



*“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. 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.*

*And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”*

- 2 Corinthians 9

This text is very familiar to many of you. At the heart of the passage is Paul's encouragement on generosity. Earlier in the chapter, the Apostle reminds the church in Corinth to follow through on its commitment to support his work with the poor. Paul shares he has been bragging about them to the Macedonians. In doing so, the example set by believers in Corinth leads the Macedonians to follow their lead.

Paul's letter is one of love and guidance, serving as a reminder to us today to focus not on ourselves, but the needs of others. God is the supplier for our needs daily.

Verses 11 & 12 in the Corinthians text relate to the scope of our giving. Paul says in Verse 11, “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.” This is a powerful promise that the Foundation leans into in its mission statement: A ministry of the Church for the Church, here to build the Church for generations to come by investing in people, churches and related institutions.

I am here today as a harvest of the seeds planted and nurtured by Foundation, covering not just one, but all three areas in your scope of work. As an individual, I have been the recipient of the William R. and Mattie T. Alexander Scholarship. This gift, along grants from Western NC Conference, as well as a scholarship from Centenary UMC in Winston-Salem, enabled me to walk across the stage at Lake Junaluska, a Commissioned Deacon, debt free from Duke Divinity. Through the obedience and diligence in the work of the Foundation to serve God, I have enabled the church to serve in one of the fastest growing areas of poverty in the state. It's amazing to be able to serve others and thrive during the pandemic this past year, without the burden of school indebtedness.



Verse 12 broadens our view of giving by stating that giving is a direct way to thank God personally for blessings. After losing a fiancé in 2009, I was struggling with what I wanted to do and in reading about a United Methodist Deacon, I realized that my work up to that point had been preparing me for this path. I sought out the Foundation, initially thinking I could use my gifts and background in fundraising and development with Historically Black Colleges and Universities within the Methodist Church to fulfill my call to ministry. I had a pretty significant experience with the second scope of work with the Foundation: institutions.

In the mid 1990's, I worked with the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association, which produces one of the largest collegiate basketball tournaments in the country. That work helped me snag Bennett College, a UMC institution, as a client with my event business in 2005. Bob Dole and Bill Clinton had agreed to do a fundraiser for the college and then Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans.

Bennett had taken in students from another UMC school, Dillard. I was clear that Bennett's generosity, in spite of its own financial struggles, needed to be described during the fundraiser. I encouraged then President, Johnnetta Cole, to include the students and their stories as part of the evening's activities.

In the audience that night was the president of Food Lion at the time. He had been on the fence about a million-dollar gift to the college. He was so moved and impressed by the stories of thanksgiving that he told his Chief Diversity Officer to cut the check to Bennett the following week. That experience resonated profoundly and I thought I could do more work along this line. I had spent some time at the Black College Fund office in Nashville and the need at Bennett was great.



Instead, I saw an even greater need in using what I had gleaned to serve the third scope of the Foundation, our churches. Our Book of Discipline states that the local church provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs. Our mission as United Methodists is to make disciples for the transformation of the world. Our focus in all that we do has to be about making disciples. If the church was not strengthened in its capacity to fulfill this mission, then everything else falls. Thus, for two years, I worked alongside Foundation staff pulling from my experiences in event planning and fundraising to organize two stewardship initiatives with African American churches that other Conferences heard about, read about and wanted to duplicate. While not all churches have taken advantage of what the Foundation offers, those who have are positioned to share their stories and, like the church at Corinth, encourage others to follow their lead.

Paul's epistle describes the results of giving. The one thing I have experienced firsthand and wish to highlight this afternoon is the power of the connectional nature in giving through our church structure and its entities. While driving home from Lake Junaluska, I shared with my mother how I often see things differently than everyone else. My mother really did not say much the entire weekend of my commissioning. It was hard to tell if she was happy, sad or skeptical. I think she was glad to see and spend time with her family as we had not been together for over a year due to

COVID. So, I was surprised that she responded to my comment by simply saying, "Camille, your life experiences have positioned you to witness things most people do not. This is a gift and that is a good thing."

Paul says in the text, recipients of each gift are blessed directly as a result of receiving each gift. In this room are talents and gifts unique to your experiences. It is your task to praise the God we all love and serve and think beyond what you can see in the here and now.

Let me conclude by leaving you with some images to encourage your work throughout your time on this board. In 1970, my mother had enough money to either pay for her tuition to become a secretary or my tuition for kindergarten. There was no public kindergarten at that time and Mom chose to sow generously by putting me in Centenary, the UMC church that later provided one of my scholarships to Duke. Like most mothers, she had big dreams for me. Mom wanted me to go to Salem College, an all-girls school started by the Moravians in Winston-Salem. My dad assured her that was not going to happen.

In her willingness, however, to see beyond what was needed at the time and pour into herself to have the money to fulfill her dream, she provided the foundation for me to fulfill my own. That little girl is the promise of the harvest by the woman standing with Bishop Leeland. Dream big, plant seeds and remember God is doing a Great Work in You and through you, though you may not be around to see it.

When we are obedient in giving back to the One who is the sower of the seed, God is faithful to bring about a harvest. I give thanks to God for you and all that you will do in your time together. Now go and increase the storehouse of seed for harvest in the generations to come.



*Will you pray with me? God of abundance, you give us all that we need to be generous givers to others. Inspire us to offer you thanks for the many gifts that we have received from your hand. Help us to share with others so that they know that the gifts we give to them are gifts that came to us from you in the name of the father, son and holy spirit. Amen.*