

**Text:** 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

**Title:** Generous Giving

**Truth:** God's grace teaches us to give generously even in poverty.

**Date/Location:** May 17, 2026 at FBC (revised from 8/6/2006)

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## Introduction

In these notes, we begin a series on Christian stewardship from 2 Corinthian 8 and 9. Stewardship encompasses how we use the money God has lent to us in our budgets, but also how we manage our time and abilities in a way that respects God. The focus in these two chapters is on giving to the Lord's work as a grateful response to Jesus's self-giving to us.

For some of us, we have understood giving to the church by way of example from our parents and it has almost become intuitive. For others hearing this message, there may be suspicion that the church is just interested in your money, which is not really true because God does not *need* our money in one sense. He owns everything. And consider our mindset on the matter, that the last time I spoke on this topic at this length was 20 years ago. The church is not interested in your money—it is even worse than that! The church is interested in YOU because God is interested in YOU. He wants you for His own child, and once that happens, you will grasp that you owe God your very life, including your stuff!

Others among us may not yet have established a pattern of responsible stewardship in finances so that we can give regularly to the church. The bottom line practically is that if you are a part of our church, but you have not been supporting the church, then you have not participated in a fair exchange (1 Cor. 9:11, Rom. 15:27). Simply stated, it takes money to keep the lights on, the building maintained, the pastors paid, the missionaries supported, the needy helped on the occasions that has become necessary, the lost reached, and the church family encouraged and edified with Bible-centered activities. Ministry costs money. Spiritual benefits are not free, although we try to make ministry free of charge to those who are not Christians because they do not (yet) see the value of supporting such work.

Here is why this is important: Jesus said that “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). That is an incontrovertible fact. So, although we do not like to talk about our money, we have to do so because it is part of our sanctification, part of our worship, and it tells on our heart. We often treat money matters like they are private, and that is true in a sense because we do not advertise things like generosity (Matthew 6:3). But we might also use privacy as an excuse if we like to keep our wrong priorities to ourselves!

Giving<sup>1</sup> shows the spiritual health of your heart. It measures how well your spiritual life is doing. It shows where your priorities are. It is remarkable how true this is in my years of experience as a pastor. There are people who have given a small amount or stopped donating altogether in protest about something. Their spiritual life shows it. God’s work in your life and in the church is worth more than a few bucks out of your annual budget! Let me put it plainly: if you spend more on coffee than you give to your church, there is a problem. If you pay more to your cell phone provider than you give to your church, there is a problem. (Coffee can be an addiction. And cell phones, remember, were not the mainstream until around 2002-2005—think of how they have changed your life in that short amount of time and taken your money too!) Those are just two examples. You can look at your budget<sup>2</sup> and see if there are similar things that show where your heart is.

There are others who have given sacrificially without anyone else knowing it, and I thank God for it. If that is happening in someone’s life, it correlates to a deep interest in the things of God and a warm-heartedness toward the church family and leadership that is a great encouragement.

We start our stewardship series in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, where we see an example of giving which God shows us as a pattern for the church. Paul begins by writing about the sacrificial giving of the

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<sup>1</sup> Later we can address giving to the church you are a member of, and compare that to giving to other ministries, benevolence, various non-profits, etc.

<sup>2</sup> I trust you do have a budget where you see your income and plan your expenditures, savings, giving, and taxes.

Macedonian churches. He explains how God’s grace worked in those people’s lives to cause them to give themselves to the Lord. This in turn shaped their hearts in joyful generosity that desired to participate in helping other Christians despite their own deep poverty.

## Background

- A. Paul routinely did not take up offerings when he first went to a place to preach the gospel, as an illustration of how free the gospel is (1 Cor. 9:15, 2 Cor. 11:8). But ministry does not run on fumes, and Paul needed finances on a regular basis to continue going in ministry (Phil. 4:16).
- B. From 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, the believers in Corinth already knew about how Christians should give to the Lord’s work—but it was not Paul’s work they were planning to support! They were aware of a relief project undertaken by the churches in Macedonia. These included Phillipi, Thessalonica, and Berea. They were raising funds to send to Jerusalem, where there was financial difficulty, probably due to a famine, and the churches wanted to help. A famine had been predicted some time back (Acts 11:27-30, like Gen. 41:25-36).
- C. As Paul instructed the Galatian churches, so it should be in other churches. Each of the people should be involved in giving as part of their regular, ongoing worship on the first day of each week. They ought to set aside some money, and specifically an amount in keeping with how God had prospered them. In other words, if you received a lot of income that week, then give in proportion to that. If you earned only a little income, then give little in keeping with that. If you took in nothing, you may not be able to give anything.
- D. In their case the money was to be gathered for when Paul came and added it to the collections from the other churches. This way they would not need a special collection or “drive” to gather money for the need. There was plenty of time to avoid that.
- E. He told them that he would not be handling the money so as to maintain the utmost integrity. He would send the money along with letters of introduction by the hand of people selected by the church and possibly go with them if it seemed appropriate.

- F. But what they already knew had to be augmented. They had not yet completed the offering for the saints in Jerusalem, and the apostle Paul had to challenge them to keep moving on the project, a project that they themselves had started a year earlier (8:10).
- G. The first part of Paul's exhortation in verses 1-5 is based on his experience with the Macedonian churches. He uses those churches to stir up the Corinthians by way of a good example.
- H. Now Paul continues the topic in this letter by giving a five-point explanation of the Macedonians' generous giving. Verse 1 teaches us the ultimate origin of proper giving—the grace of God. Verse 2 gives an example of some people who gave out of extreme difficulty welling up into extreme generosity. Verse 3 explains how they gave beyond their ability and on their own initiative, while verse 4 shows that they begged Paul to be involved in the offering despite their problems. In verse 5, we see that they had actually given *themselves* to God first. This made all the difference!

## **I. The Origin of Proper Giving – God's Grace, v. 1**

- A. Paul is informing the Corinthians that the Macedonians were graced by God with a special interest to give to those in need. This points out that generous giving is a grace, that is, it is a gift of God's grace to be able to do it properly. God gave it and, with the perfect tense, it indicates that the Macedonians were graced with an ongoing heart of generosity. *Not* giving indicates the absence of that grace in one's life.
- B. The grace of God produces qualities like those listed in 8:7—faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, and love. Giving is another part of a truly godly and Spirit-led life.

## **II. The Macedonian Situation, v. 2**

- A. Paul describes the Macedonian situation in the first part of verse 2. The Macedonian churches included Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. They were having a challenging time for some reason. The exact nature of the trial is not known but may be related to their profession of faith in Christ or to Roman occupation and taxation. The Romans had taken possession of their gold and silver mines

and so their wealth was probably vastly reduced. The trial was so severe that they were at “rock bottom.”

- B. Two things came into play in this difficult situation: their joy in salvation and their extreme poverty. The joy overrode the trials and poverty, and both the joy and poverty together, since they were in abundance, produced an abundant response in their giving.

How could deep poverty produce abundant giving? Perhaps they were keenly aware of the difficulties that one has in an impoverished state, and they wanted to help. That is, since they knew poverty, they knew what the Jerusalem believers were going through. The experience made them sympathetic.

Furthermore, they knew how to live on little. If they gave some of their means away, they might still have more than the famine-stricken believers, and they might still have more than they did in some past time. So, the poverty helped them to be sensitive to poverty in others, and to be able to handle poverty themselves.

- C. The word *generosity* at the end of verse 2 has to do with a sincere concern that causes them to have a generous spirit. The emphasis is not on the particular amount of money. We should think of generosity as a motivation or attitude, not an amount. In the end, Paul says they were richly generous. They possessed a sincerity or simplicity so that their giving was with a true generous spirit instead of one that was dishonest or double-minded. They did not have a duplicitous heart on the matter. They gave a lot both in an absolute sense and in a relative sense. But even if “a lot” was not much, it was sacrificial giving, with a right attitude, like the woman in Mark 12:41-44. It was a marvelous demonstration of the grace of God that they could do this for people they did not even know!

The grace of God produces joy and generosity even in distress.

### **III. Taking the Initiative and Giving “Over-and-Above,” v. 3**

- A. “Beyond their ability” means that theirs was an unusual kind of giving. They gave in a truly sacrificial way, giving up things they needed for the benefit of others. This is not reckless giving, but it is

giving which is more than what their means would suggest they are able to do.

B. The Scriptures are not telling us here that we always are giving beyond our ability—that would be impossible to do all the time. The Scriptures teach that a level of giving “according to ability” is to be the norm (1 Cor. 16:2 “as he may prosper”; 2 Cor. 8:12 “it is accepted according to what one has”; Acts 11:29 “the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief”). Special circumstances cause us to sometimes “go to the next level” and give like the Macedonians did.

But at the same time, we cannot just cop out and say, “I am giving according to my ability and don’t bother me about giving at a level where I would have to go without something.” In other words, we cannot excuse ourselves from giving like the Macedonians.

C. We also have to have a realistic understanding of what our ability really is, and that may be way beyond our present level of giving. Saying all of this another way around, some of us are at the “hum drum” level of giving, the no-brainer type. The Macedonians are two levels beyond that—they understand that their ability is beyond the hum-drum level, and then that they give even beyond that.

D. Paul is also encouraging the Corinthians with the Macedonian example of taking the initiative. Paul did not have to cajole them into giving. They gave voluntarily and without coercion. The proper way is that if needs are made known, the giver gives spontaneously. He takes the initiative to cover the need himself, not passing the buck or waiting for someone else to do the job or being forced into it!

In sum, God’s grace produces a take-initiative attitude and a mindset of giving according to and even above one’s ability.

Occasionally over the years this question comes up: should a person give to a church if they do not have money, that is, give on a credit card? The answer is *absolutely not*. There can be zero doubt about this. The text here the speaks of giving beyond their ability does not mean that they went “below zero” in their

bank account. It means that they could have reasonably given 20% of their income, but they gave 35%; or they could have given \$500, but they gave \$750. But in any case, they still had money left to live on. *You cannot give what you do not have.* If you want to give more, you might need to work more!

#### IV. Begging to Give, v. 4

- A. The Macedonian believers begged Paul to be involved in the ministry of giving to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Maybe Paul initially said to them, “You folks are poor and cannot help right now.” They pleaded with him otherwise to give. They really wanted to do this, it was a privilege for them to do so, and they did not want to be left out. Far from a grudging heart, they were enthusiastic and *demanding* to be able to give. This reminds us of the giving at the building of the tabernacle—the people were so energetic that they gave too much (Ex. 36:6-7).
- B. The phrase “fellowship of the ministry” refers to sharing in partnership in serving the others. Their giving was that sharing—and they urged Paul to receive that sharing and in turn share it with the others. They not only wanted to give but they wanted to express their concern for the saints, to share (fellowship) with them in the ministry. They felt a kinship or partnership with those brothers and sisters through Paul and his reports about them.

Once again, God’s grace has a tremendous effect. It produces in the donors an urgent desire to participate in helping others—not a grudging necessity but an enthusiastic participation.

#### V. Giving Yourself First, Your Money Second, v. 5

- A. The Macedonians went beyond what Paul had anticipated of them and first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to the apostle. This means that they did not only give money. Giving cold cash can be just that—cold. They had a warm heart toward the things of God and invested *themselves* in God’s things, not their own. This was in accord with God’s will and was the impetus that led them to their generous giving mentioned in the earlier verses. They loved God and the brethren and God’s work and all of that. They were truly

believers! Remember that God is always the source of good things, including our good responses to Him.

- B. This was “first priority” for the Corinthians, not simply first in order of time. They saw themselves as Romans 12:1-2 living sacrifices. With this personal dedication to the Lord, then they could easily see themselves as servants of Paul and the needs he brought to their attention.

God’s grace produces an attitude of giving oneself to God.

## Conclusion

There is no subset of “your things” or “your money” that belongs to you, where the rest can be budgeted for other things like God. “My house” and “my car” and “my my my my my...” The fact of the matter is you really owe God *everything*. And this is what the Macedonians were taught by the gospel. They had nothing that was from themselves ultimately (1 Cor. 4:7). “My” house or “my this or that”—how often does it get in the way of God’s work in your life? The Macedonians knew this. They had given themselves to God first, and then their generous giving was a natural outflow of their complete personal dedication to God.

And that points out a problem with the preaching on Christian giving today. Preaching on giving can be presented as “there he goes again, trying to wring more out of the dry towel” or “those disobedient people need to give more.” Giving can turn into a works-based thing, forced and unspiritual as opposed to grace-based, joyful, and generous.

The text before us shows a self-starting initiative on the part of the people, generous giving, even sometimes beyond what is reasonably possible, and all of this a natural outflow of a personal dedication to God. It is not forced at all, but desired. It is not the pastor twisting the arm of the congregation to give, but the congregation twisting the arm of the pastor to allow them to give (8:4)! This is what the grace of God looks like in giving.

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