

## **“Generous, Cheerful Giving”**

2 Corinthians 8-9

5.15.22

What does God expect of His children regarding their finances? What motivations does God provide His children so that they will want to be generous? What attitude does God want His children to have when they give?

The story is told that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as he passed by. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler. Yet the Emperor threw him several gold coins. A royal attendant was astonished at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded in royal fashion, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving."

What kind of giving suits God? The answer is found in 2 Corinthians 8–9 (ESV). 967 in the Red Bibles. We'll start with verse 1.

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup> and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. <sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. <sup>9</sup> 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....9:6 <sup>6</sup> The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap

sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. <sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

The context of these two chapters is Paul was teaching about giving generously to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Back in 1 Cor 16, the Corinthians had heard the need of their Jewish Christian brothers and said they would take up a collection of money to give them. But it had been a while since then and they still had not given money.

Paul wrote to encourage the Corinthians to keep their promise. In these two chapters, we discover several principles and benefits of generous giving.

### **Generous giving is not dependent on circumstances.**

Paul began by describing to the Corinthians the situation of the Macedonian churches—churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.” 2 Cor 8:1-4

These churches were suffering great persecution. Persecution sometimes meant the loss of job or being cut off from your community and/or extended family. When you lose your source of income or support of your community and family, you become poor.

Paul described the Macedonian churches as “extremely poor.” This word describes a beggar who has absolutely nothing and has no hope of getting anything.

What would most people expect these churches to do with the need? Suffering+ extreme poverty= sorry, Paul we’d love to help our brothers in Jerusalem but we are not in the place to do it right now. We need to circle the wagons and care for ourselves.

But that is not what they did. Their circumstances did not hinder them from giving. They begged Paul to participate in helping to meet the needs. They gave not only according to their means, but beyond their means. They joyfully and generously to assist their needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem!

Giving is really a heart issue. It doesn’t matter the circumstances. It doesn’t matter if you are rich or poor, if you have a heart to give, you will find ways to bless others. Children do not have money. And yet they beg for the opportunity to give to help someone else. Do you have a heart that desires to bless others?

Another principle is:

**Generous giving is based on what you have.**

It's not what you do with the million if fortune should come your way, but what you are doing at present with the \$100 you have. “For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” 2 Corinthians 8:12 (ESV)

Say you make \$100 a week. God is not asking you to give as if you made \$1,000 a week. God wants you to be generous with what you have not what you don’t have.

Some of you may remember the story- about a widow who had little but was very generous. “And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup> And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. <sup>43</sup> And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. <sup>44</sup> 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.” Mark 12:41–44

**God does not look at the the dollar amount alone to determine your generosity.**

He looks at what you gave based on what you have. So there could be some in this church who do not make a lot of money but give more generously than those who have a lot of money.

Some Christians think that giving their time is the equivalent of giving their money. So if I serve in an area that will cover my giving. Warren Wiersbe wrote, “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.” Use your gifts in the church and give generously.

So far we have looked at two principles of generous giving. Where can we find motivation to give? Paul provides several motivations to give generously. The first one is:

**Generous givers are motivated by Christ’s love and grace.**

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...” Jesus is the definition of generous giving. He lived from eternity past in complete peace and harmony in heaven. He had no needs. Jesus left the riches and peace of heaven to come to troubled and sinful earth where He would have needs. He didn’t live in a

castle. He didn't own a home. He didn't have a bank account. He lived in poverty. He was dependent on the generosity of others.

Jesus ultimately gave up His life. He died for our sins. His generosity enabled us to have our sins paid in full and peace with God. Honestly, there is no amount of money that we can give to pay Him back for what He has done. We didn't deserve it. We didn't earn it. It was all by grace.

Internalizing the truth that it is only by grace that we are saved. That it is only by grace that we are children of God. That it is only by grace that we can enter heaven should well up incredible gratefulness, humility and generosity. It should well up the desire to extend grace to others.

1 John 3:16–18 (ESV), “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup> But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? <sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

“Paul used nine different words to refer to the offering, but the one he used the most was grace. Giving is truly an act of grace that helps others.”

Tim, a Crusade staff person disciplined me in college. He used to say, “I can never repay God for what He has done for me. But I can give Him a return on His investment.”

Being generous gives God a return on His investment. What kind of return?

Scripture teaches that

**Generous giving reaps bountifully.**

Paul uses a farming principle to explain how God works in our giving. Verse 6, “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” 2 Cor 9:6

Right now the fields around us are being prepared for planting. Soon the farmers will be seeding their fields. The giving principle here is: the more seeds a farmer plants the greater the yield later. The less seeds he plants the lesser yield he harvests later.

Sounds simple until it applies to our money. Then that requires faith. Do I truly believe that if I am sow generously with the seeds of money that there will be a greater yield later?

A statement that many wise farmers live by is: "Don't eat your seed corn." The expression teaches that all the seed that comes through a farmer's hand has the potential of being planted or being eaten. In order to make sure that there will be a harvest the following year, the farmer must not eat all the seeds. And in order to have a good crop, the farmer must not be stingy with the sowing of seeds.

Did you know that God wants us to test Him with our giving? He wants to prove His ability to bless us. Malachi 3:10 (NASB95), "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."

God promises that if you are generous with your giving, He will bless you beyond what you give- "until it overflows."

Think of the ratio of a corn kernel compared to what it yields. Planting one kernel of corn in the ground can yield 500-1,000 kernels. That is an amazing return on your investment.

Now a caveat. Mal 3 is not teaching prosperity gospel. That if you give a lot, God will make you richer beyond your wildest dreams. God doesn't say He will give you loads of cash.

In Malachi, God promises to “pour out for you a blessing.” Blessings can come in all sorts of ways. Sometimes, it does come as cash.

A few years back, I received a financial gift. We could've used the gift. It would've helped us out financially but both Andrea and I felt like we were supposed to give it away. So we did.

A few months later, the tax preparer we had used for more than 20 years could no longer do our taxes so we had to find another preparer. As our new preparer began to get a preliminary look at our taxes, she found errors from the previous three years' returns. We had overpaid thousands of dollars, thousands of dollars that had accrued interest from the IRS- more than 10x the gift that we gave away. That was the hand of God at work. And it came at just the right time because we needed to purchase another used vehicle.

Blessings is not just money. It could be food, or clothing, or it could be a lower mechanic or hospital bill than you expected.

Blessings also come in reaping the character qualities of Jesus. Grace giving produces Christlike character. When you are generous, you are recognizing other people's needs. You are exhibiting compassion like Jesus. When you are giving generously, you are gaining a generous heart- which beats like Jesus. And you are becoming more righteous and more holy. You are gaining Christ's eyes and heart for the hurting and needy.

When you give generously you reap greater faith in God. You get to tell the stories that I just told. My family has so many more stories. And those who practice being generosity have many as well. You get to see God be Jehovah Jireh- the God who provides show up in amazing ways.

And you reap refreshing connections. Proverbs 11:25 (NIV84), “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.” Refresh others and you too will experience refreshment from God and from others.

To recognize what Jesus has done for us enables us to give like God desires.

**Generous givers give cheerfully.**

Churches have gotten a bad reputation for pressuring people to give. Some churches make big appeals and scold or shame you into giving.

A Pastor friend of mine was visiting a church while on vacation. He sat in the back right pew of the church. When the offering was announced everyone turned and looked at him. He was perplexed at why everyone was looking his way. One of the members turned to him and said “The offering always starts with the person sitting where you are.” He was encouraged to bring the offering up to the offering plate in front of the Pastor. My friend normally didn’t carry cash so he began to sweat wondering what he was going to do but then he remembered he had recently put a \$20 bill in his wallet.

He stood up and walked up to the front, dropped the money in the offering plate and proceeded back to his seat. The Pastor grabbed each person’s offering, unrolled the bills and then called out what was given and placed the bills in the appropriate piles. \$20 bills here, \$10 bills there. After everyone came up front and gave the offering, the leaders took the money to another room and counted it. Once counted, the amount was whispered back into the Pastor’s ear. He announced that it wasn’t enough so they were going to need to take another offering. Talk about pressure.

Some Pastors go on and on trying to pull more money out of their congregants pockets. It was told that Mark Twain was so sickened by a Pastor’s long appeal that he not only did not give what he planned to give, but he took a bill out of the offering plate!

To coerce or pressure you to give is a direct contradiction to God’s Word. Verse 7, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under



compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” Each person decides from the heart what they are to give. The decision on what you give needs to be connected to a couple of things- “that you are not giving reluctantly and you are not giving because you feel pressured- you are not under compulsion.”

The decision to give should not be by external pressure. Exodus 25:2 (ESV), “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.”

When God directs us to whatever location He wants for our future church, and we launch a capital funds campaign, there will not be a pressured sales pitch. Our job is to inform you of the project and the costs. But we will not pressure you to give or tell you how much you should give. That decision is between you and the Lord.

If we were to add pressure, it would make it very difficult for you to be a cheerful giver and that would not make God happy- for He loves a cheerful giver.

In general, what is your attitude toward giving? Do you give only when there is pressure? Do you give after it has been decided in your heart or just at random times? Do you give generously but your heart is not cheerful? Or do you give with a heart that is grateful and happy?

God wants you to be happy to give. Being a cheerful giver is becoming like Jesus. Jesus is an extravagant and generous, happy giver. He doesn't need to be pressured to give. He loves to shower us with His gifts. May we be like Him.

God watches for generous, cheerful givers. When He sees them, He often supplies them with more resources because He knows they will be used to bless others.

**Generous giving allows God to channel His resources through you.**

Look at verse 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.”

2 Corinthians 9:10

God funnels more resources through generous givers because He trusts them. He knows they will not become infatuated with money. He knows they will not hoard the money. This enables God to bless the poor and other essential ministries through the hands of generous givers.

When unexpected money comes your way are you supposed to be the final destination? It is important to seek God for the answer. Maybe He is placing that money in your hands to bless others.

When you are generous, you are blessing others. You are connecting God’s love and grace to them. As a result,

**Generous giving glorifies God.**

Look at verse 11, “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup> 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...”

Want to please God? Be a generous giver. Generous givers will cheerfully give and praise God. Generous givers give to help others. When they receive the help, they will recognize the true source and praise God.

Next steps:

When should you start being generous?

**Start today.** Don't wait for your circumstances to change. They might not actually change until you demonstrate your faith in God by giving generously.

By giving generously you prove that Christ is your Lord. If you are not turning over your money to Christ you have not fully given your life to Christ.

Teenagers, once you start making money, start giving generously. You will be further ahead than many people. You will be living wisely and you will have years and years of storing up treasures in heaven and blessing upon blessing in this life.

For those who are just scraping by or living paycheck to paycheck, the first step is to give to God first from your paycheck. Decide what you are going to give to God and give it before you pay any bills. That is showing you trust God above your money. And that is placing you under the blessings of God. Trust God to help you to pay your bills.

Some of you have been faithfully giving a tithe- 10% of your income for years and years. And as your salary increased so did the amount you gave. But 10% may be so comfortable for you now that you are not really exercising your faith. It is just something you do. Randy Alcorn in his book *Treasure Principle* wrote, "Tithing isn't the ceiling of giving; it's the floor. It's not the finish line of giving; it's just the starting blocks."

**Exercise your faith.** Exercise your faith by increasing your percentage of giving. Go up another percentage or more. Increase your percentages until you start to feel the strain. Challenge yourself to trust God over your finances.

Remember, you are not doing anything foolish. You are actually making very wise financial choices and trusting the God the Great Accountant to do His work with what you give. You cannot out give God. You can't. I dare you to try. :)

Let's pray

o.b.g.