

**Missions Emphasis:
Gospel Giving
2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 9:6-15**

Introduction

Why do we give toward missions, and why should we? The question is actually rooted in deeper questions: why do we give at all, and why would we give to those outside our local body of believers? In a word the gospel is the reason.

The good news is all about God's having given us the gift of salvation because of His grace, not our deserving it. The gospel powerfully transforms selfish rebels into loving saints. And love's nature is to give to others. Finally, by definition, good news should be shared. It makes us others-focused. A church that does not give beyond its own walls is more like a social club than a church on mission.

The classic passage on giving in response to needs outside one's own local church family is 2 Corinthians 8-9. The apostle Paul makes the case for the church in Corinth to step up in their giving to help fellow believers in the Jerusalem area suffering famine. In obedience to Christ, Jewish believers had evangelized not only Judea, but Samaria, Cyprus, Asia, and Greece. Corinth was in southern Greece, called Achaia, whereas Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were in northern Greece, called

Macedonia. These Gentile churches were planted by Jewish missionaries, demonstrating that the gospel of Christ had broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile and had made them one people of God. Once a devout Pharisee who prided himself in keep separate from Gentiles, Saul now called Paul, was chosen by Christ to be the apostle to the Gentiles. It was his life's work. Now he calls on the Gentile churches to show their God-created solidarity with their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ in a tangible way.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you— see that you excel in this act of grace also.

8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. **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 by his poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **7** Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. **8** 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. **9** 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. **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. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible
 gift!

1. Grace Produces Generosity (2 Corinthians 8:1-8).
2. Generosity Receives Reward (9:6-14).
3. The Gospel Displays the Ultimate Generosity (8:9; 9:13-15).

1. Grace Produces Generosity (2 Corinthians 8:1-8).

¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

The churches in Macedonia (northern Greece) included the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. We know from Paul's letter to Philippians and from the history Luke records in Acts that the church in Philippi was especially generous in helping Paul in his ministry needs on multiple occasions.

In our study of the Thessalonian epistles we learned about the persecution and suffering these churches endured from the beginning.

This mistreatment naturally created financial hardship, as well, making their generosity all the more significant. It was clearly the outflow of God's gracious work in their lives.

It's easy to assume that you have to be rich to be generous, but the reality is that *your generosity has less to do with the state of your finances than the state of your heart*. Ironically, statistics show that among church-going people, as income goes up the proportion of giving goes down. Why is that? Because the more you possess, the more your possessions tend to possess you.

What breaks the self-centered human tendency to hoard what we gain? This passage reveals the answer.

2 Corinthians 8:3-5

³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

These churches begged to share in bringing relief to their fellow believers in Jerusalem. Nobody was putting pressure on them to give. They were putting pressure on to have the privilege of giving. They desire doing so.

(Ultimately people do according to their desire.) Find where your heart is, and you'll figure out what your actions will be.

What is driving this self-sacrificing desire? They first gave themselves to the Lord. And when they did, all their possessions came with it.

“And then by the will of God to us”—because they saw the apostles as doing the Lord’s work, they were all in because they were already fully committed to the Lord. Their generosity wasn’t rooted in admiring devotion to Paul and his companions, but in love for God Himself. They gladly helped Paul with the offering for the saints because they loved God. It’s the highest possible motivation. It’s not dependent on the star power of human beings, nor deterred by their flaws and foibles. It’s driven by grateful love for God. And true love for God always creates love for God’s people.

2 Corinthians 8:6-8

⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.

God's grace toward them and God's grace at work in them powered their generosity. Genuine love fueled their earnestness. Paul calls on the believers in Corinth to prove their love to be genuine in the same way. They lived in a wealthy city, and they had not been harassed the same way as the churches in the north had been. For that reason, they were in much better shape financially than the Macedonian believers. Despite this reality, and despite their having received the same gospel, their giving was lagging behind. There was no legitimate reason for it. They needed to step up. Love is the queen virtue of the fruit of the Spirit who indwells all true believers. And love by its very nature gives generously. Love that withholds is not genuine love.

Applications

- In what ways does the way you live display the generous nature of the gospel?
- Why is it impossible for a truly godly person to be other than generous?
- What common excuses for not being generous do you need to reject and forsake?

- What needs do you know about that provide you a way to show love for Christ and for others through your generous response?

2. Generosity Receives Reward (9:6-14).

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Everybody who's done any gardening, let alone farming, knows that you're not throwing away seed when you plant it. However much you plant determines the proportion of what you will harvest, provided there's no disaster that wipes out the crop. No farmer in his right mind would refuse to plant his seed in order to save it. He will end up with far less than the farmer who plants the seed. From what is planted will grow all the more.

The same is true of giving. A person who's stingy in giving limits the harvest he could have had. A harvest with far-reaching blessings beyond just material gain.

Galatians 6:7-10

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also

reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

2 Corinthians 9:8-9

⁸ 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. ⁹ As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

He's not worried that he won't have enough. He knows that the God who supplies whatever he has can provide yet more. "All sufficiency in all things at all times." So he uses what he has for good. His beneficial work for others overflows. The people too stingy to give are the ones as a rule who are always coming up short.

Verse 9 quotes from Psalm 112:9 in a section describing the happiness of the man who fears Yahweh and delights in His commandments. One of the chief virtues of his character is his generosity. God is lavishly

generous, and so is anyone who is truly godly.

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. **11** You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

Enriched in every way to be generous in every way. The reason God provides us much is to pass it on. Not just money, but everything we have. Not just things, but time, effort, ability, opportunity, strength. All these are given to us not just for us, but to be used for the good of others.

Serving other believers in this generous way multiplies praise to God. He gets glory. And He deserves it. He is the one who supplied us what we have. He is the one who transforms our natural self-centered heart to a heart eager to help others with whatever He has given us. He works that transformation through the gospel, so when the Greek Christians gave so generously to Jewish Christians in need, they displayed the beauty and power of the gospel. They proved that the Messiah was their Savior-King, too.

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.

These verses reveal that there is yet more blessing. Besides glorifying God for such generosity, those that received help from these Gentile Christians grew in their affection for these relatively new believers. When Christians respond to real need with loving generosity they create a surge of grateful and affectionate response. The human heart loves to be loved. Love generates love.

Evidently the Corinthian church took Paul's admonition to heart and ended up giving heartily. Decades later toward the end of the first century, Clement of Rome wrote to the church in Corinth regarding the impact of their generosity on this occasion. He spoke of their being "more glad to give than to receive," "with an insatiable desire of doing good." (Hughes, 341)

Applications

- What makes you worry you won't have enough?
- In what ways can the law of harvest encourage you to be more generous?
- Whose life have you enriched because of what Jesus has done for you?

3. The Gospel Displays the Ultimate Generosity (8:9; 9:13-15).

2 Corinthians 8:9

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 by his poverty might become rich.

The Lord Jesus our Messiah displayed lavish, self-sacrificing generosity. Without His having done so, we would have no hope at all. He was rich beyond measure, but gave up everything, His very lifeblood. He did so to make us rich with an eternal inheritance that He alone deserved. The poorest person in heaven is richer than the richest on earth.

2 Corinthians 9:13-15

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. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

The gospel of Christ is the benchmark. God gave us Christ and with Him all things. So great a gift that words are inadequate to describe how vast is the treasure God gave us in Christ.

With that gift as our supreme standard, there's no limit as to what we could give in keeping with it. *Let us be lavish in our generosity, just as God through Christ has been lavish in His.* We can spend a lifetime trying to display such loving generosity in the way we give ourselves on behalf of others to the glory of Christ.

Applications

- Keep your eyes open for every opportunity you have to be generous toward the needs you see.
- Listen to prayer requests you hear, including those from our gospel partners; they often reveal ways you can give for the sake of the gospel.
- Make sure you don't spend all your resources of money, time, and energy on yourself and your family. Who else does God want you to help so that you are sowing for a greater harvest?

Conclusion

Our mission is to proclaim and to display the gospel. Gospel Generosity is key to doing both.

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Closing Song: Come, All Christians, Be Committed

Applications Summary

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- Why is it impossible for a truly godly person to be other than generous?
- What common excuses for not being generous do you need to reject and forsake?
- What needs do you know about that provide you a way to show love for Christ and for others through your generous response?
- What makes you worry you won't have enough?
- In what ways can the law of harvest encourage you to be more generous?
- Whose life have you enriched because of what Jesus has done for you?

- Keep your eyes open for every opportunity you have to be generous toward the needs you see.
- Listen to prayer requests you hear, including those from our gospel partners; they often reveal ways you can give for the sake of the gospel.
- Make sure you don't spend all your resources of money, time, and energy on yourself and your family. Who else does God want you to help so that you are sowing for a greater harvest?