

Good morning, friends and welcome to Foothills Church. This morning, we continue our Corinthians Series. In this series we have been learning how to become the people God has called us to be as followers of Jesus. Today we will be looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 8. Having wrapped up a discussion of Paul's method and message of ministry, Paul shifts gears to talk about generosity.

Paul brings up this topic of generosity because he has shared with the churches across Greece and Macedonia about a famine that has struck the region of Judea and the church in Jerusalem is struggling. Paul has invited the churches to raise funds so that Paul and his team can take the collection back to Jerusalem and help them in their time of need.

As Paul encourages the Corinthian church, he challenges them to be generous and support their fellow believers who are in a dire situation. That is why I'm calling this message: Called to be richly generous. Today in Paul's challenge we find seven principles. (Because 7 is a holy number)

Principle number one. Generosity is rooted in God's grace towards us. Let's look together at verses 1-4.

Paul begins by highlighting how God's grace has been given to the churches of Macedonia and they responded to that grace by being generous. Grace is the key word in this passage and Paul uses it five times in these 15 verses. Grace is unmerited favor shown to someone. Grace is when you show kindness to someone even if they don't deserve it. Commentator Paul Barnett explains grace like this. "The grace of God is his attitude of unconditional kindness shown toward us. This was manifested in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ whom Paul also

thinks of as God's "gift" and in the hearing of that word from God which reconciles men and women to God."¹

God has poured out his grace upon the church in Corinth and upon us, by sending his Son Jesus to make atonement for us and bring us salvation and reconciling us to God. That is unmerited favor and unconditional love. Because God has poured out his grace on us, we naturally respond by being gracious towards others and generous. This is how it played out in the Macedonia Churches. These included the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. These churches heard about the hardship and struggle that the Jerusalem church was facing and they begged for the opportunity to help, even though they themselves were enduring their own "severe test of affliction."

In other words, these churches who had very little for themselves, gave more than seemed possible in a response to the generous grace God had shown them. This reminds me of the story of the Widow's offering. Mark chapter 12:41 "And he (Jesus) sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

These poor churches gave all they could and more, in response to God's grace. In contrast, the city of Corinth was a wealthy city, and presumably the people in the church had financial resources far above those of the Macedonian churches. Yet they need to be challenged to be generous.

¹ Barnett, Paul. New International Commentary on the New Testament: 2 Corinthians. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997.

Second Principle. Generosity is born out of submission to God. Look at verse 5. This is such an important verse. They gave themselves first to the Lord. The priority of these Macedonian churches was to submit themselves to God, to give themselves to God before anything else. They submitted to his purpose, his desires, his priorities, and his work. This includes submitting their money and resources to God and his will.

I often wonder why money is so difficult for us to submit or surrender to God. Of all the things that God asks us to surrender to him, why is money so hard? Honestly it seems easier to submit just about everything else. We surrender our day to the Lord. We wake up and say, here I am Lord, I surrender my day to you, however you want to use me, whatever comes, I'm yours. Seems too easy to say. When we struggle with decisions, God make your choice clear, show me your path, I'll go wherever you lead me. Our fears, God I surrender my fears to you, I submit to you will for my life. Whatever it is, it feels easy to say those things and try to live them out.

But when it comes to money it is so hard. Money has this emotional bond to our hearts and sometimes we hold on to our money so tightly that it is hard to let go and submit to God. What if we don't have enough? What if we can't do the things that we want to do? What if we need it later in life? And we wrestle with our desire to trust God and submit to him, and our desire to control and keep what we have. It's like, Ok God, I submit myself to you, I surrender my finances to you, I trust you to provide for me and my family, but maybe we can wait until after Black-Friday. I really need to get some good deals on Christmas gifts. It's so hard. Its so hard we don't even want to talk about.

Talking about money in church is the fastest way to make people squirm and uncomfortable. Well, maybe politics, that might be just as bad. But nobody wants to talk about money in church, it makes us so uncomfortable. I think that we have this emotional connection to money and what we perceive that it can provide for us. But the tighter we grip money the tighter it grips us.

Matthew 19:16 Jesus says: "And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" **17** And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." **18** He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, **19** Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **20** The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" **21** Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." **22** When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

The harder we try to grip and hold on to our money, the harder it holds on to us, and the harder it will be to submit to the Lord.

This can only change when we finally recognize that all we have belongs to God and we are merely stewards of his resources. Think about how much easier it is to spend someone else's money than to spend your own money. Everything you have comes from God, from his faithful provision in your life. Maybe you feel like that is unfair because you work hard for your money, every dime you have you earned. True. But who gave you life and breath and intelligence and ability to work hard? Generosity begins with, is born out of submitting everything we are and everything we have to God and then following his will and direction in every area of life including our money.

This leads to our **third principle**: Generosity is to excel like every spiritual practice. You and I are to excel at giving the same way we are to excel at other spiritual practices. Look at verse 6-7. These Corinthians are apparently well resourced in several ways. Not only are they well educated, well cultured, and well-resourced materially, it seems that God has blessed them with all the spiritual gifts necessary for a healthy church body.

In Paul's opening greeting to them in 1 Corinthians he says, "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed."

Paul is attempting to encourage them and motivate them by emphasizing how God has blessed them in so many ways. Again, it's a reference to the numerous ways God has graciously been generous with them.

And the same way God has treated them; they are to treat others. And in the same way they have been eager, go-getters in developing the other gifts God has graced them with, they are to be eager go-getters in developing the gift of generosity. And it takes practice to excel. We have to practice over and over again until it feels natural.

This last Spring I taught a spiritual formation class in Foothills academy and every week we practiced a different spiritual discipline. Things like prayer, silence, fasting, sabbath rest, things like that. None of the books or resources I read for that class said anything about the spiritual discipline of generosity. What a shame. Sometimes we need to practice exercising our spiritual gifts, so we can grow in understanding our giftings and how God uses us. The same goes for generosity. We should strive to be good at it, just like all the other spiritual practices.

Principle number four: Giving demonstrates genuine love. Look at Verses 8-9.

Paul is not commanding or demanding that the Corinthians be generous, but he is challenging them to show their love for their fellow believers by being generous. He doesn't want the Corinthians to give because of

some external command or pressure. That would be giving for the wrong reasons. Instead, Paul is challenging the church to give because genuine love is demonstrated by generous giving. This is why Jesus said "store up for yourselves treasure in heaven where neither moth or rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:20-21). When our heart is aligned with God's heart, generosity will be a natural and joyful outcome.

Of course Paul uses Jesus as the ultimate example of generosity. Jesus who is by very nature God. Jesus who existed for all eternity with the Father and the Spirit in perfect unity in heaven, enjoying all of God's glory. This Jesus emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even on a cross (Phil 2:7-8).

Jesus who was rich, became poor. So that by his poverty, you might become rich. In short, Jesus demonstrated his sincere love for you, not by grasping, hoarding or being stingy, but by giving of himself richly and generously. And nothing demonstrates our sincere love of God and his work in the world more clearly than when we are richly generous. Your love for God and his love for you will overflow in generosity towards others.

The Fifth principle is another practical one. Giving requires intentional follow through. Look at verses 10-11. So apparently about a year before this letter the church in Corinth heard about the struggle in Judea and the struggling believers in Jerusalem and the Corinthians go really excited to help. Well as time went by, that excitement waned and eventually died out. Like any parent, Paul is challenging them to follow through and complete what they had said they wanted to do.

I think we all struggle with this sometimes. We get excited about something, some project or goal or whatever, and we jump in with both feet so excited, and then as time goes by the excitement and enthusiasm

wanes and some time around January 15th we are over it. Like so many things in our distracted lives, giving requires follow through. While giving and generosity come from the heart, it shouldn't be a purely emotional thing. Giving is a decision and following through requires some intentionality.

- It requires analyzing the income God has allowed you to have.
- It requires figuring out the amount God wants you to give.
- It requires giving that amount willingly, as first fruits, not leftovers.
- It requires sticking to the plan and resisting the temptation to be self-centered or greedy.
- It requires discipline.

The Sixth principle is a healthy reminder that Giving is to be proportionate. Look at verses 12-13. Yes Paul used Jesus as an example of generosity, yes we may have to make sacrifices in order to be generous, it will cost us to give, but it should be proportionate to what we have, not what we don't have.

In other words, poverty is not a virtue! The idea of generosity is not to give so much that you end up needing assistance from others. That's counterproductive. Doesn't help anyone. No, we work hard, we plan our budget, we stay disciplined, we pay our bills, and we ask God how to be generous, and then follow through with what he says.

Now I get it. Things are tough right now for a lot of people. The government shutdown is stretching into week four, inflation is still killing us, insurance rates are going up every year, chicken costs \$6 a pound on sale, the job market is tough, people are losing jobs to AI. It's rough I get it. I'm not pretending that we all have stacks of cash laying around that we don't know what to do with. And over the years I have talked to a lot of people who tell me they want to give, they want to tithe to the church or help others out, but things are just so tight right now they can't afford it. I get it. My advice is always the same.

God cares more about the heart than the number. He wants us to practice giving and trusting and being generous even if it is just a little bit. Trust God by giving a few dollars a week and see if you even miss it. Take that tiny step of faith and surrender to God and give a little bit and see what he does. The Widow's two little copper coins were so impressive because she gave what she had to give. God doesn't want you to be generous with what we don't have, he asks us simply to be generous with what we do have, even if it is just a small amount.

All right, **here is our final principle**, number seven God supplies just what we need. Verse 15.

When the Israelites were traveling through the wilderness for 40 years, God fed them with mana from heaven. It fell to the ground like dew in the morning, and they would go out and gather enough for the family for each day. If they tried to gather too much it would spoil, but when they gathered enough for the sabbath it would last two days.

If God is challenging you to be generous, he will supply you with just what you need. Now the tricky thing is having a healthy understanding of what we need verses what we think we need but that is something we all have to learn and work out. God will supply just what we need when he calls us to be generous, we simply have to trust him.

I like to end with some questions to challenge us as we head out.

1. Have you recognized the grace that God has poured out in your life through his unconditional love? If you don't understand or have never experience God's grace, come talk to me after the service.
2. Is there any area of your life that you have not submitted to God? Any sin that you need to surrender to him? Any relationship? Any dreams or goals? Any fears or concern? Putting your faith in Jesus as savior is the first step, submitting to Jesus as Lord of your life is the second, and it's hard. It requires daily surrender and is only

possible by the power of the Spirit. What do you need to submit to him this morning?

3. How has Jesus shown his generosity towards you and how does that motivate you to be generous towards others?
4. How are you doing on follow through? If God has called you to be generous in a specific way, are you following through?

Let's Pray!