share a burden with one another. I'm so proud that the Apostle Paul didn't write to them and say, "I don't have a need. I don't need you to do anything. I've got it all under control. Everything is just perfect." No, he said, "Listen, I need you to pray for me." You know why we need for each other to pray for us? Because

1. Life IS a struggle

It really is a struggle. Let's just admit it. Let's don't deny it. The word that he used is in verse 30 for struggle, it is the word "sunagonizesthai" in Greek. We get our word "agonize" from that.

Sometimes people think that the Christian life is a playground. It's not a playground; it's a battleground. Life is tough. It's a struggle, even for the best of Christians, even for the strongest Christians. He says, "I'm in a struggle." And it is a struggle. That's why you need to share your burdens with one another. That's why we need to say, "Pray for me as I pray for you." Here's the second thing we learn about this:

2. Even the strongest Christian needs prayer—admit it!

I consider the Apostle Paul one of the strongest Christians who ever lived. He said, "I need you to pray for me." You and I need to admit it, we need to admit that we need prayers from each other. Sometimes I'll ask a Christian in our church, I ask it sincerely when I say sometimes, how can I pray for you? Let me know how I can pray for you. Usually they'll tell me how. Sometimes a person will say, "That's all right. I don't really need any prayer." When they say that, I know one of two things is probably true. Number one, that person is probably so backslidden that they're in a spiritual coma and not aware of what's going on spiritually. The devil's got them where he wants them, so they're kind of absent without love from the kingdom of God. Number two: They're in denial. And I want to say, "What are you hiding? Come on, how can I pray for you?"

Paul says, "I need you to pray for me. I'm in danger when I go to Jerusalem. I need you to pray for my protection." On the other hand, when somebody asks me, "Pastor, how can I pray for you?" Pray for me to have wisdom, pray for me to have physical strength, spiritual stamina, pray for me to stay pure and pray for me and my family that we can stay close to each other. I'll give you a lot of things to pray for. I need your prayers. You need my prayers. We need each other's prayers. Even the strongest Christian needs prayer. Let's admit it. Paul did. The third thing we learn from what he writes:

3. We need each other for spiritual refreshment

Look again at verse 32. He says, "So by God's will, I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed." Refreshed. That's the same word, refreshed, Jesus used in Matthew 11:28 when he said this. "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, refreshment." That's what it's talking about. We come to Jesus for spiritual refreshment, but we come to each other for emotional encouragement and refreshment.

Have you ever left church just feeling low and beaten down and discouraged and despondent? If so, you left church exactly the opposite that God intended. And I ask God to forgive me for every sermon that I preached that wasn't encouraging and positive and uplifting, because the Bible says when we come together, we are to encourage one another, and we ought to leave this place refreshed. I can promise you, after preaching this same message three times every Sunday morning, I am physically exhausted, but I am emotionally and spiritually refreshed. I enter Sunday lunch with a smile on my face, because just praising the Lord with you, just worshipping with you, just being able to share with you, it refreshes me. That's why the Bible says we need each other. That's why you cannot be a secret agent Christian. When it comes to sharing your burdens, it's amazing how God answers prayers that we never know about.

I tend to agree with Tom Brokaw that the greatest generation was those folks who were the heroes in World War II, and some of the heroes are even here in the States. There's a man by the name of Elmer Bendiner who was a navigator on a B-17. He writes about how the prayers for protection that were being prayed for him were answered on one particular occasion. Can I read it to you as we finish?

"On one flight, our B-17, which was named the "Tondelayo," was barraged by heavy flack from Nazi anti-aircraft guns. – Flack shells had an explosive in them so they would explode at a certain altitude or when they hit a plane. – That wasn't too unusual, but what was miraculous was that one 20-millimeter shell pierced the fuel tank of our plane, and yet there was no explosion. The morning after the flight, the pilot went down to the crew chief to ask for the shell as a souvenir of our unbelievable luck. The crew chief said it wasn't luck. It was a miracle, because he had not found just one unexploded shell, but 11 had been found that had pierced our airplane, and any one of them could have blown us out of the sky. It was as if the Red Sea had parted for us. The shells were sent to the armorers to be defused. When they opened each of those shells, they found no explosive charge. Each one was empty, except for one. It contained a carefully rolled piece of paper, and on it were some words scrawled in German. When the note was translated, it read, 'This is all we can do for you now.' I wonder if that unknown munitions worker ever got found out or if they ever knew that they were an answer to prayer for God's protection."

Ever thought about how many unexploded shells there have been in your life? It was all because somebody was praying for you.

OUTLINE

I. CONSIDER YOUR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. *Ephesians 1:3*

You have received a new:

1. Nature
2. Home
3. Family

II. SHARE YOUR MATERIAL BLESSINGS

1. All you have is a gift from God

You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth..." *Deuteronomy 8:17-18a*

2. What you give is a seed—what they receive is fruit

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. *2 Corinthians 9:6, 12-13*

3. Unselfish giving brings more blessings!

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 made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. *2 Corinthians 9:10-11*

GIVE → GOD BLESSES → GIVE → GOD BLESSES → GIVE → GOD BLESSES

III. SHARE YOUR BURDENS, TOO (30-33)

1. Life IS a struggle!
2. Even the strongest Christian needs prayer—admit it!
3. We need each other for spiritual refreshment!