SACRIFICE - Generosity Shaped by Grace

INTRODUCTION

Church family, picture a parent standing beside a hospital bed. They have rearranged their week, missed work, and barely slept. Someone brings them coffee and says, “You must be exhausted.” And they are. But they are staying, because the person in that bed is their child.

Love does that. It changes what we are willing to carry and what we are willing to give. It doesn’t make the cost imaginary. That parent still needs sleep. There are still responsibilities waiting at home. But love gives the sacrifice a purpose.

We understand that in our relationships. Yet when we hear the word sacrifice in church, something in us can tighten up. We start wondering what’s going to be asked of us. Maybe you have experienced a giving appeal that made you feel cornered. Maybe you want to be generous, but you are already wondering how this month is going to work.

I want us to bring those real experiences into the presence of Jesus today. Because Scripture has something deeper to say about sacrifice than simply trying harder or feeling worse until we give more.

In this series, we’ve remembered God’s faithfulness, considered what He has placed in our hands, and examined what our treasure reveals about our trust. Today we’re asking what happens when His grace begins to shape what we are willing to release.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul is organizing a collection for believers in Jerusalem who are experiencing material need. Romans 15:25–27 helps us see the larger picture. Churches in Macedonia and Achaia are sharing with believers in Jerusalem. Through this gift, Gentile believers are expressing their connection to the people through whom they received spiritual blessings.

This is family responsibility reaching across distance and cultural difference. People they may never have met matter to them because they belong to Christ together. Paul's immediate concern is relief for people in need. As we apply this passage to other opportunities for generosity, we need to keep that original purpose in view.

Macedonia was the region that included churches such as Philippi and Thessalonica. Paul tells the Corinthians what God has been doing among these believers, and the surprising part is that the Macedonians themselves are going through severe difficulty.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

Here is where this passage meets us: we can receive the generosity of Jesus while keeping parts of our lives closed to His leadership. We want His care, but we struggle to trust Him when obedience touches something we value.

Sometimes the root is fear. Sometimes it is comfort. Sometimes we have simply stopped noticing needs beyond our own. Whatever the root, we need grace that reaches deeper than our intentions and changes the way we love.

BIG IDEA: GRACE DOESN'T JUST CHANGE WHAT WE BELIEVE; GRACE CHANGES WHAT WE'RE WILLING TO GIVE.

SCRIPTURE READING

[Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–9 in full from the NIV Bible.]

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. [2] In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. [3] For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, [4] they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. [5] And they exceeded

our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. [6] So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. [7] But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. [8] I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. [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.

Listen to where Paul begins. Before he describes what the Macedonians gave, he identifies what God had given them: grace. That is the starting point for everything we are about to hear.

POINT 1 GRACE OPENS OUR HANDS

Look at verses 1–4. Paul puts severe trial, overflowing joy, and extreme poverty together. Those are not circumstances we would naturally expect to produce generosity. We might expect a conversation about all the reasons they could not participate.

But Paul describes believers who urgently wanted to share. Their hardship was real, and so was their joy in the Lord. God's grace was producing a freedom that their circumstances could not explain.

The Greek word charis appears repeatedly through this passage. It is translated grace in verse 1, privilege in verse 4, and appears in Paul's description of giving in verses 6–7. Paul keeps connecting the gift they received from God with the privilege of participating in His work. Their generosity belongs inside the story of His grace.

Grace opens our hands before circumstances make it easy.

That challenges the way we postpone generosity. We can always imagine a future season when obedience will feel more convenient. After the raise.

After the bills ease up. After life becomes predictable. Some seasons really do give us greater capacity. But a life without uncertainty keeps moving further down the road.

The Macedonians didn't wait for every difficulty to disappear before they cared about somebody else's difficulty. They recognized that grace had made them part of a larger family.

Verse 4 describes sharing in this service. The word for sharing is koinonia, a word used for fellowship or participation. Here, fellowship takes a material form. Their connection to other believers becomes visible through practical help. They want a part in carrying the need.

Acts 11:27–30 gives us another picture of this. When believers in Antioch learn of a coming famine, they determine to send help to believers in Judea, each according to their ability. The family connection becomes action. That is one of the ways the Gospel teaches us to see people.

You know how this can work in ordinary life. You are tired, your week is full, and then you hear that someone has lost a loved one. Suddenly, you start asking different questions. Could we bring dinner? Could I watch the kids? Could we help with that expense? Love makes their situation part of your concern.

Generosity is that willingness to share what has been entrusted to us for the good of another. Stewardship includes managing our whole lives faithfully. Generosity is one vital expression of that stewardship as we release resources to love and serve.

Now, verse 3 says the Macedonians gave according to their ability and even beyond it. We need to hear both the extraordinary sacrifice and the freedom Paul describes. They acted voluntarily. Paul is bearing witness to their response; he is not prescribing one financial threshold for every household.

And we need to read the rest of the chapter. In 2 Corinthians 8:12–14, Paul explains that willingness is measured in relation to what someone has, and

he rejects the idea of relieving others while leaving the givers hard pressed. His vision includes mutual care. Those with resources help those in need, and circumstances may later change.

If you are struggling to provide food or housing, church family, let us know. We want to walk with you. Receiving help belongs in this passage too. Our church should be a place where needs can be spoken honestly and met with dignity.

For all of us, the question is whether we are available to God in the season we actually have. Where might grace be opening your hands today?

POINT 2 GIVE YOURSELF FIRST

Verse 5 explains the heart beneath the offering. The Macedonians gave themselves first to the Lord and then, by God's will, to Paul and his companions. Their participation in the collection grew from their prior surrender to Jesus.

Before the gift, they gave themselves.

That takes us deeper than deciding what portion of our lives God can have. These believers understood that they belonged to Him. The offering became one expression of that belonging.

Romans 12:1 follows the same movement. In view of God's mercy, Paul calls believers to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice. Mercy comes first. Then our everyday lives become a response of worship.

We sometimes use the word surrender as though it describes one emotional moment. There are moments when God meets us powerfully, and we need them. But surrender also becomes visible on Tuesday afternoon when we have a decision to make. What do I do with this money? How do I respond to this need? What gets priority in my calendar?

Think about the difference between letting a guest sit in your living room and giving somebody the keys to your house. A guest gets access to the

room you prepared. Someone with the keys can encounter the room you haven't cleaned yet. That can feel a lot more personal.

There may be areas of our lives where we have welcomed Jesus' encouragement while resisting His authority. We want comfort about our finances, but we hesitate to ask Him about our spending. We want peace about our future, but we struggle to let Him examine our plans.

The same grace that forgives us is the grace that forms us.

That is part of what we mean when we talk about holiness. The Holy Spirit works in us so that love for God and neighbor increasingly shapes our whole lives. He addresses our motives and habits, and He enables us to respond. Titus 2:11–14 describes grace teaching us how to live and Christ forming a people eager to do good.

So we can come honestly before Him. "Lord, I am afraid of not having enough." "Lord, I have become attached to this." "Lord, I want to obey, but I need Your help." Those prayers are a good place to begin.

And surrender includes wisdom. First Timothy 5:8 takes care for one's household seriously. We should never use a giving appeal to dismiss the responsibilities God has entrusted to people. Faithful generosity belongs alongside faithful care, honest planning, and healthy conversations.

For married couples sharing finances, a significant decision deserves prayer together and a willingness to listen. One person's sense of urgency does not cancel the need for unity and careful discernment.

Still, wisdom should leave us open to the Lord's direction. It is possible to make a plan so protected from inconvenience that nothing can interrupt it, including love. We need the Spirit's help to recognize when prudent planning has become a way of avoiding obedience.

So begin where the Macedonians began. Give yourself to the Lord. Ask Him to shape the heart that will make the decision.

POINT 3 LET GRACE BECOME ACTION

In verses 6–7, Paul turns toward the Corinthians and the work Titus has begun among them. They have already expressed willingness to participate. Paul wants them to carry that willingness through to completion.

He recognizes their faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, and love. Then he calls them to grow in this grace of giving as well. Financial generosity belongs within spiritual maturity. It is part of the life Jesus is forming in His people.

That is worth letting settle. We can know a great deal about Scripture and still resist its direction at the point of our resources. We can speak sincerely about love and leave a need untouched that we have the ability to help meet.

Grace grows generosity into follow-through.

As the chapter continues in 2 Corinthians 8:10–11, Paul urges them to complete what they began. Readiness needs a practical response. For some of us, that is the next step. We have been willing in principle for a long time.

We have thought about helping that family. We have intended to begin giving regularly. We have talked about simplifying a part of our spending. But the decision keeps getting deferred, and the good intention never becomes help somebody can receive.

James 2:15–17 brings that tension close to home. If a brother or sister needs clothing and food, kind words alone leave the need unmet. Living faith expresses itself in action. Paul is calling the Corinthians toward that kind of concrete love.

Verse 8 also matters. Paul says he is not issuing a command. He puts the earnestness of others before them as a challenge to the sincerity of their love. He takes their discipleship seriously while leaving their response voluntary.

That means freedom and challenge belong together. We can invite one another to grow without deciding someone else's gift. We can speak clearly about sacrifice while trusting the Holy Spirit to lead people.

Sacrifice has a real cost. It may mean postponing something we wanted, changing a habit, or releasing resources we had planned to retain. God knows how that cost differs from household to household. We cannot read someone's faithfulness from the size of a donation.

Second Corinthians 9:7 describes a considered decision of the heart, made freely. There is room for prayer and thought. There is also a decision to make. What would it look like for your willingness to become a faithful action this week?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Now Paul brings us to verse 9. Everything he has said about generosity rests on what Jesus has done for us. Before he asks the Corinthians to complete their offering, he calls them to remember their Savior.

[Read 2 Corinthians 8:9 again from the NIV Bible.]

Listen to those words: "for your sake." Paul makes this personal. The grace we are talking about has come toward you through the self-giving love of Jesus.

When Paul describes Jesus as rich, he takes us beyond money. John 17:5 gives us a glimpse of the glory the Son shared with the Father before the world began. The One through whom all things were made entered the world He had created. Philippians 2:5–8 describes His humility: He took the form of a servant, became truly human, and humbled Himself to death on a cross.

He remained truly God. He willingly entered our weakness and suffering as a human being. And His journey took Him all the way to the cross, where He gave His life for us.

Church, we need to understand why we needed that sacrifice. Scripture tells us that all of us have sinned. We have turned from God, resisted His authority, and failed to love Him and our neighbors. Our deepest problem reaches further than a habit of holding on to our money. We need forgiveness and reconciliation with the God we have sinned against.

We cannot make that right by becoming generous enough. We could empty our bank accounts and still be unable to remove our guilt. Ephesians 2:8–9 tells us that salvation is God's gift, received by grace through faith. We come to Him with empty hands.

Jesus gave Himself to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

First Peter 2:24 tells us that He bore our sins in His body on the cross. Our sin was real, and His sacrifice was sufficient. Second Corinthians 5:19–21 describes God reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. Through the sinless Savior who gave Himself for us, we can be brought into a right relationship with God.

And on the third day, Jesus rose bodily from the grave. First Corinthians 15:3–4 places His death for our sins and His resurrection at the center of the Gospel. Our Savior is alive. He has conquered death, and everyone who trusts Him receives a living hope that reaches beyond the grave.

That helps us hear what Paul means when he says we become rich through Christ's poverty. He is speaking of the riches of salvation: forgiveness, reconciliation, belonging to God's family, and the hope of eternal life. The Macedonians were already receiving those riches while experiencing material poverty. This verse gives us no promise that a financial gift will make us wealthy.

But it gives us something far greater to rest our lives upon: the love of the Savior who gave Himself for us.

Some of you need to receive that grace today. You do not have to fix your life before you come to Jesus. Turn toward Him in repentance and faith. Tell

Him the truth about your sin. Trust His death and resurrection for your salvation. He welcomes those who come to Him.

And for those of us who follow Jesus, His grace continues its work. Titus 2:11–14 shows us grace training us to live differently as Christ forms a people eager to do good. The Holy Spirit brings the love of Jesus into the places where fear, greed, or comfort have been directing us. He gives us power to obey.

Our giving answers grace; it never purchases it.

So when we say, "Give yourself first," remember whose hands you are placing your life into. You are entrusting yourself to the One who loved you and gave Himself for you. Romans 8:32 points us toward the Father's generosity in giving His own Son. We can trust His character as we listen for His direction.

That is where surrender can begin: "Jesus, You have given Yourself for me. I belong to You. By Your Spirit, teach me to love with open hands."

BOTTOM LINE

WHEN GRACE HAS YOUR HEART, GOD CAN LEAD YOUR HANDS.

That is what we have seen in this passage. Grace meets people in difficulty, brings them into surrender, and forms a willing response. The question before us is how we will respond to the grace we have received.

CHALLENGE: GIVE YOURSELF FIRST

Church, there is a phrase in verse 5 I want us to carry home: they gave themselves first to the Lord.

We can move past that phrase because we're interested in what they gave. Paul wants us to understand why they gave. Their generosity grew out of belonging to Jesus.

That brings the question close to home. Have I made myself available to His leadership? Can He speak into my plans? Can He interrupt a preference? Can He show me a need and ask me to become part of the answer?

It is possible to give something while keeping ourselves at a distance. We can make a contribution that leaves the deeper questions untouched. But these believers offered themselves. Their resources followed the direction of their hearts.

The offering began before they gave anything away.

So here is our challenge this week: **GIVE YOURSELF FIRST**.

Start with a simple prayer: "**Lord, I belong to You.**"

Let that prayer reach the places where you make decisions. Your calendar. Your spending. Your savings. The plans you are excited about. The things you are afraid of losing.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying what God has provided or planning wisely for the future. But even good things need to remain open to His leadership. Sometimes we become so attached to a plan that we stop asking whether God might be inviting us to change it.

Maybe you already know the place where this gets personal. Every time it comes to mind, you start explaining why the Lord couldn't possibly be asking you to touch it. Bring that conversation into prayer. You can be honest with Him about why it feels difficult.

"Lord, this makes me nervous."

"Lord, I worked hard for this."

"Lord, I had something else planned."

"Lord, help me understand what faithfulness looks like here."

God's grace meets us in that honest place. The Holy Spirit can expose what has a hold on us and give us the freedom to respond.

Then ask the next question: "**Lord, what would You have me give?**"

Keep that question practical. The Macedonians' surrender became help that other people could receive. Somebody's need was met because their love took the form of an offering.

For you, there may be a person to help, a gift to make, or a spending decision to change so that generosity has room to grow. There may be time or ability you need to offer. And because this passage specifically concerns material generosity, let the Lord speak into your finances too.

For some, the sacrifice will involve releasing a comfort. For others, it will mean changing a plan. Some may discover how tightly fear has been holding their resources. God knows the difference, and He knows how to lead each of us.

Sacrifice will not look identical in every household. The question is whether we are willing to follow Jesus when His leading has a real cost.

As you pray about Building for the Future, bring that opportunity before Him in the same way. Consider what you have, talk together if you share financial decisions, and ask what a willing, faithful response would look like.

Then follow through.

Choose one concrete act of generosity this week that reflects what you have prayerfully discerned. Give your willingness somewhere to go. Let it become care somebody experiences.

And when obedience feels costly, return to the grace of Jesus. Remember the One who gave Himself for you. Ask His Spirit for the strength to take the next step.

Church, give yourself first. Then, with your life open before Him, ask, "**Lord, what would You have me give?**"

INVITATION AND ALTAR RESPONSE

[Slow down. Allow room for silence.]

Church family, would you open your hands before the Lord? Before considering an amount, remember where the Macedonians began. They gave themselves first.

Some of you are ready to give your life to Jesus today. Turn toward Him. Ask for His forgiveness. Trust His death and resurrection for your salvation. If that is your response, I invite you to come forward so our prayer team can pray with you. If you are watching online, you can respond to Him right where you are and let our team know you would like prayer.

Others have followed Jesus for years, and the Spirit is bringing an area of resistance to your attention. Bring it to Him honestly. You may want to come for prayer as an expression of surrender. There is room to receive prayer for a financial need too. We are here to care for one another.

Let's begin with this prayer: **"Lord, I belong to You**."

[Pause for silent prayer.]

Now ask Him, "**Lord, what would You have me give?**" You don't have to manufacture an answer in this moment. Begin the conversation and keep listening this week.

[Pause. Allow space for prayer ministry.]

Father, thank You for welcoming us through Your Son. You know our needs, our responsibilities, and our fears. We place our lives in Your care.

Lord Jesus, thank You for giving Yourself for us. Through Your death and resurrection, You have brought us forgiveness and hope. Let Your grace deepen our love and shape our decisions.

Holy Spirit, search our hearts and lead us in wisdom. Free us from greed and fear. Give us willing hearts, courage to obey, and practical love for the

people around us. We offer ourselves to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

WEEKLY COMMISSION

This week, make room to pray, name a concrete response, and follow through. As you go to work, care for your family, and meet the needs around you, remember that you belong to Jesus. Let His grace shape what you do with what He has entrusted to you.

TRINITARIAN BENEDICTION

May the Father assure you of His faithful care. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ deepen your love and open your hands. And may the Holy Spirit give you wisdom and courage to follow His leading. Go in peace, church, with this prayer: "**Lord, what would You have me give?**" Amen.