



2 Corinthians 8:1-15 Give Generously

Summary: Generosity is a clear indication of a life touched by God.

Most of you know how we do things around here – we take a book of the Bible and we go through it, verse-by-verse for better or worse – meaning, we sort through whatever the text says whether we like it or not. I need you to know that as we dive in today, and for the next three weeks actually, because we’re going to be talking about giving and I need you to know: we’re not talking about it because the church needs money.

We’re talking about it, because God talks about it. Thanks to your faithful giving, this church is doing fine. But we still need to talk about giving, because, as we’ll see – it’s not really about your money- there’s an invisible, but powerful chain that runs from your wallet to your heart. Your finances are a direct reflection of your attitude toward God and the condition of your soul. Think about it, the opposite of generosity is greediness, the opposite of giving is hoarding. Financial decisions almost always have a hidden spiritual root.

So, we’ll spend the next three weeks looking at two chapters – 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, learning what God has to say about giving generously, giving personally, and giving cheerfully.

I want to highlight that last one up front – God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7). I am not here to pressure you to give. I have no desire to make you feel guilty. If you feel conviction from the Lord – and at some point, I think each of us will - that’s between you and God, but even then, the tone of everything we’re going to look at is grace, not guilt.

Giving is an opportunity, not an obligation – you get to participate in what God is doing, if you want to – but that’s the hard question: *do you* want to, do you *really* want to? Because, in order to give to God, you have to let go of things for yourself and that’s not so popular these days.

According to a recent study by Indiana University less than half of all US households made a charitable contribution of any kind in 2018. Less than half. The real number is 49.6% and that’s down 17 percentage points from the year 2000 when 66.2% of households donated. During the same time frame they observed a decrease in the amount of trust, empathy, and compassion Americans express for others. The two are not necessarily related, but it’s definitely suspicious.¹



¹ <https://philanthropy.iupui.edu/news-events/news-item/latest-data-shows-new-low-in-share-of-americans-who-donated-to-charity.html?id=363>

So, less than half of all households give to charities of any kind, but when people do, how much do they give?

Well, according to a separate report from Texas A&M last year, the average across all income levels, rich and poor - is between 1.4% and 2% of their income.² Half of that goes to religious organizations, which is the largest category of giving in this country by far, but that means, that nationwide, on average, people who give, give just under 1% of their income to churches, synagogues, and mosques, *and that's the largest category of giving!* Oh, and by the way, 80% of all charitable giving comes from individuals and foundations, not big corporate donors no matter how much they like to advertise their "giving back to the community."

We might like to *think* of ourselves as a nation full of generous people, but the numbers don't quite bear it out. So, let's dig into God's Word and see what we can learn about what generous giving looks like and when, where, how and why we should give.

As we do, here's what you need to know: Israel was in the middle of a pretty severe famine and the Apostle Paul was taking up a collection to help out the church in Jerusalem. So this is giving above and beyond what you might call tithing – it's a special collection to meet a need outside the local congregation – very similar to the way people react today, after a disaster or during a crisis, people want to give. Well, Paul is telling the church in southern Greece how the churches up north have already responded. He writes:

2 Corinthians 8:1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

If you're taking notes this morning, I'm going to give you six observations about those who give generously and here's the first one: they desire to give *even in hard times*. It's not a question of waiting until I've got more economic security. It's not a question of waiting until we've got this or that situation taken care of. No, the Macedonians, *in their deep poverty* and difficult circumstances, *wanted* to give!

These people who had their own problems, their own issues, counted it a privilege to be able to do something for someone else and begged to be able to help.

So, what keeps you from giving more than you do? What are the explanations or excuses you offer? Because, here's the sense I have when reading this – most of us would have been embarrassed or humbled to be there when the Macedonian church made its offering – having nothing, yet finding a way to give something.

² <https://econofact.org/are-rich-people-really-less-generous>

But now remember, this is all about grace, not guilt – they *wanted* to do it, they *begged* Paul to take their money. Something inside was prompting them. We learn more as we read:

5 And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God.

It all makes sense now, doesn't it? They weren't giving to Paul, or even really giving to the church in Jerusalem, *they were giving to the Lord*. In modern terms we might say, they wrote a check as an act of worship.

Here's the way I try to explain it today – you should give *to* God, *through* the church or wherever else you're giving. That applies to your money as well as your time and your resources – we do not give *to* the church, the person or the ministry – we give *to* God, *through* the church, the person, or ministry.

So, when you offer to babysit to help a family out you can do that *for the family*, so they will appreciate you and your kindness, or you can do it *for God* by serving the family as an act of worship. You can write a check *to* the church and think you've done something good, you've made a contribution, or you can write a check *to* God as a sacrifice, an act of worship and deposit it *into* the church for His glory. It's a small, but significant, difference.

So, if you're taking notes this morning, here's what I'm saying: generous givers give themselves to God first and everything else flows out of that. Your wallet, your calendar and your stuff follow your heart, they go where it leads. They are lagging, not leading, indicators. Which is why the goal is to have an open heart, not simply an open wallet.

Would you say it was a healthy marriage if a woman moved into her new husband's home, but also kept her own place, with her own stuff for those times when she felt like she just needed to get away and she kind of bounced back and forth between the two? Well, again, Scripture says we're the bride of Christ – so, have you moved in or not? Are you keeping separate accounts from God? Do you still have a storage shed full of stuff you're not ready to move in or get rid of? That's weird in a real marriage, it's even weirder in your relationship with God. What does He have that He won't share with you? So, what do you have that you're not quite ready to share with Him?

Here's something else to consider. God loves you. Wants the best for you. And *knows* what's best for you. Could it be that He wants you to give your time, money, and stuff in such a way that keeps you from causing harm to yourself and others?

Here's what I mean: maybe God wants you to give so that you won't have enough to spend on something or someone who might lead you astray. If giving your time, energy, or money means you won't have enough to X and X is not God's will for your life, then your "loss" is actually gain.

But, remember, the Macedonians aren't grumbling, griping, or complaining. They were happy to give *because* they first [gave themselves to the Lord](#) and experienced His grace.

Which brings us to the next observation we make as Paul encourages the Corinthians to be like the Macedonians:

[6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace \[note that word\] in you as well. 7 But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace \[there it is again\] also.](#)

For you note takers, here's point number three: generous givers are responding to God's grace. Now, if you've been around City Gates for a while you've probably heard us talk about this concept that we receive, then reflect. First, we receive the grace of God, the love of God, gifts from God, and then we reflect that to others. And it's always in that order – we cannot give what we do not possess. We need God to start the chain reaction – He shows love or kindness to us and that empowers us, resources us, with something to reflect to others.

Jump back up to verse one with me and notice what Paul wants the Corinthians to see:

[1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia](#)

Behind our English word grace is the Greek word Charis. So if you know someone named Karisa, or Karissa, her name means Grace. But also, this is where we get our English word Charity. So, what Paul is saying is: receiving grace from God enables us to reflect grace, or charity, to others. Receiving enables us to reflect.

He tells the Corinthians, your faith, your speech, your knowledge, your diligence, your love, all these things reflect what you have already received from God. Now, let your giving reflect Him too.

This is where it becomes so evident that truly Christian giving can never be compelled by guilt or manipulation or pressure – truly Christian giving is a response that reflects what has already been received. It's a joyful action that says, look at all God has done for me, given to me, now how can I use my time, my money, my stuff to help others in His name? How can I get on board with what He is doing?

Because – remember this – God was on a mission long before you came along. His Kingdom was advancing, His Spirit was moving, He was on track and on schedule centuries before you were born. He did it without you then and He'll do it without you when you're gone – but, if you're willing, there's a chance for you to get involved while you're here. There's a chance for you to receive the grace of God in your life and then reflect it to others. Look with me at:

8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Paul says I'm not going to tell you what you have to do, but I'm telling you this – point number four – generous givers follow the example of Jesus. When you give generously, of your time, your money, or your resources it looks like Jesus who has given so much for us.

Jesus' sacrifice didn't begin on the cross. Or even during His life which was never categorized by luxury or wealth. His sacrificial giving began back in Heaven when He agreed to set aside His rights, privileges, and position, and come to earth to save human beings. His entire life was one protracted act of sacrifice and service. So, what do we expect our life to be like as we "follow" Him?

Do we hope, or expect, that it will be filled with middle-class stability in the suburbs punctuated by the occasional concentrated sacrifice? Or, do we expect that it's going to be a long, steady, life of sacrificial service to God and others during a time of spiritual war?

Why do you have the stuff you have in the first place? The funds, the time, the experience, the skills, the interests, the job, why are you here where you are right now? Is it all just to make your life a little cushy? Is it all to give you more things to enjoy? More 'experiences'? Is it to pump up your ego or maybe your resume, or both? Why are you here, what are you doing? What is your purpose?

If Jesus became poor *so that* we could be made rich, what do you think He might want us to do with those riches, except use them to help others too?

But again, let's keep pounding this in: it's grace, not guilt. We are offered an opportunity to spend our lives in the service of God and others – to be invested with eternal purpose and meaning rooted in an indestructible identity received from a Holy God. That's the offer – do you want in?

Paul puts the question back to the Corinthians: you see what has happened with Macedonians, do you want a shot too? You said you did, a while back, did you mean it? Read with me:

10 And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; 11 but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as *there was* a readiness to desire it, so *there also may be* a completion out of what *you* have. 12 For if there is first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to what one has, *and* not according to what he does not have.

A year ago, when Paul first told them about the opportunity to help out the church in Jerusalem, they said they wanted to, but they hadn't actually done it yet. Well, now is their chance – if it's still in your heart, and it's really from God, Paul says, go for it.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Christian, sometimes God stirs things in you – you’re moved by an opportunity or stirred by a possibility but you talk yourself out of it, or you don’t follow through. It sounded like a great idea, but you didn’t do anything with it. Well, the blessing comes from doing, not just intending – so start with what you have and get your life in motion because point number five is: Generous Givers are known by their attitude, not the amount. Look at vs

12 For if there is first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to what one has, *and* not according to what he does not have.

Back in Corinth some may have been thinking, well, I don’t really have much to give. It won’t really make a difference. Paul says, actually, God cares much more about what is in your heart than the amount that is in your hand – give according to what you have, not what you don’t have because where you direct your giving reflects what has hold of your heart. Jesus said:

Matt 6:21 Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be as well

So, if you want to know what has a grip on your heart, just take a look at your calendar and your bank account – what are you giving yourself too? Or, what are you saving for, hoping for, waiting for? Again, it’s not about the amount, it’s about the attitude – where do you WANT to spend your money, your time, your life? What do you value? How nice of a life do you need to make for yourself? How much stability do you need? When will it be the right time to follow through on the desire God originally stirred in your heart? Paul encouraged the Christians in Corinth – *the time is now*. What about you?

One last thing to notice this morning, point number six: Generous Givers find reciprocal support. In other words, if you carry the burden of others today, they will carry yours tomorrow.

13 For *I do not mean* that others should be eased and you burdened; **14** but by an equality, *that* now at this time your abundance *may supply* their lack, that their abundance also *may supply* your lack—that there may be equality. **15** As it is written, “*He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.*”

Now, if you’re a political conservative, and you’re honest, this might make you a little nervous because all this talk of equality seems a little progressive. But we need to notice something important here – while God is very concerned about equality, He wants it to be 100% voluntary. Socialism and communism believe in forceful redistribution of wealth. Take power, privilege, position, wealth and materials from those who have them and give them to those who do not.

Throughout Scripture you find something completely different – people with private property and position, rank, and status, willingly choose to serve those who have less, as an act of worship directed *to God through* the people or peoples in need. It is always voluntary and, as result, it is often endearing so that when a person who has been giving is suddenly in need, people flood in to help. We see this today in our own church and lives, there are people who have been so kind to you, so helpful to you, that if they suddenly had a need, you would jump at the chance to help them.

The problem is, we're often too proud to ask for the help that others would be happy to give. We think self-sufficiency is the cardinal virtue above all else. We might be happy to give, but we're often embarrassed to receive. Well, God has designed life and the church in such a way that we need each other and we can't actually thrive without each other. We can limp along on our own, but it's slower and harder than it needs to be and sooner or later you go down hard.

In other words, we are meant to share. One of the primary reasons you have what you have, from the money in your bank to the breath in your lungs is *so that* you can serve God *by* sharing with others.

So what does that look like? Well, some might want to think in terms of a tithe, or giving 10%, and then you might want to parse that out – are we talking net or gross? But remember, that's actually not what's in view here. This is about giving above and beyond – and remember, the real point is the attitude not the amount. The Corinthians were not meant to give the same amount as the Macedonians, and the church in Jerusalem wasn't meant to give at all – they were meant to receive. Which is why, I emphasize again, the goal this morning is not to make anyone feel guilty, it's to provoke some personal reflection and conversations, though that is probably going to be painful at times.

In his famous book *Mere Christianity* CS Lewis wrote something that has haunted me for years. I share it with you now in the hope it's as unsettling and painful for you as it is for me because misery loves company. He wrote

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give **more than we can spare**. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, **we are probably giving away too little**. If our charities do not at all **pinch** or **hamper** us, I should say **they are too small**. There ought to be **things we should like to do and cannot do** because our charitable expenditure excludes them.³

Christian, your life should look different from the people around you. It should look less centered on self. It should look like less money going toward fancy vacations and drinks,

³ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

cars, or your favorite indulgence or hobby, and more time, money, and energy going toward people in need, especially those in the church, whether local or global.

Are you part of the 49% of households that gave to charity? Did you give the somewhere between the average 1.4 and 2 percent of your income? Or are you all in? Does God have your heart?

He has opened Himself up freely and fully and offered all that He is to you. He wants to give you even more than you've received, but He doesn't want you to hold onto it all – He wants to make you a distributor – spreading your time, resources, and yes, your money, to advance His kingdom, relieve suffering, and change lives. And, He wants to use His people to meet your needs – this is how the church is supposed to function and you're invited to be a part – to be a generous giver because you worship a generous God.

Let's pray



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 Give Generously

Summary: Generosity is a clear indication of a life touched by God.

- In what areas do you find it easy to be generous? When/where do you tend to be more stingy or reluctant to give?
- When did you start giving? What principles guide you? Where did you get them?
 - Is there a baseline, a rule, a standard for how much we should keep and how much we should give?
 - How do you decide how much to give, and to whom?
 - How have you experienced joy in giving? Can you relate to the Macedonians begging for the chance to give?
- Compare 2 Cor 8:2 with Revelation 2:9, what do you learn about poverty?
- Review the following verses, what do you learn about giving?
 - Romans 12:13
 - 2 Cor 9:8
 - Gal 6:9-10
 - Eph 4:28
- Review the following verses, what do you learn about greediness?
 - Romans 1:29
 - 1 Cor 5:10-11, 6:10
 - Eph 5:3, 5
 - Col 3:5
- Review the following verses, what do you learn about the dangers of not working?
 - 2 Thes 3:10; 1 Tim 5:13
- Review the following verses, what do you learn about having enough?
 - Proverbs 30:8-9; 2 Thes 3:12
- What are some ways Jesus was generous with His time, energy, and money?
- Can you relate to the Corinthians desire to give, but lack of follow through? Ever been stirred to do something, but delayed or dismissed it?