

# GRACE GIVING

## A Devotional Prayer Guide on the Subject of Financial Stewardship

### Prayer Time #7 Riches of Poverty

Focal Passage: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

*Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*

Dr. W. A. Criswell told of an ambitious young man who learned an important lesson about giving. When the man was making \$40 per week, he vowed to the Lord to tithe his income. He asked the Lord to bless his career and promised to tithe on his income. He told his pastor about his commitment. The Lord opened the door for the man to take a job paying \$500 per week. The young man called his pastor, telling him about his new income, and asked if he could be released from his vow to tithe his income. The pastor told the young man to come by the church and he would speak with him about it and pray with him. The man went by to see the pastor and told the pastor that he just couldn't afford to tithe on an amount as great as \$500 per week. The pastor said, "let's take this to the Lord in prayer." The pastor began to pray. "Oh, Lord," he prayed, "this brother made a commitment to tithe his income when he was making \$40 per week, but now he's making \$500 per week, and he says he cannot afford to tithe on that income. Dear Lord, please reduce this young man's income so he can afford to tithe again." Do you think the young man said "amen" to that prayer?

As you read the focal passage and this devotional message, prepare your heart for a season of prayer. The matter at hand is not a matter of having too much, like the young man in the story, but having little. Abundance often creates a situation where the heart of the giver loses the joy of giving. With plenty often comes want. With poverty often comes riches. It is a poverty of riches that reaps spiritual rewards from grace giving.

The Philippian church was a solid church. In his letter to them, Paul referred to them as "fellow partakers in the Gospel." (Phil. 1:3-4). He was overwhelmed by their kindness toward him by sending a gift to help assist him with his needs. The Lord used the model of the Philippian Church's generosity and heart for the spreading the Gospel to inspire Paul to present their joy in giving to other churches.

Paul's appeal to the Corinthians instructs believers about financial stewardship. In an earlier devotional, we learned giving is to be proportionate to income. As the Lord "increases us" we are to set aside an amount to give to the Lord. We need not allow the amount to become a stumbling block to us. The joy of grace giving can be drained by abundance. Thankfully the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write of the generosity of the Philippians. They gave out of want, not out of plenty.

Philippi was a Greek city conquered by the Romans. They didn't change the Greek name, but they did change its culture. They settled large numbers of retirees from the Roman army there. The common people in Philippi were not wealthy. In both Paul's letter to them, and in the letter in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, we discover they lived in poverty. The daily lives of the members of the Philippian

church was a struggle. If they were in existence today, we would describe them as “living hand to mouth,” or “barely scraping by.” Humanly speaking, they were the last place where one would expect to see grace giving taking place. They were giving so generously Paul set them before all other believers as an example.

Here in 2 Corinthians, Paul encourages the Christians to be joyful givers. The Philippians were joyful givers, despite their poverty. When you read this passage, you find words and phrases that are polar opposites, but are gloriously all true. Paul described the Philippians situation with these statements:

*Great ordeal of affliction*

*Deep poverty*

*Beyond their ability*

Day to day life was hard for the Philippian Christians; yet they were intent on being generous. They begged Paul to allow them to contribute toward the Lord’s work. Notice the result:

*Abundance of joy*

*Overflowed in the wealth of their liberality*

God is gracious toward grace givers! He pours out blessings upon those who have a heart to give. The Philippians blessing from Lord was not the filling of their bank account. There is no indication the Lord relieved them of their daily struggle to make ends meet. What the Lord did was give them joy amidst their daily lives and personal trials. The Philippians had what more money or more ease could never buy!

Grace giving levels the field as far as stewardship is concerned. It does not matter if we have an abundance or are in need. It is a matter of the heart. Is the challenge more for the person in want? In plenty? Both have their individual challenges, but the challenges are not the same. Each must have a heart for the Lord and a commitment to give generously. The Lord does not look at the amount, He looks at the heart. But the person in want deals with pressures unique to their situation.

Is more faith required by the person who lacks financial resources? Because giving for the person with few resources calls for the person to trust the Lord to meet their daily needs, yes. When they give when they are stretched already, so more faith is required. In those instances, the needy person is in an “preferred position.” Really? Yes! A person whose giving makes no earthly sense has the potential for unique joy. To have a heart to give when their bills are more than their bank account can handle, puts them in a spot where they can experience the grace of God in amazing ways.

Elijah was a prophet of God during the days of great wickedness in Israel. The Lord told him to proclaim a drought to King Ahab. Indeed, the famine was hard upon the people. Elijah spent two years living by a brook and being fed by ravens sent by the Lord. The brook dried up, so the Lord called him to take a leap of faith. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Lord sent him to the nation of Phoenicia. They were pagan idolators. They didn’t honor the Lord. This was a dangerous thing for Elijah to do. King Ahab hunted him relentlessly, believing him and his worship of the Lord to be the problem. He wanted to have him killed. The trip to Phoenicia required a cross-country trip. He was Israel’s Most Wanted! God was with him. But that’s not the most challenging thing God called Elijah to do. He was to seek daily sustenance at a widow’s house. In times of plenty a widow experienced

hardship. In a time of famine, the widow would really struggle. This poor lady struggled more than most. She had a child to feed.

The Lord led Elijah to this widow. She was picking up sticks to make a fire. Elijah approached her and asked for a drink. Hospitality was expected in that culture. When she was going for the water, Elijah called out and asked her to bring him some food. That stopped her in her tracks. She told Elijah about her situation. She had just enough food to make one last meal for her and her son. After that, they would begin to die of starvation. Elijah heard her sad story, but he challenged her in much the same way God challenged him. Elijah called out to her, “Don’t be afraid, go and do as you plan to do, but bring me food first, then prepare for yourself and your son. The Lord has promised that the little food you have will not run out until the drought is over.” (My paraphrase, 1 Kings 17) What a challenge! This lady was not a believer in the God of Israel, now some strange looking man comes to her out of the blue with a message from the Lord that made no earthly sense at all. She obeyed, and the result was truly amazing. The Lord supplied her needs, and her son, and Elijah’s for a year until the drought ended. She experienced a very special joy in the Lord each day, when by faith, she went to that bin of flour and reached for that container of oil. It was there each day.

Paul had told the Philippians this: “And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19) They were still impoverished years later, but they trusted the Lord. They eagerly supported the Lord’s work. They gave themselves to the Lord first, don’t miss that. The result was still poverty but with spiritual riches! No wonder they begged Paul for the opportunity to give. They gave expecting spiritual blessings in return.

God never ceases to provide spiritual blessings in return for faithful grace giving. You have heard the term, “you can’t outgive God?” It is true! There is never a challenge in stewardship that He cannot even more abundantly bless you in in return. Thank you for reading and have a blessed prayer time.

### **Suggestions for your prayer time:**

- Look closely at the focal passage and meditate upon the terms that describe the trials of the Philippians and the surpassing abundance and generosity they exhibited.
- Ask the Lord to increase your faith to give when your personal financial circumstances are not favorable.
- Consider how abundance might be robbing you of the joy of the journey of faith and grace giving.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you if you have used financial trials as an excuse to not give.
- Commit to the Lord to seek to make your giving a matter of faith.