

GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

ADULT LESSON by Tony Richmond | Associate Pastor to Families, FBC Keller

Main Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Key Point: The grace of God in the people of God produces an overflow of joy and generosity.

“Picture It” (Introduction)

In the book of Acts, Jesus says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Those words were countercultural when Jesus said them, and they are countercultural today. We live in a culture that celebrates getting. A casual drive through any population center reveals stuffed garages where tubs and boxes have relegated vehicles to the driveway. Storage complexes offer people extra bays of space to store possessions that will not fit in the home. We live in a context which seems to embrace the philosophy—“He who dies with the most toys wins.”

This worldview of possessions is not a philosophy limited to secular cultural. Unfortunately, Christians and churches are at risk of falling victim to this mentality as well. It is vitally important that individual Christians and churches live according to a biblical worldview instead. We need to view all of life (the world) through the lens (view) of Scripture. It is at this junction where we begin to live counterculturally. Instead of valuing money and accumulating possessions for personal gain or comfort, we must apply biblical principles related to money and possessions. In other words, how should we view all the things God has given us in the way that He views them?

In the animated movie *Finding Nemo*, a raucous group of seagulls share a common line, “Mine!” The flock of birds compete for any morsel of food or fish dropped in their midst. This scene illustrates the mentality of some Christians and churches related to their money, possessions, or resources. The thought progresses from “I earned this through my own hard work or expertise” to “I deserve this.” Scripture is clear, “Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). It is only through the grace of God that He allows us to steward His resources. “He owns the cattle on a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10). God is the Almighty Creator who delights in being a generous Father to His children. As a result, it is an exercise of prideful arrogance when we declare, “Mine!”



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“God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). One of the marks of Christian maturity is a person’s level of generosity. This generosity is not limited to financial generosity but includes selfless service to others, no matter the circumstances. To be truly generous and selfless at the level of the heart, Christ followers must grasp the correct way to receive blessings from God. If we consider those blessings our rightful property, we rob God of His glory as Giver, and we will lack generosity. However, if we acknowledge with thankfulness and gratitude the gifts of our Father as evidence of His grace in our lives, we will be led to be generous both individually and corporately.

PRAY

“Bible It” (Bible Study)

Read the passage: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

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.

1. Observe the Text (Ask learners to identify phrases and repeated words):

- Who is speaking? *The Apostle Paul*
- Who is his audience? *Corinthian believers*
- What is the truth that Paul is intending to communicate? *To know about the grace of God manifested through the generosity of the Macedonian churches.*
- What was evident in the Macedonian churches that enabled this generosity? *They gave themselves to the Lord first.*
- What is Paul calling the Corinthian believers to do as a result? *Follow in the same pattern of recognizing God’s grace in their lives and be a conduit through which God’s blessings would flow forth.*

Say to the class: By observing the text, we can be clued into the message that Paul intends to communicate.

2. Interpret the Text—“What is its meaning?”

Generosity is the byproduct of recognizing the grace of God in one’s life.
vs. 1, “the grace of God that has been given”

vs. 4, “begging us earnestly for the grace of taking part”

In the verses that follow the passage above, grace is mentioned also:

vs. 6, “complete among you this act of grace”

vs. 7, “see that you excel in this act of grace also”

This passage of Scripture (2 Corinthians 8:1-7) is dominated by an atmosphere of grace.

1. The foundation of the Christian faith is grace.

The grace of God is a foundational truth in Christian life. He is unconditionally kind toward us in that He gives according to His nature, not according to what we deserve. This grace was clearly seen in the sending of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 2:8, Paul teaches, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” Our salvation originates with the grace of God. He saves us, not because of us, but despite us. He saves according to His character. In 2 Corinthians 8:1, Paul writes that he wants the Corinthian church “to know about the grace of God that has been given.” This grace reflects the grace Christ gave the church. As a result of experiencing the grace of God, these believers were to be grace givers. God had given these believers His grace and it resulted in remarkable and unanticipated generosity.

Take a moment to ask your class to reflect on the grace of God in their lives. In what specific ways can they recall/identify the evidence of God’s grace toward them?

2. Grace-produced generosity can exist in every context.

In verses 2-3, Paul explains the specific ways in which the Macedonian churches reflected the grace of God. He begins by identifying their condition. They were severely afflicted and in extreme poverty. Paul is showing that their generosity was not flowing out of prosperity and abundant resources. The Macedonian churches gave, not because they had an overabundance to give, but because they had “overflowing joy.” Their generosity flowed out of poverty and joy.

In Mark 12, Jesus teaches his disciples using a similar circumstance. As they sat near the temple treasury, they observed many rich people placing large sums into the receptacle. Then a poor widow came and placed two small copper coins (equivalent to a penny) into the receptacle. At this point, Jesus teaches a lesson about generosity: “For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, and all she had to live on.”

Paul is exhorting the Corinthian church to forsake their former passiveness and adopt the spirit of the Macedonian churches, a spirit marked by determination and sacrifice. Paul goes on in verse 3 to explain they have not given according to their ability but ABOVE and BEYOND. They were not motivated by duty or guilt in their giving; they gave voluntarily. In the same way that God’s grace is shown to us voluntarily and is characterized by oversupply, the Corinthians’ appropriate course of action was to be grace givers.

“If I only had a little more, I could give more.” “If I had as much as that person, I could be more generous.” From time to time, we hear these kinds of sentiments when people speak of giving, especially monetarily. However, the point that Paul makes in this passage is that life circumstances are never an excuse for failing to be people identified by grace-motivated

generosity. We must be careful to search our motivations and not begin to think that our giving is because of a sense of duty or obligation. Instead, as we reflect on God's grace in our lives, we are motivated by overflowing joy to give generously. In doing so, we reflect the character of God in our individual lives and in the life of our church.

3. Generosity is directed toward those who are doing God's will.

We do not typically have to find someone to accept our money when we are being generous. Many people, organizations, and charities rely on donations to operate. In 2 Corinthians 8:4-5, Paul summarizes how the Macedonian churches directed their generosity. They recognized that the apostle Paul was a true servant of God. They had experienced Paul's ministry in such a way that they were convinced he was doing the will of God. As a result, Paul writes that the Macedonian Christians begged "us earnestly for the favor or taking part in the relief of the saints and this not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us."

The believers in the Macedonian churches were committed to the work of God. They had given themselves to the Lord. This language expresses a kind of commitment to God that goes beyond a segmented mentality of God's kingdom. These people did not view their lives as having a portion dedicated to God and church life; instead, they were totally devoted. They were all in. As such, they sought to support work that was obviously God glorifying and kingdom building. They identified the apostleship and work of Paul as something to which they should be devoted as he was doing the will of God.

What process do you go through individually and corporately to identify those who are doing the will of God in your context? Although we are to be generous, we are limited in our resources, and we want to be wise as to where we direct those things. Giving is certainly a matter for prayer as we ask God for this wisdom. According to Paul, it is a wise practice to consider those who are serving the kingdom according to God's will and seek to partner with those brothers and sisters.

Christian generosity is not getting something to give something. Christian generosity is grounded in the grace of God that all true believers have experienced in their soul. It is acknowledging with joy the generous gifts that we have been given in the past and are certain to receive in the future from our loving Father. We hold tightly to the hope that we have in God as we loosen our hold on the goods of this life, directing those goods to be used for kingdom purposes. Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19. God gives to us for our enjoyment that we may do good, that we may serve others, and that we may be ready to share generously.

“Live it” (Application)

Tell your class to consider the generosity exhibited in the Macedonian churches as they reflect on the specific areas below where we can be generous.

Generosity in Thought

- “Why are people doing what they are doing?” Sometimes we make ungenerous assumptions about people’s motives. How could we reframe those thoughts to extend generosity in our thinking?

Generosity in Gifts, Talents, Skills

- How can you frame your spiritual gifts, innate talents, or important skills in the context of generosity? In what ways do you already use these things in the church or for kingdom purposes? Are there ways in which you can utilize these things in a more intentional grace-giving way?

Generosity in Investing in Others

- It takes time and energy to invest in another person’s life. However, we are called by Christ to be on a mission of going and making disciples. As a result, investing in others is non-negotiable. Think about those who have made a generous investment in your life. How might you share that same kind of investment in the life of someone else?

Generosity in Money

- Take a close look at your personal giving. How much of your giving is directed specifically toward those individuals or organizations committed to doing the work of the Lord? Are you surprised by this number? Would it be considered a generous number? What are you willing to do to express generosity in this area?

Generosity in Time

- In the busyness of life, we don’t always remember that our time is a gift from God. Time is something we can utilize with generosity. What practices in your life regarding your use of time need to be trimmed away so that your time can be used generously for the work of the Lord?

Closing Prayer