

Overflowing to the Mission

"Overflow" Series, November 8 & 9, 2025 | 2 Corinthians 9:1-5

Rob O'Neal, Senior Pastor

Good intentions that go nowhere get nothing done.

Vice-President George H.W. Bush famously looked into the camera at the 1988 Republican National Convention and said, "Read my lips. No new taxes."

Some people thought he might raise taxes, so their support was lukewarm. And it showed! Bush lagged in the polls. So he made this pledge at the convention. No new taxes. Read my lips. His poll numbers surged, and he won the election. But ultimately, he raised taxes. His good intentions went nowhere and got nothing done.

Paul worried that the Corinthians' good intentions might go nowhere.

For two weeks, we've been looking at 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. Paul was taking up an offering to relieve the poverty of the church in Jerusalem. When he first asked the church in Corinth to participate, they were enthusiastic in their support. They asked for specific instructions on how to set aside money. They were full of good intentions. But those good intentions went nowhere and got nothing done.

Unfulfilled good intentions cost President Bush a second term.

He did oppose new taxes, but the economy slowed, revenues dropped, and the deficit grew. Deficits threatened government programs both parties wanted, so President Bush compromised and agreed to a tax hike. His enemies pounced. In the next election—both in the primaries and in the general election—Bush was hit repeatedly with his broken promise. It cost him the election and profound embarrassment—and resulted in a one-term presidency.

We don't want our good intentions to go nowhere.

We have good intentions—about God and about generosity. There are times I leave worship or a mission project full of zeal and determined to do something. Then I get busy or distracted, and those good intentions vaporize. There is no follow-through. It's embarrassing, and I imagine the same is true for you. Paul tells us how to disrupt the cycle. Which is incredibly valuable because we don't want our good intentions to go nowhere!

Would the Corinthians' good intentions go nowhere?

The Corinthians started out with fervent zeal for the offering.

As I shared with you two weeks ago, they asked Paul for instructions on how to take up the collection. Paul advised them in 1 Corinthians 16 to set aside money each week on the first day of the week. That way, they would have a sizable sum ready when he returned. Paul said that all of Achaia had become zealous. That's most of mainland Greece! Their zeal was contagious; it spread all throughout the province. Paul told their story to encourage others!

Paul's stories about Corinthian zeal inspired the Macedonians.

Macedonia—the region north of Greece—included churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Paul told them that Corinth had become zealous to give an offering to help Jerusalem. They, too, wanted to give, which surprised Paul because they also were impoverished by persecution. Paul described their good intentions turning into joyous action in **2 Corinthians 8:2-4**:

... or in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints ...

A year later, though, Paul's visit might be an embarrassing bust.

Paul was coming to collect the offering. Because he was continuing to Jerusalem to deliver the offering, he would be accompanied by representatives from Macedonia. But the disciples in Corinth had likely done nothing. Their good intentions seemed to have gone nowhere. Imagine how embarrassed Paul would be! Imagine how embarrassed Corinthians would be! That's what Paul described in **2 Corinthians 9:4**:

Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident.

Paul saw a possible "Matt Hasselbeck Moment" brewing.

Matt Hasselbeck was the quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks (a professional football team) in January 2004. The Seahawks were in a playoff game against the Green Bay Packers. Matt led a dramatic seven play, 67-yard drive for a touchdown, tying the game at the last minute and forcing it into overtime. At the coin toss, Hasselbeck called "Heads." It was heads. [Show "Hasselbeck" picture.] Then on camera he declared, "We want the ball and we're going to score." Everyone heard him. A short time later, Hasselbeck floated a short pass to the left sidelines. A Packer jumped up, intercepted the ball, and ran it into the end zone to win the game.¹ Can you imagine being Matt Hasselbeck that week? The humiliation! Paul wanted to avoid a Matt Hasselbeck moment! But Matt Hasselbeck moments happen when our good intentions go nowhere! Why does that happen?

Good intentions and zeal deflate over time.

Corinth's good intentions and zeal quenched quickly.

After Paul left Corinth, new apostles came to town. Something they said made the Corinthians doubt Paul, which led to conflict. There was a painful visit followed by a painful letter. The offering had been forgotten. But that is what happens all too often with good intentions and zeal. They are white hot one moment. But then real life douses the flame of good intentions and zeal, quenching that flame over time.

It happens naturally, so the New Testament warns us to "keep on".

¹ <https://www.nfl.com/100/originals/100-greatest/plays-86>

We experience difficulties and distractions, and our own sin nature puts a pin in our zeal and good intentions, deflating them. That's not how we were created; we were created for our good intentions to flow naturally into joyful actions. But in a sinful, fallen, and broken world, our good intentions and zeal get disrupted. So, we are reminded repeatedly to keep on. As Paul himself writes in **Galatians 6:9**,

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

That's good news! We don't have to give up!

That's why Paul sent three emissaries to Corinth to fan the flame of their zeal.

Paul wrote about them in 2 Corinthians 8. One was Titus, who had been to Corinth before. Listen to how Paul described him in **2 Corinthians 8:16-17**,

But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord.

Titus would be a great help. Paul also sent two others. They were going to Corinth to fan the flame of zeal that had been quenched and to get the offering ready.

Pride and sloth disrupt the flow from good intentions to joyful action.

We were created so that our good intentions would naturally turn into joyful actions. All sin disrupts that natural flow, but some sin immediately clogs the pipe. Pride, one of the deadly sins we discussed this past summer, tells us that we are entitled to something more and that we (not God) should be the hero of our stories. Pride clogs the natural flow of good intentions quickly. So does sloth. Sloth causes us to say, "I could but why? Why not tomorrow?" If you're asking yourself, "Why do my good intentions go nowhere and do nothing?" then the answer is "sin". But that isn't a simplistic answer; it is a lens that enables us to ask a good question, "What sin?" and to search for an answer and a solution. Because God provides us with solutions.

God designed our good intentions to overflow generously.

God redeems us and sanctifies us so that we once again overflow naturally.

Sin separates us from God and breaks us. Sin disrupts that natural flow from good intentions to joyful action. That flow is obedience, and we were created to obey God naturally, but sin makes obedience difficult. Jesus obeyed His Father perfectly and lived a sinless life. Then He died on the cross to pay the price for our sin. Now, He offers us forgiveness, and when we accept that forgiveness, we are redeemed. Our relationship with God is made right, and God puts His Holy Spirit in us. And God's Holy Spirit sanctifies us. Earlier, in **2 Corinthians 3:18**, Paul described the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit this way,

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

We are being made into the image of Christ! **Sanctification** means "to make holy and whole". God the Holy Spirit makes us holy and whole. That means that our good intentions start to flow toward joyful action. Our good intentions can overflow generously. How does this happen?

God encourages us through Christian brothers and sisters.

That's why Paul was sending three emissaries to Corinth. They would provide a gentle balance of encouragement, equipping, and accountability. In **2 Corinthians 9:3** he wrote,

But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be.

Paul wasn't telling us that we need Christian brothers and sisters so that our good intentions might overflow generously. He was showing us! When we let Christian brothers and sisters into our lives, they do the same for us. It's one of the ways God makes us whole and holy!

He renews us through worship.

Paul doesn't write about worship here, but it is another important way that God renews us. Frequently, our zeal and good intentions get stoked during worship. Sometimes it's public worship like we're doing right now, and other times it's in the private moments of Bible study, prayer, and time with God. He renews us—zeal and all. So, we want and need more of Him! As **Psalms 23:2-3** says,

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.

...

God stretches us through mission.

That's what's happening here in 2 Corinthians 9. Paul is taking up an offering. In so doing, he is stoking the zeal of the Corinthian Christians and stretching their obedience. But the offering is just a means to a bigger end. The end is God's mission! Paul wants to provide for the saints in Jerusalem to advance God's mission to redeem His people and build His Kingdom! Joining God on His mission always stretches us. We serve people, share the Gospel, and make disciples. In the process, we see how big God is and how God's power is at work in dramatic ways! It stokes our zeal and fans our good intentions. Mission opens the connection between good intentions and joyful actions. It makes us overflow generously! Our wallets go where our hearts have already been.

Consider going on a mission trip; it will encourage, renew, and stretch you!

Mission trips bring it all together. You are surrounded by brothers and sisters, you worship vibrantly, and you are stretched by seeing, touching, and participating in the mission yourself. I remember my first mission trip to Honduras. I was surrounded by team members who became brothers to me. We prayed and worshipped in ways I had never done before! And we served and shared the Gospel in ways that changed lives—mine included. I came back from my first mission trip on fire and ready to do everything differently. That's the experience most people have on mission trips! Some of you may be hesitant to go—worrying about your safety or that you wouldn't add much to the trip. Just go! It will change your life. It will encourage you, renew you, stretch you, and cause you to overflow generously in ways that are difficult to imagine.

Overflowing generously advances the mission.

For 50 years, this church has generously advanced the mission.

Starting this church advanced the mission because there was a church where none had existed before! We have reached people locally with the Gospel. We have planted churches, raised up pastors, sent out missionaries, started outreach ministries locally, and sent teams around the world. But everything we have done at some point comes down to one person serving another and one person telling

another the Gospel. We are celebrating our 50th Anniversary in 2026, and it has me thinking deeply about everything God has done through this church. Our theme is going to be "Light of the World." A group of people was meeting to pray about the next chapter of our church's life together. We were looking back and looking ahead, and one person brought up **Matthew 5:14-16** in which Jesus says,

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

That's this church! That's us!

It is time for us as a church to take our next step together.

We have been a leader among the churches in this country in missions giving. We give nearly \$1 million a year to missions. But we have been stuck at that number for roughly a decade. When you stay at the same point for ten years, the reality is that you are falling behind. It's time for us to take next steps and overflow generously toward God's mission. And we can do that together.

When we overflow generously, God changes the world.

What people need is the Gospel, not money. But money helps ensure that Gospel proclamation happens. When we overflow generously, God takes what we give, and He does the real, hard, spiritual work. He brings people to faith. He plants churches. He advances the Gospel. But, as Paul showed the church in Corinth, He chooses to use us in the process.

God is changing the world through John and Ann Busa and their overflowing generosity. Let's watch how.

May we overflow generously and advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul told us how. It's what we've been doing for 50 years. John and Ann are still showing us how. For those of you whose good intentions have been overflowing generously toward God's mission for years, I say, "Thank you!" What will God do through you next? And for those of you who are full of good intentions today, I say, "Let's do this together!"