

We've Forgotten the Grace of Giving

PATHWAY TO GRACEFUL GIVING

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Text: 2 Corinthians 8:10-9.5

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Series: Confessions of an Imperfect Church (2 Corinthians)

Introduction: Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 8. We are continuing our series through the book of 2 Corinthians entitled, "Confessions of an Imperfect Church". And like the imperfect church at Corinth, we have a long way to go in our growing and changing in Christ. Today's confession is this: "We've Forgotten the Grace of Giving". 2 Corinthians 8 is divided up into four messages on giving. Last week we looked at the Reasons for Giving and the Greatest Example of Giving. This morning we are looking at the "Pathway to Giving". Next week we will look at the "Blessings of Giving".

Illustration – Titanic: Many of you know the story of the Titanic. The *RMS Titanic* was a passenger liner that struck an iceberg on her maiden voyage from Southampton, England, to New York City, and sank on the 15th of April 1912, resulting in the deaths of 1,517 people in one of the deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in history.

Titanic was designed by experienced engineers, using some of the most advanced technologies and extensive safety features of the time. It was deemed by the world to be an "unsinkable ship". Yet the unsinkable ship set sail on April 2nd 1912, and sank less than two weeks later!

What sank the Titanic? The ship made its fatal collision at an estimated 37 seconds after the crew sighted an iceberg. The captain was jolted awake by the impact, and less than two hours later at 2:20am in the morning, the Titanic was no more.

Icebergs are dangerous because you only see the tip!

Finances Just the Tip of the Iceberg

We are going to learn today that our finances are so important because they are just the tip of the iceberg. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (**Matthew 6:21**).

Some of you here today have never given regularly to the work of the Lord, and that reveals more about the state of your walk with God and your spiritual life than almost anything.

We can look at most of the problems in our lives, and we think our problem is relationships, or finances, or our job, or this or that.

Really, the root of all our problems is our love for self, and out of that comes greediness and stubbornness and pride. God want us to give Him our heart. And our treasure will always follow our heart.

Giving is about being like God. When God saves us, His purpose is to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. The likeness and image of God is restored in us. "God

so loved the world that He gave...” (John 3:16). To be live God is to be utterly others focused. It is to not think of self. It is to lay down your life. It is to give.

True godly giving is motivated by grace. I want to give several evidences how you can identify that your giving is truly from a motivation of grace and not guilt.

I. Give regardless of circumstances, vs. 1-2

2 Corinthians 8:1–2 (ESV) — “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.”

- A. God’s grace is not bound by circumstances. There were three Macedonian churches: Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. As far as circumstances go...
- The Macedonians were the Afghanistan of the ancient world – ravaged by war.
 - They was a great persecution. Remember Paul and Silas beaten in the Macedonian city of Philippi and jailed until the earthquake came! Many likely lost their jobs or had been excluded from the trade guilds because they refused to have anything to do with idolatry.
 - Specifically, the Scripture says that the believers experienced “a severe test of affliction” and in “extreme poverty” (vs. 2). Literally this is a word for someone on the brink of starvation or one who is a beggar. Yet they gave more than all.

How could they give so much? I mean, the Macedonian churches were the poorest believers in the region! Here’s the secret: they learned that DEEP POVERTY plus GOD’S GRACE = abundant GENEROSITY.

True Christian giving is not just a donation of money. It is an experience of God’s grace! There is a constancy in giving for the Christian with a healthy walk with God, because **giving is not dependent on circumstances**. It’s a way reflect the selfless grace of God.

- B. When you have experienced the grace of God in your life, you will not use difficult circumstances as an excuse for not giving. Often the people that give the most are those that have the least!

God has no problem supplying all of our needs. He can give to us each day what He deems best – like the children of Israel in the wilderness. They received Manna from heaven each day! I think of George Mueller.

Example: George Mueller

George Mueller had nothing, asked no one but God for his needs, but gave everything he had to start an orphanage in Bristol, England. He said, *“If the Lord fails me at this time, it will be the first time.”* He determined that if God created the universe with ease, He just as easily could supply all his needs. George Mueller determined to ask only God to supply his needs, and saw the Lord continually do so.

- Through the years he received 1.5 million dollars to meet the needs of nearly 10,000 orphans, and estimated that he had received 50,000 specific answers to prayer.
- Mueller had NOTHING, except a God who owns everything.

As believers we are to give regardless of circumstances. There is a joy and a grace that all growing believers have that compels them to give. One man said,

“If you are not generous with a meager income, you will never be generous with abundance”

~ Harold Nye

Giving has little to do with our income, and more to do with our understanding of our infinite generous God! All we have is from Him. We ought to give His money to His causes, and then He will give us more as He determines. So we need to give regardless of our circumstances since it all comes from Him!

James 1:17 (ESV) — “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

We are to give regardless of our circumstances because everything we have whether little or great, is all from the Lord!

II. Give **enthusiastically**, vs. 3-4

Speaking of the Macedonian believers, Paul said: **2 Corinthians 8:3–4** (ESV) — “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”.

Giving wasn't a pain, but a massive blessing to these believers! It is possible to give generously but not give enthusiastically. It wasn't painful, but something joyful and greatly anticipated. The Macedonian churches needed no prompting or reminding, as did the church at Corinth. They were more than willing to share in the collection. In fact, *they were **begging to give!*** (2 Cor. 8:4). How many times have you heard a Christian *beg* for somebody to take an offering?

The Macedonian believers gave because they had experienced the grace of God. Grace not only frees us from our sins, but it frees us from ourselves.

Illustration – CEF of EPA Gave to Me, Easy to Give to Them: I think I know what the Macedonian believers felt like. In college, there the director of Child Evangelism Fellowship of E. PA invested in me. That organization helped pay my way through college. They gave me a love for the Word and for ministry. They were so generous to me. Through the years they have asked me from time to time to give back to them. It's easy. They don't have to ask me to come and help and give of myself and my resources to them. I love it. They gave so much to me. I want to give to them. So it is with God. He has given us His Son, we ought to give to the cause of His Kingdom enthusiastically!

Enthusiastic Giving at the Tabernacle: I think how enthusiastically the people gave at the building of the Tabernacle.

Exodus 36:2–7 (ESV) — “And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. 3 And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, 4 so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, 5 and said to Moses, “The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do.” 6 So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, “Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary.” So the people were restrained from bringing, 7 for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.”

They were so enthusiastic that Moses had to tell the people to STOP giving! That's grace giving. That's the kind of giving that is empowered by God's grace.

III. Give to be like **Jesus**, vs. 5-9

God calls us to grow in conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. Surprisingly, just as we are to grow in faith and Bible knowledge and in love, we are also to grow in the grace of giving. This makes us like Christ who though He was rich, became poor so we might be spiritually rich in Him.

2 Corinthians 8:5–9 (ESV) — “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.”

It was easy for the Corinthians to give at first. They had plenty. They were the very first ones to donate to Paul’s collection for the Jerusalem saints. But Paul had to send Titus to encourage them to finish what they started. You see the Corinthians were gifted with many spiritual gifts, but being a Christian is not simply the ability to giftedly understand and teach the Word of God. It is the ability to give sacrificially of ourselves and lay down our lives from others. One commentator said it perfectly:

“We must never argue that the ministry of our spiritual gifts is a substitute for generous giving. “I teach a Sunday School class, so I don’t have to give!” is not an explanation—it’s an excuse. The Christian who remembers that his gifts are *gifts* will be motivated to give to others and not “hide” behind his ministry for the Lord. I have met pastors and missionaries who have argued that, since they devote their whole time in serving the Lord, they are not obligated to give. Paul argued just the opposite: since you are wonderfully gifted from God, you ought to want to give even more!” (Warren Wiersbe).¹

Paul says, “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” (vs. 7).

He goes on to say in verse 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.”

You want to be like Jesus? Paul says, “Excel in the grace of giving”! You say you are growing in faith in Bible knowledge, and in love, but does your giving equal your growth in other graces? It’s a good barometer!

IV. Give **voluntarily**, vs. 10-11

2 Corinthians 8:10–11 (ESV) — “And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. 11 So now finish doing it as well, so that your **readiness** in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.”

2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV) — “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (2 Co 8:5). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

The Corinthians voluntarily were the first to give to Paul's collection for the Jerusalem saints. They promised to give more, not under coercion, but willingly.

There is a great difference between *promise* and *performance*. The Corinthians had boasted to Titus a year before that they would give even more in the special collection (2 Cor. 8:6), but they did not keep their promise.

Here Paul says that giving must come from a willing heart; it cannot be coerced or forced.

If we give because we feel forced, then it is not the mark of grace giving. It is to be given voluntarily.

Christ gave up His life voluntarily, so we should not greedily hold onto our life and resources. Greed is *not* good. Greed does *not* work. It cripples and paralyzes our souls to the needs of others. Worse yet, it ignores the amazing mercy and grace of Christ and the sacrifice he made so that we, through his poverty, might become truly rich.

“for the joy that was set before him [Christ] endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2). With joy Christ voluntarily offered up His life. We ought to do so as well. We ought to give of ourselves and our resources voluntarily as Christ did.

Illustration: Evan's kisses

There is a great difference between forcing a child to give you something, and a child willingly giving you something. At times I've told my little 3 year old son to come and give me a kiss. You know that goes sometimes. You have to chase them down and tickle them and then kiss them. He squirms all around dodging my affection. But what a joy it is sometimes to walk in the door and you hear the little pitter patter of feet and a little child jumps into your arms and squeezes your neck and kisses you.

That's what God wants from us. He wants to see our affection for Him and others voluntarily through our giving.

V. Give in proportion to what you have, vs. 12

2 Corinthians 8:12 (ESV) —“For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”

Examples

- Remember the feeding of the five thousand? God used a **little boy's lunch** of five loaves and two fishes!
- Remember the **widow of Zerephath** (1 Kings 17:8ff). God commanded a poor widow to sustain Elijah. She had nothing – only a handful of flour and jug of oil that was about empty!
- Those who have little or much give accordingly.

The Widow's Two Mites

You may only be able to give two measly mites today, but God does not judge according to the amount, but according to what you have. We remember the astounding commentary of Jesus on the poor widow who gave her last two mites. **Mark 12:43–44** (ESV) — “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

John Wesley: a very rich man

Let me tell you about a very, very rich man by the name of John Wesley. But the first thing you're going to say to me is no-John Wesley died very poor. And you would be right. He died with eight possessions. Six silver spoons which he bequeathed to the men who would bury him – a Geneva robe, and a Bible. That's it.

But John Wesley received millions of dollars in his life time from his books and hymnals that he put together with his brother Charles. But John Wesley gave it all away. He financed missionaries; he gave it to pastors; he gave it to the work of the Lord around the world. John Wesley was a very rich man – *he just invested his money in things that do not rust, and where moths cannot eat away.*

George Mueller quote

Mueller famously said, “God does not judge us according to what we give, but according to what we keep.” Don't look at what you give. Look at what you are holding on to.

Conclusion: May God give not according to our means, but beyond our means, and according to the grace of Jesus Christ. May God make us rich but help us to die poor as those who have sought first the kingdom of God knowing that all things are added to us.

VI. Give with equal commitment with the rest of the Body, vs. 13-15

2 Corinthians 8:13–15 (ESV) — “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of **fairness [equality]** 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be **fairness [equality]**. 15 As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

VII. Give under trustworthy leaders, vs. 16-23

VIII. Give to show your love, vs. 24

IX. Give because you are setting an example, 9:1-4

X. Give to overcome covetousness, 9:5