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The Grace of Gospel Generosity

Read: 2 Corinthians 8:1–9

Introduction

C. T. Studd was a man of conviction. After coming to faith in Christ, he gave himself wholeheartedly to the service of the Lord. He once said, **“Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.”**¹

That statement captures something of the aim of his life. He had tasted much of what the world had to offer before his conversion, yet he later said that none of those pleasures compared with the joy he experienced when he first saw another soul come to faith in Christ.

The grace of God had so captured his heart that he wanted his life to be spent for the glory of Christ and the good of others.

While serving as a missionary in China with Hudson Taylor, Studd turned twenty-five years old. According to his father’s will, that was the age at which he was to receive a large inheritance.

But when the inheritance came, Studd did not view it as an opportunity to secure his own comfort. Knowing the faithfulness of God, knowing the grace of Christ, and knowing the needs of many others, he determined to give the entire inheritance away.

He gave large portions to George Müller’s orphanages, to gospel work, and to the needs of others as he became aware of them. He gave because the grace of God had loosened his grip on earthly treasure and had opened his heart toward the needs of others.

Studd is remembered for saying, **“If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”**

That is the language of a man who understood something of the grace of gospel generosity. He understood that the grace of Christ does not simply save sinners from judgment; it transforms the way they think about their lives, their possessions, their comfort, and the needs of others.

And that is exactly what Paul places before us in 2 Corinthians 8:1–9. In this passage, Paul shows us that true Christian generosity does not begin with guilt, pressure, or emotional manipulation. It begins with grace.

¹ This introduction is adapted from this article: <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/c-t-studd-gave-huge-inheritance-away-11630616.html> (Accessed on 6/10/2026)

Associate Pastor Adrian Garcia, Cornerstone Community Church

Main Point: 2 Corinthians 8:1–9 reveals three lessons in gospel generosity that call us to grow in the grace of God and reflect the generosity of Christ toward those in need.

Outline:

I. The Grace of God Produces Gospel Generosity (1–5)

II. The Grace of God Calls the Church to Gospel Generosity (6–8)

III. The Grace of God is Supremely Seen in Jesus' Generosity (9)

My prayer has been that the Lord would loosen our grip on the things of this world and open our hearts to gospel generosity towards others.

I. The Grace of God Produces Gospel Generosity (1–5)

In these verses, Paul presents the Macedonians as a powerful example of how the grace of God transforms our hearts so that we become instruments of God's generosity toward others.

For the sake of context, the occasion for the generosity Paul refers to in chapters 8–9 is the collection being gathered for the poor saints in Jerusalem as an expression of gospel unity.²

Let's look at verses 1–2, they read, **“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.”**

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know something about the **“churches of Macedonia.”** These likely included the churches associated with Paul's ministry during his second missionary journey, especially Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16:6–17:13; cf. 20:1–6).

Paul goes on to describe these churches as being in a **“great ordeal of affliction.”** The word **“ordeal”** carries the idea of testing, trial, or proving. These saints were facing ongoing hardship, adversity, and persecution that was testing the genuineness of their faith.³

Paul further describes their suffering by saying they were in **“deep poverty.”** This would have been an intense poverty that borders on destitution. One commentator rendered this phrase **“rock bottom poverty.”**⁴

This was not the experience of inflation or living paycheck to paycheck. Paul is describing a desperate need, a severe lack, and a level of poverty that left them with very little to live on.

² Cf. Acts 11:27–30; 24:17; Romans 15:25–27; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15; Galatians 2:10

³ Cf. Philippians 1:29–30; 1 Thessalonians 1:6–7; 2:14; 3:1–5; 2 Thessalonians 1:4

⁴ C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1973), 219.

Paul then tells us that the Macedonians had an **“abundance of joy”** in the midst of these afflictions. As they are suffering greatly from persecution and poverty, they had a heart that was full and rich with a surplus of joy

In turn, that abundance of joy **“overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.”** The word **“liberality”** carries the idea of sincere concern,⁵ of genuine devotion, of pure motives. This is a heartfelt sacrificial generosity.

How was this possible? Paul gives us the answer at the very beginning of the section: **“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia.”**

The **“grace of God”** was the cause of the Macedonians’ generosity. It was the enablement, the reason, the source, the root, the underlying motive, and the foundation of everything they gave. All true gospel generosity is the result of God’s saving and sanctifying grace in a person’s heart.

In other words, one evidence that we truly know God and have experienced His grace is that His love and generosity begin to be displayed through us.

Paul then gives us five marks of gospel grace generosity.

First, gospel grace generosity is sacrificial. Notice the first part of verse 3, **“For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability...”**

This means the Macedonians gave as much as they could, as much as they were able, as much as their resources allowed. And yet Paul testifies that they went even beyond that. They gave sacrificially.

Second, gospel grace generosity is voluntary. Look at the second part of verse 3, **“they gave of their own accord...”**

The expression **“of their own accord”** is one Greek word meaning “of their own volition,” “voluntarily,” or “entirely on their own.” One English Bible renders it, “simply because they wanted to” (CEV).

In other words, they were not under compulsion. They did not give reluctantly. They were not pressured, manipulated, or coerced. They gave freely, gladly, and willingly from the heart.

⁵ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 104.

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Third, gospel grace generosity is earnest. Look at verse 4, **“begging us with much urging...”**

The words **“begging”** and **“urging”** show how earnest and motivated the Macedonians were to express their generosity. They were urgently appealing, insisting, pleading, and imploring that they be allowed to participate in this service.

It is possible that Paul urged them not to give, given their circumstances. They were barely getting by themselves. Yet they earnestly begged him for the joy and privilege of giving to the saints in need.

Fourth, gospel grace generosity expresses love for, concern for, and unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Look to the next phrase of verse 4, **“for the favor of participation in the support of the saints...”**

“Favor” tells us that the Macedonians viewed the opportunity to give as a gracious privilege from God. They understood the truth of Jesus’ words: **“It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35).

They also understood that **“participation”** (*koinōnia*) meant sharing in fellowship and partnership with the other churches who were giving, as well as with the saints in Jerusalem who would receive the gift. Their giving visibly displayed the unity of Christ’s church.

The word **“support”** shows that this contribution was an act of ministry. They longed for the gracious privilege of sharing in practical service to the saints who were in need.

Fifth, gospel grace generosity is ultimately an act of devotion to the Lord. Look at verse 5, **“and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”**

Paul notes that they first gave themselves in wholehearted devotion to the Lord. Their desire was to serve Him and do what was pleasing to Him. This was their aim.

Then Paul says they gave themselves **“to us by the will of God.”** In other words, because they were first devoted to the Lord, they also submitted to Paul’s God-given leadership as an apostle. Their willingness to participate in the collection showed that they recognized his authority and were eager to follow the Lord’s will through His faithful servants.

These are the five marks of gospel generosity, and this is the example Paul has set before us.

Whenever we have watched a Rocky movie and the training montage comes on before the final fight, I suddenly feel inspired to get up off the couch and start doing push-ups.

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I think the boys take after me. When they have watched the Disney movie *McFarland, USA*, they have actually gone outside in the middle of the movie and started running laps around the house.

A compelling example often motivates us to action. That is what Paul is doing with the Corinthians and us. He is placing the Macedonians before us as an example of grace-filled generosity.

This example shows us where we still need to grow in the grace of God. Do our hearts have an abundance of joy even in the midst of suffering, persecution, poverty, or any other test of our faith?

Are we characterized by generosity toward others? Are we willing to give sacrificially to meet the needs of others? Do we give willingly? Do we give eagerly? Do we have a genuine love and concern for other believers?

It is worth remembering that the Macedonians had likely never met the saints in Jerusalem. Yet they begged for the favor of ministering to them. In love, I have to ask, do we even make an effort to know, love, and serve the brothers and sisters who belong to the same local church as us?

Do we give as an act of service to God, or do we give because we hope to gain some benefit for ourselves? Speaking of serving the Lord, we must consider that for some of you to give financially isn't a problem. But remember, it says the Macedonians gave themselves.

Do you give yourselves in service to the Lord by serving your brothers and sisters within our home church?

The heart of what this passage is getting at is the recognition that everything we have belongs to the Lord. We need to ask "Lord, how would you have me steward my time, gifts, and resources for your people and the advancement of the gospel?"

These are questions that we need to prayerfully consider before the Lord. God desires that we would be a gospel transformed generous people. That is God's heart for His children, and that is Paul's heart for the Corinthians in the next point...

II. The Grace of God Calls the Church to Gospel Generosity (6–8)

In these verses, we see that Paul pastorally wants to see the same grace that is at work Macedonian believers to be at work in the Corinthians.

Look at verse 6, **"So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well."**

Titus had already been involved with them and had apparently helped begin this collection for the saints in Jerusalem. Now, after reporting the Corinthians' positive response to Paul's earlier letter, Titus was being sent back to Corinth to help bring this **"gracious work"** to completion (2 Corinthians 7:6–7, 13–16; 8:16–17; 12:18).

In what follows, Paul gives us a model of faithful shepherding, of biblical discipleship, and of godly leadership. His desire of seeing this grace at work in the Corinthians is communicated in a winsome and genuinely loving way.

First, he affirms the grace of God already at work in them. Look at verse 7, **"But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you..."**

He says they **"abound in everything."** They had been strengthened in faith, enriched in speech and knowledge, and this was by the gift of God's grace (1 Corinthians 1:4–7). They had also shown real earnestness, repentance, and love in response to Paul's previous letter (2 Corinthians 7:8–11, 15–16).

He doesn't want to discourage them, so he shows them all the ways God's grace has already been evident in their lives. But now he wants to see that grace continue to grow in a particular area...

Second, he encourages them to abound in grace of gospel generosity. Look at the last part of verse 7, **"see that you abound in this gracious work also."**

Just as God's grace had produced other virtues in their lives, Paul now urges them to see that this same grace produces the virtue of generosity. Again, we see that those who have received an abundance of grace from God should also abound in the grace of giving to meet others' needs.

Third, he doesn't appeal to his authority. Look at verse 8, **"I am not speaking this as a command..."**

Paul did not force them to give. Instead, he made a loving, gentle, and gracious appeal. He wanted them to arrive at the right conclusion willingly, not because he had pressured, domineered, or manipulated them into giving.

The influence of loving shepherding will always far exceed the effect of heavy-handed authority.

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Fourth, he desires that their gospel generosity would prove the sincerity of their love. Look at the last part of verse 8, **“but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.”**

The earnestness of the Macedonians served as an example for the Corinthians. Paul wanted the Corinthians examine their hearts and demonstrate the genuineness of their love for the Lord, the saints in Jerusalem, and for him.

This shows us that true love is not content with empty words. It must be fulfilled in meeting practical needs and sacrificial action (1 John 3:11, 16–18).

A husband can say to his wife, “I love you,” and he can say it sincerely. He can know the right things to say. He can speak warmly about his marriage. He can affirm the importance of sacrifice, service, and care.

But if his wife is sick, exhausted, and overwhelmed, and he sees the need but refuses to help, his words are hollow. At some point, love must move from words to action, from good intentions to real sacrifice.

That is what Paul is pressing upon the Corinthians. He is saying, “Let love prove itself here. Let this grace abound here also. Let your love for the Lord, for the saints, and for me become visible in sacrificial generosity.”

Based on Paul’s appeal in these verses, we need to beware of the tendency in our own hearts to abound in faith, speech, knowledge, prayer, service, and every other mark of Christian faithfulness, while remaining unwilling to be generous when a need is placed before us.

We must beware of a heart that is willing to speak of love, but unwilling to let go of money when love requires sacrifice. And living in the most prosperous nation in human history, we should keep Jesus’ exchange with the rich young ruler always in our minds.

Luke 18:18–24 “A ruler questioned Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.²⁰ “You know the commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’ ”²¹ And he said, “All these things I have kept from *my* youth.”²² When Jesus heard *this*, He said to him, “One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”²³ But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.²⁴ And Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!

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This man had morality, religion, and outward conformity. But Jesus exposed the grip that wealth had on his heart. It is possible to appear spiritually earnest in many ways, and yet still have a heart that clings tightly to earthly treasure.

Paul called the Corinthians, and God is calling us, to a grace fueled generosity that proves the sincerity of our love. At the beginning of this passage Paul used the Macedonians as a powerful example of this grace, but now he wants to point us to the ultimate example of generosity in Christ.

III. The Grace of God is Supremely Seen in Jesus' Generosity (9)

Look at verse 9, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”**

This verse gives us one of the most beautiful summaries of the gospel in all of Scripture. Pastor John Marc preached 2 Corinthians 5:21, and that verse may be one of the clearest single-verse summaries of the gospel, but this verse is a close second.

In this verse we find on the greatest conceivable contrasts, the greatest possible expression of sacrificial love. Christ, who was rich, became poor so that spiritually dead and poor sinners might become rich in Him.

First, Paul says, **“you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This is reminding the Corinthians of the truth they had already come to know personally. The grace of Christ that had saved them and transformed them. They knew this grace because they had received and experienced it.

Next, it reads, **“though He was rich.”** This is speaking of the riches Christ possessed in His preexistent heavenly glory. Before the incarnation, the eternal Son shared the glory, fellowship, honor, majesty, and blessedness of heaven.

He was rich in divine glory, rich in heavenly splendor, rich in all that belonged to Him as the eternal Son of God (John 1:1–3; 17:5; Colossians 1:15–17).

Yet, it says, **“for your sake He became poor.”** He willingly gave up the privileges of heavenly glory and humbled Himself. He took on human nature. He entered this fallen world. He became a servant. He knew rejection, sorrow, weakness, and suffering.

Christ's poverty included the humiliation of the incarnation, but it does not stop there. The Son of God did not merely come from the splendor of heaven to the fallenness of this earth. For the joy set before Him, He came to bear the cross.

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He assumed the debt of our sin and paid for it with His life. He was rejected by men, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and made a curse for us so that we might receive the blessing of salvation (Isaiah 53:4–6; Galatians 3:13–14; 1 Peter 1:18–20).

This is why the verse says, **“for your sake.”** The grace of Christ was personal and purposeful. He became poor for the salvation of His people. He entered our poverty, experience our pain, and bore our penalty. He did this so that, by grace, we might receive His riches of righteousness.

Look at what it says, **“so that you through His poverty might become rich.”** These are not earthly riches. This verse isn’t teaching the false prosperity gospel. This is speaking of the spiritual riches of salvation.

The forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, righteousness in Christ, adoption as sons and daughters, eternal life, union with Christ, and the hope of sharing in His glory and inheritance in the new heavens and new earth (Romans 3:22–26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:3–14; Titus 3:4–7).

This is the gospel. We were poor and utterly destitute in our sin. We had no righteousness of our own. We had no ability to pay our debt before God. We were spiritually bankrupt, guilty, and hopeless in our condition.

But Christ, in grace, made the greatest sacrifice that could ever be conceived. There is no greater price that could be paid. The Son of God, in some way that I can’t even fully understand or accurately explain, left the experience of His infinite glory.

He took on flesh, became like us, and He went to the cross. He bore the righteous infinite wrath of God against our sin that we deserved. He went from the highest possible conceivable glory to endure the lowest humiliation and punishment conceivable, for our sake.

He paid the debt we could never pay. And through His poverty, all who repent and believe in Him become rich in salvation.

This means that Christ is both the foundation and the pattern of Christian generosity. If Christ gave Himself for us, then it is not too much for Him to call us to give generously for the needs of others.

But this verse doesn’t just call us to generosity, it calls us to come to Christ. The greatest need in this room is not first that we would become more generous with our money. The greatest need is that every sinner would receive the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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If you are outside of Christ, you are spiritually poor, no matter how much you possess. You may have money, comfort, success, and religion, but without Christ you are bankrupt before God. The call of the gospel is to turn from your sin and trust in Christ.

For believers, this verse brings us back to the heart of gospel generosity. We do not give in order to earn grace. We give because we have received grace. We give because, in Christ, we already are rich beyond measure. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the source, the model, and the motivation for all true gospel generosity.

In my introduction I shared a quote the quote from C.T. Studd, he said **“If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”** May that be our heart.

Let’s pray.

Benediction: **Hebrews 13:20–21 (NASB95)**

²⁰ Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord, ²¹ equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.