



## 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 Give Personally

Summary: God calls Christians into relationships characterized by generous love and stringent safeguards.

This morning we're in the middle of a three-part series on giving – but it's not what you might think. We're not trying to raise money for anything. We're not taking up a special collection or asking you to make a pledge. We're talking about giving because we've come to a passage of Scripture that talks about giving – and talks about it, a lot.

So last week we looked at the first half of chapter 8 and noticed that Christians are called to give generously because *God has been so generous with us*. This week we learn giving is about more than money – Christians are called into relationships characterized by generous love so they give *personally*.

And though we've been seeing this all along, we'll cover chapter nine next week and notice that we are to give *cheerfully*. Because, it doesn't matter whether you're giving your time, your money, or your skills, if you're not giving because you really *want* to, God doesn't want what you're giving. Can you imagine if He had this begrudging kind of attitude toward us? Yeah, I know they all need My help down there on earth, and I suppose it's the right thing to do, but I can't wait until this whole thing is done and over with so I can get back to the stuff I'd rather be doing instead. Can you imagine if that was God's attitude?

Well, thankfully, we know it's not. And, since we reflect to others what we have received from Him, our giving should be marked by joyful enthusiasm, because God joyfully and enthusiastically gives Himself to us.

So, read the remainder of the chapter with me, and watch for two things: men giving themselves personally to make ministry happen, and the safeguards they put in place to make it clear that they're walking in integrity as they do:

**2 Cor 8:16** But thanks *be* to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. 17 For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. 18 And we have sent with him the brother whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches, 19 and not only *that*, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and *to show* your ready mind, 20 avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us— 21 providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

22 And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you. 23 If *anyone inquires* about Titus, *he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.* 24 Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

So, what's happening here? Well, you remember from last week, Paul is taking up a special collection to send to the church in Jerusalem. There's a famine happening in Israel, so Paul has asked churches in Greece to pitch in some money to help with the relief efforts. The churches in northern Greece, the area known as Macedonia, just made a contribution even though they're going through some hard times themselves.

Now Paul writes this letter, in part, to ask the Corinthians if they still want to make a gift too – because they said they did a year ago, but they never really followed through. So, there's a team of men coming their way to receive whatever the Corinthians want to give.

And that team consists of Titus, whom they know because he has visited them before, along with someone I just call The Preacher, because he's kind of famous among the churches for preaching the gospel. We don't get his name, but it seems they all knew him or had heard of him. And there's one more guy tagging along whom I call Mr. Diligent because he's got a reputation for consistent, faithful, excellent, service. These three men are headed to Corinth to receive whatever financial support Christians there want to send to Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul says he's sending three of them for the sake of accountability. They're going to be receiving and distributing a large amount of money, so they're taking precautions to avoid any scandal. We do similar things around here. We have a team that receives tithes and offerings, someone else who keeps the books, another person who writes the checks, and someone entirely different who reviews and inspects the whole process.

We run background checks on everyone who works with the youth and children. We try to link up men with men and women with women when it comes to counseling and if that's not possible, we meet in an open, public space. We all know of cases where someone did something stupid or sinful in the context of ministry and brought shame on themselves or the church, which is why, we do our best to establish policies and standards to prevent it.

For Paul that meant recruiting a group of men to collect, escort, and disburse this special collection. So, let's talk about what these men were doing and then we'll get into some really good stuff when we look at their motivation.

First, notice the scope of the task. These men have been asked to travel to Corinth, receive some money, and escort that financial gift all the way to Jerusalem before finally coming back home. It's a pretty big ask. They're going to be on the road and perhaps sailing the Mediterranean Sea for months. What they said yes to was a pretty big deal and required commitment and sacrifice.

Think about what they'll be doing and some of you realize, I think I'd rather just be part of the group that writes a check – I'll give some money and go home and sleep in my own bed tonight thank you. But that's my whole point – Christian giving is not just about giving your money – these men: Titus, the Preacher, and Mr. Diligent, are giving themselves personally – giving their time and their energy to the task, and it's a big task.

Second, notice that these men are all men of character, men of reputation. Their performance in the past is the reason they were considered today. They were known *and therefore*, they were chosen. I remember this coming home clearly to me years ago when preparing for a promotion. In addition to pastoring the church, I serve as a military chaplain in the reserves.

Well, when it comes time for you to be considered for promotion, you put together a PRF, a promotion recommendation form, signed by your commander – it's basically a summary of all your awards and evaluations up to that point. In fact, nothing new can go on the form, everything it says has to be quoted from somewhere else, *something you've already done*. They're considering your potential to serve in the future based on what you've actually accomplished in the past.

Here's the thing that hit me about that – there's no space for you to say how much you really want the promotion. No space for you to say why you think you'd be a really good fit. There's nothing aspirational about it, when your records are reviewed and they decide whether to promote you or not, the only thing that matters is: what have you already done with the time and opportunities you had?

Well, when important work needed be done in Corinth, Paul and the churches looked around and said, who's already proven themselves? Who's ready to go right now?

Now, that doesn't mean you have to have experience doing whatever it is that needs to be done - *what needs to be done may have never been done before* – it just means that you've already proven your character in smaller ways and now, when something larger needs to be done, you're worth considering *based on your proven track record*.

My brothers and sisters in Christ – today you are establishing the patterns, building or neglecting the strength, becoming or avoiding the man or woman God wants to use tomorrow. So be faithful and be available, because there is much to be done for God and for His kingdom and those opportunities often go to people who have given themselves personally in the past – to men and women of proven character with known reputations.

Third, and somewhat related, notice these were men who could easily be doing other things. Men who, in fact, were busy doing other things before they were asked to come on this trip. The Preacher has been out preaching. Mr. Diligent has been out diligentin' – we don't know with what, but the point is, you can't build a reputation for diligence if you're not doing much.

Here's why I'm saying this: you might think *I'm a busy person*. I don't have time for the things I'm doing now, how am I supposed to do anything else?

And I want to respond, there's nothing wrong with being busy, but are you busy with the right stuff? Are you spending your time, energy, and skills in the right way? Are using them the way God wants you to be? You're going to spend your money, and you're going to spend your time *but are you sure you're spending them the right way?* If so, then, by all means, keep going. But, be ready to shift lanes if God comes calling – because the work you're doing now might be preparation for what He wants you to do next.

These men apparently saw themselves as given entirely to God – it was up to Him to direct the when, where, and how of their lives. You want me to serve you over here God? OK, fine. You want me to serve you over there God? OK, fine.

If you had the chance to play the professional sport of your choosing, would it really matter which team you played for? Not really, huh? It's enough just to be able to play.

Well, the goal for Christians is to see your entire life as given over to God and be willing to serve Him wherever there's a need. I saw a need in ministry and God called me to it. My wife saw a need in nursing and God called her to it. Right now, there's a tremendous need for special education teachers. Could that be the kind of thing that God is calling you to? And to give yourself to it, generously and cheerfully, receiving it as a ministry?

Right now, crisis pregnancy centers have a huge need for trained sonographers. Could that be something God is calling you toward, calling you to give your time, energy, and money, to learn a skill that will make a difference in helping mothers choose life and can help pay your own bills at the same time?

You see, when I say Christians are to give personally, I mean we give God all that we are – we present ourselves to Him as a lump of raw clay and say, fashion me however You wish, and I will do my best to please You with a mix of diligence on my part and dependence on You. A mix of both grit and grace. Wherever you want me to be, whatever you want me to be doing, I see my entire life – Sunday to Saturday, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – I'm all Yours. You're not holding anything back from me, I'm not holding anything back from You.

Church, when you live like that, it's an act of worship to God. He's pleased by it and others are blessed and inspired by it.

And it brings me to a point that I have been looking forward to making – it's my favorite thing to say to you about this whole passage – and that is: you are loved.

I try to tell you that every Sunday. And I know, for some of you, that's the only time you hear those words directed at you all week. But here's the thing – receive and then reflect, right? I, and we, receive the love of God, and then do our best to reflect that love to others. And since God is love, there's supposed to be a whole lot it flowing around the church as

people generously and cheerfully give themselves personally to the love of God and the love of others in His name.

Look with me at vs 16 and notice, Titus [earnestly cares](#) for the Christians in Corinth. In fact, vs 17, he's coming to them [of his own accord](#). When he found out someone needed to go pick up their checks, he said, "Peace, I'm out!" Paul had to call him back and say hey, take The Preacher and Mr. Diligent with you. And Titus was like, well, come on guys, let's go!

You might remember from last week the Macedonians begged to be able to give, well now Titus is begging to go to Corinth. Ya'll, this is natural, normal, Christian behavior. To be excited by opportunities to give our time, our energy, our money, in ways that are generous and personal and create a community marked by love, mutual affection, caring for each other, praying for each other, grieving for and with each other, crying, and hopefully rejoicing together.

On the night before He was crucified Jesus told the disciples:

[John 13:35](#) By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

And that's exactly what happened. The early church survived persecution and ostracization winning converts not just because of the doctrine they taught, but because of the love that was evident in their communities. Love that is not only given, but received.

Church, this isn't just one more thing for you to do, 'make sure you love people,' it's also a statement of what is meant *for* you, you are meant to *be loved*. Look at what we read in Scripture:

[Phil 1:8](#) For God is my witness, how greatly [I long for you all](#) with the affection of Jesus Christ.

[1 Thes 2:7](#) But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children. [8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.](#)

[1 John 3:16](#) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. [And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.](#) [17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?](#)

Church, this should not be considered special, this is not extraordinary behavior, this is meant to be the natural, default, baseline, condition of the Christian church. And you know that because you read it in Scripture – the Bible tells us: this is what God wants us to be.

God wants you to be part of this community of faith where you share your hopes and your hang-ups because it's OK not to be OK. I've said it so many times – out there you get report cards, progress reports, performance evaluations, and promotion recommendation forms. Out there people are forming opinions based on what you said, how you said it, how you dress, the way you look. But in here – in here, we want to be a safe place for sheep. A place where you can be you, a mess in progress – a case study in imposter syndrome because no, you're not good enough, you're not ready, but you're making progress as you grow in Christ.

In here you should be able to open up and discover that it's OK to be who and what you are because everyone else around you has realized: *we all need Jesus*. That's our starting point. We all need help. But we've all been loved and we're all trying to be loving. In here you should find people you can confess your struggles to, people who will pray for you, hope with you, and encourage you. That's what we want to see at City Gates, because that's what God wants to see.

In fact, He's actually the one behind it all!

Come back and look with me again at the verse I personally read over and over this week,

**2 Cor 8:16** But thanks *be* to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.

Titus has an affection for the Christians in Corinth. And that's cool right? It's great to walk in the door at church and have someone light up because they're so happy to see you.

But who did that? Who sparked that relationship? Who's making it work? God! God **put** this earnest care for them into the heart of Titus.

God says I want you to be loved, and I know it might not happen on it's own, so I'm going to put this concern for you *into the heart of someone else*.

Church, this is amazing! God wants you to be loved. He wants you to be known. And, of course, you are – by Him. But that's not enough. He wants other Christians to also care for you, care about you. This whole Christian faith thing is not just about you and your personal devotions and your personal walk with God. It's not about you listening to podcasts of your favorite preacher on your run or your drive. It's not about you and your family being a home church. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God and then to love your neighbor as yourself. We are meant to be together, connected, in fellowship, community, one family, one body of Christ, meeting each other's needs, sharing each other's burdens, giving and receiving, knowing and being known.

And so, God puts concern for you into the heart of others. He is the one orchestrating our affections, directing our attention, meeting our needs, and He's often doing that through other human beings. So, if you're going to receive that, experience that, participate in that, you need to be around and with the kind of people that He can burden.

And when it happens, when you experience it, you know who to thank, right? Yes, of course, thank you to the person who helped, the person who prayed for you, the person who listened to you, the person who sent you a card, brought you a meal, took you out to coffee, texted something encouraging, asked how things were working out – thanks for all of that, but even more:

[Thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.](#)

*God* wants you to be loved.

And, he wants to love others through you. So, who is God giving you a burden for, a concern for? Who do you really care about? And, are you allowing that concern to grow? Men, I want to especially encourage you to ask the question. Because Titus was a man. The Preacher was a man. Mr Diligent was a man. And each of these men gave themselves personally to serving God and helping others.

It's really easy for men to say, "I don't need anyone. I'm fine. I don't really feel an '[earnest care](#)' for anyone except my family." Why not? Did God skip over you? Has He opted not to put [earnest care](#) for anyone else into your heart? Or are you avoiding it because you're a man, and it's awkward. Well yeah, it is, but we're going to have get over that, because this is what God does – He says, care about that other man. Let that other man into your life so he can care about you and your family and your work and your walk with God.

Brothers, and sisters, church, this is what God wants – for us to be loved and to love, vertically with Him then horizontally with others. This is what you're made for.

And just to be clear that this is not only for people in ministry, look at vs 24. How does Paul hope the Christians in Corinth will receive Titus' crew when they show up?

[24 Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.](#)

This is normal Christian behavior – we give generously, personally, and cheerfully to each other, *because that is what God has done for us.*

Before you walk out of here this morning, I need you to know three things.

First, you are loved by God. He sent His son to be a sacrifice for you – He knows all the things you've done that you shouldn't have done, and all the things you haven't done that you should. He knows all the ways you fall short and fell again this week. And, He offers to forgive you, to help you, and to change you if you will turn to Him.

Jesus Christ laid down His perfect life to make something better out of your messed-up life and now He offers to call you a friend.

You are loved by God.

You are also, number two, loved by others. That's grumpy you, moody you, selfish, shady, not quite who you want to be you, seeking approval and acceptance you, too cool for everyone else you – you're still loved, because God has put an earnest concern for you into the heart of His people.

And finally, number three, your entire purpose on earth – the reason you're here, is to know and experience this love and then show it to others. To be patient with them because God has been patient with you. To be helpful to them because God has been helpful to you. To feel, in your heart, a deep, unnatural, earnest concern for others, because God has put it there and He's calling you to give generously, personally, and cheerfully for His glory and the good of others.

Let's pray





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 Give Personally

Summary: God calls Christians into relationships characterized by generous love and stringent safeguards.

- Which is more difficult for you – to give away your time, or your money? Why?
  - Who do you trust with your time and money?
- Review the following verses, what do you learn about the spiritual dangers surrounding money?
  - Matt 6:24; 21:12
  - Mark 6:8
  - Luke 3:14; 9:3; 16:11
  - Acts 4:37; 8:18-20
  - 1 Tim 6:10
  - 2 Tim 3:2
  - Hebrews 13:5
- Why is there still a need for accountability and safeguards in ministry?
  - What are some examples from Scripture of people in positions of leadership and/or ministry who fell into sin?
  - What are some recent examples?
  - Why doesn't serving automatically God insulate you from scandal and moral failures?
  - How should these failures affect our view of ministry leaders? Other Christians? *Ourselves*?
- How have you seen God use your reputation or your past as credentialing or preparation for what He asked you to do next?
- How can knowing that you are loved enable you to love others?
- Where and how have you felt loved by another Christian, someone whom God gave a deep concern for you? Where and how have you felt the same for someone else? How did God use that?