



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

SERIES: THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES GIVING 2 CORINTHIANS

8:1-15 •

8/6/2023

MAIN POINT

Because God has given much to us, we should make much of Him by giving generously to others.

INTRODUCTION

Name some blessings you recognize as gifts from God.

What are some causes you willingly support with your finances? Why?

Did you grow up in a house where giving was modeled for you? How did your upbringing impact your relationship with giving?

God has given us so much in Christ—forgiveness, salvation, and sanctification. As we grow into the image and likeness of Christ, we enjoy so many of His blessings. But He doesn't bless us only for our own benefit. Rather, He blesses us so that we can make much of Him by generously giving to others. God has all the resources He needs to reach the world with the gospel, but He expects His people's generosity to be a key part of accomplishing that mission. Everything that is in our possession has been entrusted to us for eternal purposes.

UNDERSTANDING

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-6.

What did Paul describe as “the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia?” In what way is your generosity to others a gift of grace from God?

Based on these verses, what words would you use to characterize the giving of the Macedonians?

Why do you think the Macedonian believers wanted to give so badly (v. 4)?

Why is it significant that the Macedonians gave both “according to” and “beyond” their ability?

Sacrificial generosity was a practice of the church established at its very conception, and in these verses from 2 Corinthians we read Paul's reminder to the Corinthian church that generosity should be fundamental in their ministry to one another. Paul

told them about the generosity of the Macedonian churches who—despite their own poverty—had raised money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Their generosity was compelled by love, not obligation, as seen in the desire they expressed and the initiative they took. The Macedonian believers saw beyond their circumstances to God’s eternal blessings in their lives. This view caused them to see their giving as a partnership with other believers to help with the needs of the saints, a preferred description of Paul’s for followers of Christ.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-10.

Based on verse 7, what were the Corinthian believers like? Is it surprising to you that believers who excel in faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, and love might not also be generous in their giving? Explain.

Paul indicated that generosity is a test of the genuineness of our love. Can a person truly love God and people, yet at the same time not be a generous giver? Explain.

Notice how the work of Jesus is used as our example and our fuel to live and give generously. How does a proper understanding of the gospel loosen our grip on money? How does it give us the desire to give joyfully?

Verse 9 reveals what should motivate all believers to willingly sacrifice of themselves for the sake of others by giving generously—Jesus’ sacrifice for us. Jesus practiced and taught sacrificial giving. Gratitude for what Jesus has done for us reminds us to fix our eyes on heaven, not earth. This motivates us to demonstrate responsible stewardship of our lives and our possessions.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:11-15.

The Corinthian believers were thankful for God’s provision in their lives and wanted to help others, but apparently they struggled to follow through. Can you relate? Do you ever fail to give generously, even when you have a genuine desire to do it?

How can the phrase, “according to what you have” help you follow through in your desire to give?

When one person is in need, other believers are there to help—this is how kingdom living operates. The church body is a family, created by the grace of Jesus, whose members get to help one another through genuine acts of love and support. Not only has God created us and adopted us into this family, but He has also given us one another. For this reason, we can be thankful and keep giving!

APPLICATION

How do you know if your giving is truly generous? What next step do you need to take to live in thankfulness to God through generous giving?

How can our group hold each other accountable to being truly joyful and generous in our giving to the work of God?

With whom specifically can you share the generosity of God this week?

PRAYER

Thank God for His incredible generosity to you in Christ. Thank Him for the privilege of giving generously for the purpose of helping others and making much of Him. Ask Him to help you joyfully complete the desire He has put in you to give generously, not letting circumstances or fear keep you from it.

COMMENTARY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

8:1-5. When Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans, he indicated that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had “been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” and that he would take the contribution to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-27). Paul mentioned the offering also in Acts 24:17. Paul had assigned Titus the task of collecting the offering in Corinth. The problems in the church there had delayed the process. Paul, however, wanted Titus to complete the task (2 Cor. 8:6).

Why were the Jerusalem Christians in such dire straits at this time? Perhaps the primary reason was that the unbelieving Jews persecuted Jewish Christians. These Christians must have been socially and economically ostracized. Their businesses in many cases were ruined. Moreover, when large numbers of Jewish pilgrims were converted at Pentecost, many of them apparently chose to remain in Jerusalem, thus worsening the economic crisis. Some interpreters believe the early Christian communal life was a failure, thus adding to the crisis (Acts 4:34-37). Luke, however, made no statement of disapproval regarding the community of goods. Instead, he recorded that “abundant grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

Why did Paul remind the Corinthian church of a monetary offering in view of the church’s problems with which he earlier had dealt? Perhaps Paul felt that Christians who are right with God in stewardship matters also will be right with one another in other matters. You may recall that the Corinthian church already had begun to collect the offering a year earlier (8:10). The Greek word for grace occurs five times in 8:1-9 where it is variously translated grace (vv. 1,9), favor (v. 4), and “gracious work” (vv.

6,7). When used of God, the term refers to His unmerited favor. When used of Christians, the word may refer to our expressions of kindness to others in response to God's grace toward us.

Paul used the churches of Macedonia (located at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) as a great model of generous and joyful giving. In contrast to the wealthier Corinthian church, the Macedonians experienced deep poverty (v. 2). They also suffered persecution. Yet the Macedonian Christians gave sacrificially, generously, and voluntarily. By the phrase beyond their ability (v. 3), Paul perhaps meant that the Macedonians gave sacrificially from their meager supplies. They even begged to give (v. 4)! Having gone beyond Paul's expectations, the Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God (v. 5). The term first may refer to first in time or in importance. If it means first in time, the point is that giving oneself precedes other kinds of giving. If it means first in importance, the point is that their total giving of themselves to the Lord and to Paul was their most important act of giving. In application, the meanings are similar. They were willing to give themselves in service in any way needed.

8:6–9. Titus, a Gentile convert, apparently accompanied Paul to the Jerusalem Council with reference to requiring Gentile converts to be circumcised and to obey certain Jewish laws (Acts 15:2; Gal. 2:1) although others distinguish between the events recorded in Acts 15 and those in Galatians 2. Paul did not have Titus circumcised because circumcision had no part in salvation (Gal. 2:3). Titus was Paul's capable coworker in Corinth.

Second Corinthians 8:6 indicates that Titus had begun the task of collecting the offering in Corinth, and Paul wanted him to complete it. In 8:16–23 Paul expressed thanks to God that Titus shared Paul's deep concern for the Corinthians (v. 16). In verse 23 Paul indicated his high regard for Titus as Paul's "partner and fellow worker."

Although giving has little significance to some who profess to be Christians, the expression gracious work (v. 7) shows that Paul considered giving an act of grace. Paul urged the Corinthians to grow in the grace of giving. Instead of exercising his authority as an apostle, Paul chose to soften his appeal by stating that he did not intend his words as a command (v. 8). He wanted the Corinthians to give voluntarily. He also wanted to prove, or test, the sincerity of (their) love. The Greek word translated love in this phrase is *agape*, a self-giving love that results from God's

action toward us in Christ. Since love by nature is active, it demonstrates itself in helpful deeds (Jas. 2:14-17). In the expression earnestness of others, Paul referred to the Macedonians' generous and inspiring example of giving. Paul focused on the great generosity of the Macedonians in spite of their poverty (2 Cor. 8:1) to inspire the Corinthians to give.

Paul also appealed to the example of Christ to motivate the Corinthians (v. 9). Jesus is the supreme example of generous giving. Verse 9 may remind us of Philippians 2:5-11. Christ became poor in the sense of humbling Himself, taking the role of a servant, and experiencing suffering and death. He freely gave up the glory of heaven in order to make all who trust Him spiritually rich. Furthermore, Christ's emptying of Himself is to be understood in a personal way. He gave up everything for you and me. We may conclude that if Christ's supreme example of giving did not inspire the Corinthians to give, nothing else would.

8:10-11. In these verses Paul challenged the Corinthians to put their earlier good intentions into practice by completing what they had started. Paul suggested that the completion of their offering was to their advantage, or "profitable" for them. They had begun the project a year ago. Paul had suggested a plan of weekly offerings to reach their goal (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Presumably, their failure to complete the project either had stemmed from lack of concern or from preoccupation with other matters.

Nevertheless, Paul urged the Corinthians to complete the project. He wanted them to act now (v. 11). What they needed to do was, not to renew their promise to give, but to actually give. The eager spirit they had demonstrated by their willingness to begin the task of collecting the offering needed at this point to be matched by action in completing the project. No matter how strong and good our intentions and desires may be, they are fruitless if we do not carry them through to completion of the action. Our failure to act on our intentions can harm our reputations. We need to put good intentions into practice. Although the Macedonians had given beyond their ability (v. 3), Paul challenged the Corinthians to give according to their ability (v. 11). Paul did not intend the collection to be a burden to the Corinthians.

8:12. Verse 12 builds on verse 11. The word translated readiness also means "willingness." Since the Corinthians previously had expressed a willingness to give, Paul currently was concerned with their present willingness, as well as with their performance. The motive was important. Moreover, the amount they gave was to be based on what the people possessed, not on what they did not have.

8:13-14. Paul did not expect the Corinthians to burden themselves so that others might live in ease at their expense. Paul did not want the Corinthians to cause themselves hardship by giving. Paul stressed equality. Paul viewed all believers as comprising one spiritual body of Christ, the church. When any part of the body of believers hurts, the other parts have a responsibility to help the ailing part (see 1 Cor. 12:12-27). In particular, the wealthier Corinthian church ought to help the suffering Judean Christians. God uses Christian giving to meet human needs. On the other hand, Paul did not teach that a wealthier Christian should support an idle church member (2 Thess. 3:10). All Christians are interdependent and our mutual sharing can benefit one another. Thus, in 2 Corinthians 8:12-14 Paul presented the principles of proportionate and reciprocal giving.