

The Biblical Foundation for Grace-Enabled Gospel Stewardship

Acts 20:32–35 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.³³ I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Introduction:

Final words are powerful. Paul's final words to the elders entrusted to care for the church he founded at Ephesus were a warning against covetousness and an exhortation to radical generosity. To help them understand why God desires this kind of generosity, Paul points them to something Jesus said – *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* These words are difficult on several levels.

First, they are difficult because they do not appear in any of the four gospel accounts. To be sure, the gospel writers do not claim to record every statement Jesus made during his earthly ministry, but it does seem strange that Paul would build the strength of his case on an unrecorded saying of Jesus.

Secondly, they are difficult because they run radically counter to everything we have learned, observed, and experienced in life. Our every instinct tells us it is better to be on the receiving end of a major gift than being the one parting with the gift. Perhaps someone has given us a gift that made a significant difference in a difficult situation. Perhaps we have witnessed a friend or a loved one's life being spared or transformed by a medical treatment made possible by the generosity of another and we saw the blessing of receiving as opposed to the pain and sacrifice of giving. So, how is it that Paul can quote Jesus with a straight face and say to us, *"It is **better** to give than to receive?"* Paul may be referencing Jesus' counter intuitive command to seek first His Kingdom and its righteousness instead of spending strength and energy pursuing resources to sustain our earthly lives. Jesus observed that His

Father, who knows the needs of His people, would abundantly supply everything they needed for daily living (Luke 12:22-34).

Interestingly, Jesus' teaching on living for the priorities of the Kingdom follows a parable about a man who lived for his own kingdom rather than God's and when His soul was required by God, not only did he leave all his wealth behind for others, he was called to give account for his covetous heart which led him to lay up treasure for himself and made him poor toward God (Luke 12:13-21).

Jesus ends his teaching with a wonderful word of encouragement and enablement.

***Luke 12:32-34** "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

The secret to the radical generosity called for by Paul is something Jesus said to his disciples about His Father (and theirs)! *"It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"*

The key to radical generosity is not something in us but something in God. He is the ultimate giver who has given the ultimate gift to His people! And because His radical generosity resulted in our possessing the Kingdom of Heaven, what we do with the possessions we have in the kingdoms on earth is a remarkably accurate indicator of where our heart is focused and whose kingdom we are striving to grow and advance (God's or our own). This is why Paul could say without hesitation, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

We are never more like God than when we are marked by radical generosity toward others because God is radically generous toward us. What we believe about God will determine how and why we steward and deploy the resources God has entrusted to us!

Which is why we are embarking on a journey to understand what God has said in His Word about the Grace-Enabled Gospel-Focused Stewardship of our lives and resources.

Our understanding and practice of this topic must be (a) Driven by the Scripture; (b) considered in its entirety as opposed to random texts that reference money; (c) accurately interpreted; and, (d) appropriately applied to our lives corporately and individually.

So with that in mind, let's begin by exploring what God has to say about the kind of grace-enabled gospel stewardship that produces radical generosity in us.

I. **The Meaning of Grace-Enabled Gospel Stewardship**

1 Peter 4:10–11 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

It is ongoing selfless sacrificial living that abounds in generous giving in every area of my life – to the glory of God, the good of others, and the growth of the gospel.

A. **Using resources God has given me (time, talents, treasure),**

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

B. **With the strength God supplies,**

whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies

C. **for the purposes and the glory of the One who entrusted them to me.**

in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

- It is an **attitude** of life that displays itself in joyful generosity
- It is a way of life (a **Habitude**) that consistently and intentionally pursue the good of others
- It is a worthy life (**gratitude**) that seeks to glorify God by advancing the gospel of His Son

II. The **Manifestation** of Grace-Enabled Gospel Stewardship

Using my life in its entirety for

Kingdom Advancement motivated by

Faithful Stewardship marked by

Radical Generosity that leads to

God being **glorified** on account of

His **inexpressible gift** to the World

Expressed this way: “Regardless of the personal cost, I will partner with you so that we grow in grace and knowledge and so that a harvest of righteousness will be reaped in and through us.”

- Moses: Heb 11:23-28
I choose to be identified with you ... and to graciously serve you ... a great personal cost ... for your good and God’s glory.
- Samuel: 1 Sam 12:1-4, 7, 23-24
I chose to love and pray for you in spite of great personal disappointment, discomfort, and grave danger (from Saul).
- Paul: 2 Cor 12:15
I chose to spend and be spent for you in the face of great personal rejection and deep pain for you and from you.
- Jesus: Phil 2:5-8
I chose to empty myself by taking the form of a servant and by being born in the likeness of men. I choose to be obedient unto death, even the kind of death reserved for criminals – death on a cross.

III. The **Model** of Grace-Enabled Gospel Stewardship

Four biblical texts help us grasp the concept of grace-enabled gospel-focused stewardship.

A. **Principally** in the Parable of the Talents – Faithful Stewardship. (Matthew 25:14-30)

- It requires that we have a certain view of possessions.
- Regardless of how much or little, they are not our possessions to use as we wish.
- Rather, they are God's possession entrusted to us for wise investment and not for personal hoarding or accumulation.
- The servants who were rewarded, were rewarded for using the resources entrusted to them for the Master's advantage, not their own.
- The servant who was castigated not for taking care of his needs (this is appropriate) but for failing to use his resources out of the wrong kind of fear of his master.
- We have this same kind of fear when we don't believe God will take care of us and so instead of investing His resources in His work, we hold on to them in case we need them to meet our own needs.
- God has an answer to this fear when it rises up in our heart and closes our hands tightly around our resources – His own generosity.

B. **Majestically** in the Person of Christ – Radical Generosity. (2 Corinthians 8:9; 9:15)

- If He did not refuse to give us His Son, how can we believe He won't give us everything else we need as His children?
- When we hold on too tightly to the earthly resources He has placed in our care, we fail to grasp the majestic immensity of His radical generosity in giving us Christ!

- And when we respond to God's radical generosity by being generous with the resources He has put in our hands, it brings immense pleasure to God (as seen in the next illustration).

C. **Sacrificially** in the Widow's gift – Grateful Sacrifice.

(Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:3-4)

Luke 21:3-4 And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.
⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

- What motivated this humble, poverty-stricken widow to give her gift at the temple?
- No doubt she was in desperate need of it herself?
- What could possibly have moved her to give a gift that cost her so much?
- Perhaps she remembered the story of another widow in Elijah's day who gave her last bit of food to feed God's servant and, because she cared for God's servant on God's mission, God abundantly cared for her and she found honor and pleasure in His sight.

D. **Incomparably** in God's Amazing Gift – Unfathomable Grace.

(Romans 8:31-32)

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who **did not spare his own Son** but **gave him up for us all**, how will he not also **with him graciously give us all things**?*

- These biblical texts show us there is immense benefit when we steward our lives and resources in these ways.
- But, we must understand this kind of life will be costly. It will be risky. It may be lonely.
- And the only way we will be able to embrace life consistently is when we are energized by the grace of God and empowered by the Spirit of God!

IV. The **Means** for Grace-Enabled Gospel Stewardship – Radical Compelling Generosity

Cultivating and displaying this kind of Radical Generosity.

One of the things that flows out of a life that has been radically transformed by God’s amazing grace is the “fellowship” of giving – giving ourselves, our resources, and our possessions – for the work of the ministry God is doing through our local fellowship of believers.

A. With the **strength** God supplies (Phil 2:13)

... for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

B. With the **resources** God supplies (2 Cor 9:9-10)

As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

- **Verse 9 is a quote from Psalm 112:9.** Often we think God is the person being described as distributing freely and whose righteousness endures forever. However, Psalm 112 makes clear that it is the godly man – the man who is blessed because He fears God and keeps His commands. And one of the ways he displays his enduring righteousness (ongoing way of life righteousness) is through his consistent practice of radical generosity.
- **Verse 10 is a reference to Is 55:10-11** – God is the one who abundantly supplies and multiplies our “seed.”

C. For the **gospel purposes** God intends (2 Cor 9:10b -14)

*He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing **and increase the harvest of your righteousness.**¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others,¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.*

So what are the gospel purposes God designs to accomplish through the radical generosity of His people?

- As you practice radical generosity, God will supply and multiply the resources you need to sow bountifully and generously (v. 10).
- A harvest of righteousness will grow and increase (v. 10).
- God will enrich His people spiritually so their lives will be marked by radical generosity (v. 11).
- So that thanksgiving is multiplied toward God as the needs of His people are supplied through the radical generosity of fellow believers (v. 12).
- God will receive Glory and you will receive gratitude (v. 13-14).
- The surpassing, super-abundant spiritual enablement from God (grace) will be evident in your life (v. 14).
- Your generosity will magnify God's and will point people to His gift of salvation through Christ (v. 15)

Conclusion: How do I go about developing this kind of radical generosity?

1. ***Its Theological Foundation*** – I must submit to what I confess regarding a particular aspect of God's Nature and Character.
2. ***Its Old Testament Preparation*** – I must understand the reason for the regular, measured, and regulated giving by God's people through "the tithe" to support the full-orbed gracious ministry of God's temple to prepare Israel to serve God faithfully, worship Him acceptably, and live obediently before the nations.
 - The OT tithe is where God first instructed His people about their spiritual responsibility and personal obligation to give regularly and proportionately to support the work God elected to do through the Tabernacle and later the Temple.

- Tithing is how God trained, regulated, and rewarded the consistent, obedient giving of His people.
 - Illustration 1 – training wheels on a bike.
 - Illustration 2 – specially lined paper to train children to write their letters.
3. ***Its New Testament Expression*** – I must embrace and engage in the regular, consistent, unmeasured, joyful giving by God’s people for the preaching of God’s Word, strengthening of God’s Church, and the Advancing of God’s Gospel through the local church where He has placed me.
- The New Testament reveals that God graciously provides internal enablement so that I can give regularly, proportionately, joyfully, and eagerly to advance the gospel and support the work He intends to do in and through His Church!
 - The New Testament reveals that God lavishly supplies external provision so that I can give bountifully and generously to advance the gospel and support the work He intends to do in and through His Church.

We began with Paul speaking to the Ephesian elders; let’s end by listening to Paul exhort the Corinthian believers: *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” (2 Cor. 9:8)*

Call to Action: Would you prayerfully make three commitments for 2023?

1. With God’s help, I will seek to invest in one gospel-relationship.
2. By God’s strength, I will engage in one significant ministry opportunity.
3. Through God’s provision, I will make one significant financial sacrifice above my regular giving for the sake of the Gospel, the good of His people, and the glory of God.