

GENEROSITY

Leader pages on pp. 154-157

THE POINT:
GOD'S GENEROUS
GRACE MOVES US TO
BE GENEROUS.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-9

¹ We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia:

² During a severe trial brought about by affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

.....

³ I can testify that, according to their ability and even beyond their ability, of their own accord,

⁴ they begged us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints,

⁵ and not just as we had hoped. Instead, they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us by God's will.

⁶ So we urged Titus that just as he had begun, so he should also complete among you this act of grace.

.....

⁷ Now as you excel in everything—in faith, speech, knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love for us—excel also in this act of grace.

⁸ I am not saying this as a command. Rather, by means of the diligence of others, I am testing the genuineness of your love.

⁹ **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.**

MEMORY VERSE

+

+

+

KEYWORDS

Grace of God (v. 1)—The Greek term is a key theme of chapters 8–9, appearing ten times in those two chapters. Grace is the demonstration of unmerited favor toward someone.

Wealth of generosity (v. 2)—The Greek term refers to one who has personal integrity which

is demonstrated in his or her words and actions.

Act of grace (v. 6)—Giving is not just a duty or obligation. It is an act of grace in response to the gracious activity of God in our lives.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO REFLECT CHRIST THROUGH OUR GENEROSITY?

Have you ever heard of a church mortgage burning? A Chicago publication named Quinn Chapel AME as Chicago's oldest black church. In the spring of 2024, the 180-year old church celebrated paying their mortgage with a mortgage burning ceremony. The previous year the church had air conditioning for the first time in the building's 131-year history.²¹

Black churches seek to serve their communities and it takes the generosity of others to provide resources and space to serve. A local newspaper in Madison, Wisconsin told the story of another black church seeking to pay off its mortgage. The church had served the community for over 100 years and never owned their building.²²

Every year, churches close their doors for a variety of reasons. Finances are often a contributing factor. Generosity towards the local church is a topic that continues to need to be addressed. In our study we'll see how God's abundant grace moves us toward a generous lifestyle.

Generosity Overflows //

2 Corinthians 8:1-2

Character counts but the only counting that some are doing these days is self-calculated. Staying in your own lane can become a rationalization for wearing blinders and ignoring others with a legitimate need of help.

Paul wrote a letter to his spiritual "brothers and sisters" living in the town of Corinth. It was a relatively new and thriving boom town where highly motivated people looking for opportunity came to make their fortune. Though once destroyed, Corinth was rebuilt by the famous Roman emperor Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. It quickly became the third most notable city in the Roman empire.

We can assume that the city's culture infiltrated the church. Paul's audience would have included

some up and comers of the day, people who pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps, as the saying goes. To these kinds of folks, a message of generosity was delivered. That message came wrapped in a human example.

The churches of Macedonia were shining examples of generosity, but not because they had deep pockets of financial resources. It was the exact opposite. It was not because they lived lives of ease from which they could survey those less



THE POINT: GOD'S GENEROUS GRACE MOVES US TO BE GENEROUS.

fortunate than themselves. In verse 2, Paul gives three relevant factoids about the churches in Philippi and Thessalonica:

- **They were being severely persecuted for their faith.** From their infancy as churches, both congregations experienced opposition (Acts 16:20; 17:20). Paul affirmed that in his letters to them (Phil. 1:27-30; 1Th. 3:3-4)
- **They experienced deep poverty.** Paul picked his words in the original language very carefully. He didn't just say that they were in poverty but added a phrase to convey that it was deep poverty or, as one commentator puts it, "rock-bottom poverty." It doesn't describe just missing a paycheck or two.
- **They lived in abundant joy.** Their affliction had not squelched their joy. Their circumstances were bleak, but they weren't. In this they imitated Paul's own experience (2 Cor. 7:4).

It's hard to wrap your mind around these seeming contradictions. What could have possibly caused this? Paul knew exactly from where their amazing joy and generosity came. It was their experience of the grace of God.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOY AND GENEROSITY?

Just two chapters previously, Paul wrote inspiringly about God's grace in salvation (2Co. 5:16-6:2). His goodness to rebellious sinners overflowed. The Macedonians heard the gospel and received the grace of God that brings salvation. And then what happened?

Just as the wealth of God's goodness flowed into their minds and hearts, so a wealth of generosity began to flow from them. Their joy at what God had done for them brought a fullness to their lives that material deprivation couldn't exhaust. They were overwhelmed by the grace of God.

Generosity doesn't depend on having financial wealth, but rather a deep spiritual commitment to the Lord. It is the response of those to whom the grace of God has become real.

Generosity Shows //

2 Corinthians 8:3-6

The specific object of the collection Paul received from the churches is not certain. It is possible it was directed towards the relief of believers in Jerusalem and/or Judea (Acts 11:29, 12:25; Rom. 15:27). It is also possible Paul was referring to some other relief project for fellow believers. Either way, the response from the Macedonian believers was astounding.



DIGGING DEEPER GENEROSITY FUNDS MINISTRY

Looking at Paul's ministry, we see that provisions come from a variety of places. He went to Corinth and supported himself and worked as a tent maker while he spoke at the synagogue every Sabbath (Acts 18:1-4). Paul was also supported by individuals. In Romans 16:1-2, Phoebe is named as one of Paul's benefactors. In Philippians it is recorded that the Philippian church supported Paul (Phil. 4:15-18). The Bible calls us to be generous. We belong to God and, therefore, all we have belongs to Him. We are to earn, use, and manage our money wisely, but our money is ultimately for His glory. We express our trust in Him and further His kingdom by meeting the needs of others.

How do you demonstrate generosity to support Christian ministry?

The popular expression “give until it hurts” barely describes this situation. They didn’t give out of their abundance but out of their poverty. Neither did they give under duress. Paul made it clear to the Corinthians he had not manipulated or pressured these sacrificial gifts.

The Macedonians saw giving as a privilege. They begged for the opportunity to participate in Paul’s ministry through giving. There are two kinds of giving, “just” giving and Jesus giving. In verse 5, Paul described the Macedonian believers as giving not “just as we had hoped.” The context tells us what Paul had hoped for, a simple willingness to give something. But they went further.

With generosity, the fundamental question is, “Have I first given myself to the Lord?” Putting Jesus first transforms our giving. To talk about something being “first” is not an occurrence in time but rather a value and a priority. A failure to be generous is a problem of giving ourselves to the Lord.

Sometimes our spiritual leaders must help us see this. Using some relational tactfulness, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to complete their initial enthusiasm to give to the collection. He could have scolded them for their delinquency but instead he appealed to the goodness of God. The highest spiritual attainments are accomplished more through a pull than they are through a push. Giving falls into this category.

If we only remember one thing about generosity, it needs to be this: it is an act of grace that leaves no room for self-congratulations. When our focus is on something other than the Lord, giving can become a platform for empty pride. But when it flows from a deep sense of gratitude for all that God has done for you, then it reflects His wonderful grace.

HOW DOES COMMITMENT TO CHRIST IMPACT YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD GIVING?

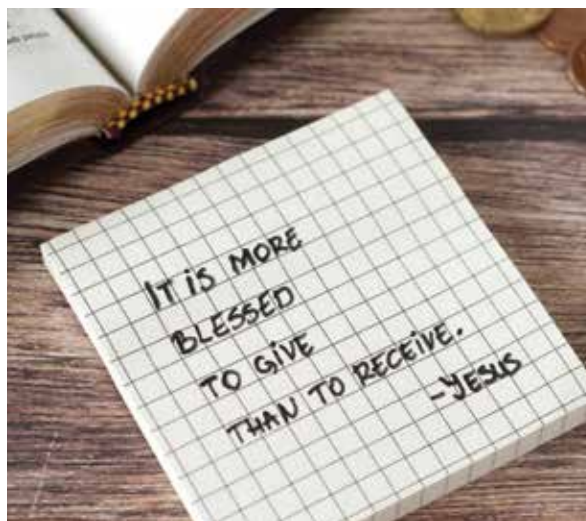
Generosity Knows //

2 Corinthians 8:7-9

Paul wasn’t using the Macedonian’s example to start a generosity contest between them and the

Corinthians. But he was helping them think about this vital spiritual discipline. Even the way in which Paul went about it was generous. Harshly scolding people for a failure to give according to the grace of God is oxymoronic. It defeats your whole purpose of highlighting the mercy of God.

Some commentators seem to question whether Paul employed sarcasm in verse 7 when he described the Corinthians as excelling. I don’t believe that was the case. He wasn’t speaking



tongue in cheek but was truly affirming their spiritual giftedness, something he had done in a previous letter (1 Cor. 1:5-7). True, in other letters he did affirm spiritual qualities like love, faith, and hope or, as here, generosity. But Paul didn’t minimize the giftedness of the Corinthians. He just put it in proper perspective.

All of this highlights a significant principle of the Christian life: giftedness is not the same thing as character. We need to hear this lesson in the church. The Corinthians possessed the spiritual gifts of “faith, speech, knowledge” and were diligent in their exercise. But they clearly were not as generous as Paul knew they needed to be.

Character counts. Generosity matters. We can preach the gospel eloquently and we should. We can sing the gospel beautifully. Thank goodness some can. But neither of these expressions test the genuineness of our love for Christ like generosity does. Just as we try to excel in the

THE POINT: GOD'S GENEROUS GRACE MOVES US TO BE GENEROUS.

exercise of our talents, we should also strive for excellence in our generosity. How do we do that? The secret lies in understanding how generous Christ has been to us in His grace and salvation.

Drawing upon what they already knew about His grace, Paul highlighted the generous sacrifice of Christ in His incarnation. The wealth of Christ refers to His unlimited and pre-existent status as God. He was "rich" in that He was fully God, possessing all the attributes of deity. Yet, as we saw in a previous study on humility in Philippians 2, Christ was willing to surrender His residence in heaven and come to earth on our behalf. The gospel says to me that "for your sake he became poor" and that truth changes everything.

Because of what Christ did—not simply in coming to earth but in dying for our sins on the cross—we came to possess a wealth beyond our comprehension. As the enormity of Christ's grace becomes real to me, my heart is crushed. As I consider this great exchange, how Christ became poor for me so that I could become rich, I am overwhelmed by how favored and blessed I have become. Giving then becomes the most natural response to God's goodness.

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD'S GRACE AND OUR GENEROSITY?

DID YOU KNOW?

I am amazed every time I read about the early church in the Book of Acts. As the church grew and added to their number daily, they demonstrated tremendous generosity towards each other. They did life together and cared for each other. Paul writes in Acts 2:45, "They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need." Their generosity was visible to the watching world and was surely part of what drew people to want to learn more about their faith. I often wonder how financially healthy the church would be if everyone just gave 10 percent of their increase. I cannot imagine what would happen if people gave all they had to help one another. Think of all the ways churches demonstrate generosity. Summer meal programs, after school tutoring, clothing and food giveaways are some contemporary examples of ways to help.

Biblical Truth: "Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices" (Heb. 13:16).

How do you participate in public displays of generosity?

LIVE IT

What truths about God encourage you to be generous?

The Bible calls us to be generous. We belong to God, therefore, all we have belongs to Him. We are to earn, use, and manage our money wisely, but our money is ultimately for His glory. We express our trust in Him and further His kingdom by meeting the needs of others. God's generous grace moves us to be generous. Choose one or more of the following applications:

+ + +

- **Study.** Do a deep dive topical study on the grace of God using this question as a guide: "What is so amazing about God's grace?"
- **Write.** List the traits of what it means to be generous. Create a checklist of the qualities and characteristics of someone who is generous. Share your findings with someone you trust.
- **Ask.** Identify one person you consider to be generous. Don't simply use financial giving as an indicator but look for individuals who freely share their time, attention, or ideas with others. Ask the individual "What moves you to share things in your life with others?"

DAILY READINGS

1. AFFLICTED ABILITY // 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-2

During times of lack, the natural tendency is to hold on to what we have, not give it away. It requires God's favor to move us to give during financial hardship. However, God often uses affliction to teach us to obey His commands and believe His promises. Psalm 119:71, says, "It was good for me to be afflicted, so that I could learn your statutes." The Macedonian churches felt the pain of extreme poverty and wanted to help alleviate those who were experiencing the same. Their impoverishment forced them to trust God, and God not only supplied their needs, but blessed them to meet other's needs as well.

**Is God calling you to give in a time of scarcity?
Give and trust God to supply all your needs.**

2. THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMITMENT // 2 CORINTHIANS 8:3-6

Paul gives us a peek into the hearts of people, who despite their impoverishment, still give generously. First, they've given themselves to God. Jesus said the greatest command is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). Second, they've given themselves to others. The second commandment is: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). Love for God and others expresses itself in concrete acts of kindness. John declares, "If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him...let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18).

Whose tangible need can you meet today?

3. GRACE-FILLED GIVING // 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-9

Just as we are expected to be exceptional in faith, speech, knowledge, effort, and love – we are also expected to be exceptional in giving. Our commitment to giving is a test of the genuineness of our love for others and our love for God, a

demonstrable love that is in response to the grace shown to us by Christ. Just as Jesus willingly became poor to lift us out of the poverty of sin, we ought to be willing to become indigent to lift our fellow human being out of indignant conditions, knowing that "this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

Are you pursuing excellence in giving as much as you are in other areas of discipleship?

4. KEEPING CLEAN // JOB 1:1,8

Job helps to define a person of integrity. He or she is one who reverences God and shuns evil. The Hebrew word for "integrity" is translated in the Amplified Bible as "blameless and upright." "Blameless" means that a person is innocent of wrongdoing and "upright" means that a person is honest in his dealings. A person of integrity abstains from wrong (blameless) and does what's right (upright). It does not mean a person is sinless. By confessing, God is faithful and just to forgive their sin and cleanse them from all unrighteousness (1 John. 1:9).

"Better the poor person who lives with integrity than the rich one who distorts right and wrong (Prov. 28:6).

5. AN IMPERFECT IMITATION // 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

What gives Paul the confidence that his life could hold up to the scrutiny he was inviting? It was his humility and dependence upon God's grace that convinced him that his conduct could endure examination. He says, "For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle...but by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:9-10). But along with grace, it was no longer Paul who lived, but Christ who lived in him, and the life he now lived, he lived by faith in Jesus (Gal. 2:20). Paul is calling on believers to look at a perfect Jesus use an imperfect apostle to God's glory.

There is no secret to what God can do, what He's done for others, He can do for you.