

Series: Graced to Give
“Blessed to be a Blessing”

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Today we are in the second week of a sermon series called “Graced to Give”. This study is specifically focused on the fact that God calls us to live a life of generosity in which we give generously of our time, talents, treasure, and things. For those of you who are just joining us I want you to know that there is absolutely no manipulative motive or purpose in sharing this message. It is simply a calling that God gives in His Word and a conviction that God has placed on my heart that if we are going to be the vessel that God wants us to be we must obey His Word, surrender our lives to Him and live a lifestyle of generosity. I realize for many this is an uncomfortable topic. In fact, for the first eight years of my pastoral ministry it was equally as uncomfortable to me. In those early days I was very hesitant to address money matters. I had started as a very young seminary student and was somewhat timid to address this heavy topic. I had become convinced that if I preached on the topic that I was going to upset specific people and run them off. That perspective was largely impacted, by the common misconception that pastors and churches are always asking for money. When you consider many of the so-called preachers that we see on television it seems that most of them are constantly asking for money. However, I am convinced today that the abuse of many doesn’t release us from the fact that God’s Word clearly calls us to be generous and we must be obedient to Him. In fact, I believe that Scripture shows that our being generous is not about what God wants from us but rather what He wants for us.

Thankfully, God is not silent on the subject because He has much to say about generosity. In fact, Jesus addressed the issue of money more than any other single topic He spoke about. Jesus knew that how we use our money reveals what is most important to us. God doesn’t want us to be about ourselves but about Him and others. He is not simply calling us to generosity, but He is calling us to be growing and abounding in generosity. This, though, goes completely against the norm of our culture. Our culture tries to convince us that life is all about ourselves - own wants, desires, and perceived “needs.” But God teaches us in His word that as believers we aren’t to live for ourselves, but instead for the glory of God and for the good of others. Unfortunately, however, the selfish life is not only characteristic of those outside of the church it is also seen inside the church. Statistically we know that when tragedies and disasters occur in our country or throughout the world people only give about 2% of their annual income towards helping others in need. It is interesting to note that statistically, we also know that the average Christian gives 2% of his resources to the Lord’s work. It should strike us as odd that the average Christian is no more generous than someone who doesn’t know the Lord. For the Christian, this is not really a money issue. It is an issue of Lordship. It really boils down to Who is Lord and Who is in control of our lives. Are we living our lives for our wants or God’s will? Are we living according our ways or God’s ways? I am convinced that we have been greatly blessed. But, we must always remember that we have been blessed to be a blessing.

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One of the first things we learn from 2 Corinthians 8-9 is that giving is an act of grace. Paul used nine different words to describe their giving, but the word he used most was “grace.” Giving is certainly a wonderful ministry, but the motivation for giving must be from the grace of God in the heart. I am convinced that if we have experienced God’s grace we will want to abound in generosity. We have experienced much grace from God, but in grace we should also be willing to give for the glory of God and the good of others. This means that we are not called to give of the left-overs of our life nor are we called to give out legalistic demands and expectations. We are called to give out of the love that God poured out in our hearts when we experienced His grace and mercy. We are to give out of the longing in our hearts to be like Jesus and to honor Him in all that we do. This is what “Grace Giving” is all about. Notice with me four observations that will help us grow in this grace.

I. The Picture of Generosity (vs. 9)

I am very thankful for pictures that help explain certain details. ****ILL:** Putting together the basketball goal. The instructions weren’t as thorough as you would anticipate, so I studied the picture to make sure that I understood every detail. If we want to grow in generosity we need to study the picture – the Person, Jesus Christ.

A. Jesus Gave Sacrificially

The greatest example of generosity and giving that the world has ever seen is found in Jesus Christ. He humbled Himself and left the throne and riches of heaven to come to this fallen world. We can’t thoroughly grasp the riches and splendors of heaven. We are told in the Bible that His city is surrounded with jasper walls. The streets themselves are paved with gold. The City gates are made of pearl. This was His home, He was indeed rich. Yet, the Bible says though He was rich, He became poor. Just as we can’t fully grasp His riches, neither can we fully grasp His poverty. He humbled Himself and came to this earth to be born of a virgin. Even in His birth there was no room for Him in the inn so Mary and Joseph went to the area for animals where Jesus was humbly born and laid in a manger. His first garments were grave clothes and the first to give testimony of Who He was were poor, outcast shepherds. He grew up in Nazareth, a despised place in a despised land. The leaders of the day believed that nothing good ever came out of Nazareth. But, His poverty continued. Throughout His earthly ministry **Matthew 8:20** explains that He didn’t have a place to lay His head. He had nothing of earthly value. When He wanted to feed the hungry multitudes, He had to borrow a little kid’s lunch. When He wanted to confound the critics He had to borrow a penny. When He was led to teach great things to the crowd that pressed against Him He had to borrow Peter’s boat. When fulfilling an ancient prophecy He had to borrow an upper room. When entering Jerusalem He had to borrow a donkey. When He needed a burial place, He temporarily borrowed a rich man’s tomb. He was rich, but He became poor. Why? “For your sake He

became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” He sacrificed greatly for you and for me! He sacrificed greatly for the glory of the Father and the good of man.

B. Jesus Gave Willingly

It is important to realize that Jesus gave Himself willingly. He was not forced or coerced into His action. Was it God the Father’s will for Jesus to come and give His life as a substitute in our place? Absolutely! However, we can’t ignore the fact that Jesus responded with willingness to fulfill the Father’s plan. **Philippians 2:6-8** says it well, “Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus was equal with God the Father, yet He willingly laid aside His glory to come to this earth and give His life for the glory of the Father and the good of man. All throughout His life we see His willingness to give. Jesus knew what salvation would cost. He knew that it meant that He would have to give His life. Yet, He was clear to proclaim that He had come to seek and save those who are lost. Even when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane in **Matthew 26:39** He was aware of what was to come. He knew that His time was drawing near. His soul was deeply grieved and as He prayed He sweated great drops of blood. Overwhelmed with anguish He cried out, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.” Who can grasp all that He was facing in that moment? But He continued on, “Yet not as I will, but as You will.” In other words, even in great torment, He was willing to submit His will to the will of the Father and give His life for us. We see this further in **Matthew 27:12-14** as Jesus stands before the governor, Pilate, the chief priest and elders were bringing all sorts of accusations against Jesus. Pilate was astounded and asked, “Don’t you hear what they are saying about you? Don’t you understand their accusations? What are you to say for yourself. Verse 14 states, “And He did not answer him with regard to A SINGLE CHARGE, so the governor was quite amazed.” **Isaiah 53:7**, six hundred years prior, stated, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.” Why did He remain silent? Because He was willing to give His life for you and me.

C. Jesus Gave Generously

Notice two additional statements about His generosity. First, it says that God gave according to “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Second, notice that because He was rich and became poor, now through Him we can become rich.

We have been blessed greatly because of God’s grace. Some have defined grace as “**God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**”. That is not the most thorough definition to ever be given, but the clear point is that we don’t deserve it and we certainly can’t earn it. We did nothing to deserve what Jesus did for us on the cross. He simply freely gave Himself

for us. I will never fully understand why He gave of Himself so generously and graciously for me. I simply take Him at His Word and believe it's true that He gave so greatly because He so loved me.

John 3:16, “For God so love the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.”

1 Tim. 2:5-6, “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.”

Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands love your wives, just as CHRIST also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”

Galatians 1:3-4, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of God the Father.”

He was generous in what He gave for us, but He is also generous in what He gives to us. He took the enormous debt of our sin and bore it on the cross so that we might become heirs to all the riches that are found in Him. **Ephesians 1:7**, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to **the riches of His grace.**” **Verse 18** continues, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are **the riches of the glory of His inheritance** in the saints.” John Phillips describes God's generosity well, “From all eternity, God has had our well-being in mind. His eternal purpose was to bring into existence human beings upon whom He could bestow all the inexhaustible riches of His grace.” Jesus has been generous to all by giving His very life and offering the riches of His grace, however, the only ones who experience His generosity are those who receive Him by faith.

In being reminded of God's amazing grace to us, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that God is giving this as an illustration of how we, too, are to generously give our lives for His glory and the good of others. In fact, we are never more like Christ than when we give of ourselves generously for the glory of God and the good of others. We have been blessed to be a blessing.

II. The Process of Generosity (vs. 10-11)

One could easily argue that the Corinthian believers do not give us a good example of generosity. To that point I would certainly agree. However, even in their negative example as Paul addresses it he actually gives us a clear process by which to live generously. There are three simple steps.

A. Determine

Now remember last week I mentioned that one of the reasons that Paul was writing so clearly to the Corinthian church about generosity was because they were not practicing it at all. Their lack of generosity wasn't because there wasn't an opportunity or need or due to an inability to give. Corinth itself was a very prosperous city and was located on a major trade route which bolstered the economy. The overall wealth of the city was also seen in the church. There was need, means, and opportunity, but they had failed to be generous. A year prior to this they had taken the first step towards generosity. They had learned of the need of the saints in Jerusalem, they concluded that it was right to give and they determined they would give. **1 Corinthians 16:1-2** explains, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come." So, a year prior the Corinthian believers had determined that giving to bless others was the right thing to do. I believe that all giving should start there. Often times we begin with "What do I think? What do I feel? Am I comfortable with this?" The fact is that it shouldn't be about what I think or feel. It's about what does God want me to do and what is His will. ****ILL:** I remember many years ago getting my first job and writing that first tithe check. Frankly, it was painful. My feelings said, "This is your money. You worked hard and earned it." My faith said, "God entrusted all of this to you. It is right to honor Him with the first of your income." In that moment, I had to determine what God wanted me to do and what was right. That continued on in college. It was difficult to give at times when I felt I didn't have much to give, but in each case I knew that it was God's will. Notice that Paul called them to determine that giving unto the Lord was right. When did he tell them to give? "On the first day of EVERY week." He didn't say, "Whenever it's convenient, when you feel like it, when it's been a great week." He knew that God was worthy of their best all the time and that He should be their top priority at all times. So, the first step is to determine. And I am convinced that until we determine what is right in the matter of generosity we will likely never truly be generous. This speaks of their "will". They submitted their will to the will of God and committed to be generous.

B. Desire

We learn from 2 Cor. 8:10 something interesting about the Corinthians. They not only committed to give, but their hearts were in it. The verse says that they not only began to give but they also "desire(d) to do it." In other words, they weren't being forced or coerced to give their gift. Here we see the same verse as last week. **2 Corinthians 9:7**, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." God is not only aware of what we determine to give, He also sees the giver's heart and knows the motive for giving. Are we giving out of a sense of devotion to God or out of a sense of duty and obligation? God doesn't want anything that is given grudgingly. He wants us to give from the heart. When we give, God records what is in the heart, regardless of the amount that we have in our hand. This speaks of their "want". It is amazing how often we don't want what is good for us, but as soon as we begin to discipline ourselves we realize the joy that comes when our want

aligns with will. ****ILL:** Since I gave my first gift to the Lord it hasn't always been easy. However, once I determined that giving to the Lord was right it became a conviction in my life. Initially, it wasn't my desire. However, now that we have given to the Lord we see the joy that it has brought into our lives. We see how God has used it to shape us, to expand His kingdom and to bless others. In fact, God has so made it my desire to give, the very thought of having nothing to give grieves me. Once we commit to God that we will obey Him in faith, it is amazing to see the excitement and joy He brings as we trust Him. ****ILL: Disney World Money Jar.**

May God help us to desire the things that He desires and reject the things He doesn't.

C. Do

This may sound simple, but it is an important point. The Corinthian believers had determined the right thing and they had a heart to do it. However, they were still missing something important. See, they had made a great promise and even had great passion behind it, but they had not yet put their commitment into practice. **Verse 11** says, "FINISH DOING IT." It seems for them that they had started out well, but they got distracted. We aren't told exactly what got their attention. We don't know where all of their energies went. We don't know what they were doing with their resources. We simply know that a year had passed and they still hadn't shown generosity. I imagine that they thought they were fine. After all, they might conclude, God knew their hearts. However, I am reminded clearly that we must follow-through. **James 1:22** summarizes, "But prove yourselves doers of the Word and not merely hearers who delude themselves." We must fulfill what God puts on our hearts to do. ****ILL: Sister giving to the Legacy Campaign in her will.**

III. The Plan of Generosity (vs. 12)

Everyone knows that if you are going to be successful at accomplishing a goal you do best when you have a plan. A good plan is helpful for an athlete, a builder, a teacher, a doctor, a student, a custodian, a manager, etc. We understand the benefits of a good plan. Paul basically says, "Here is the plan for practicing generosity and fulfilling your commitment." He says two specific things:

A. We Must be Prepared to be Generous

We can sum up this point in two words – "Be Ready!" Paul says that they should give "if the readiness is present." Were they ready to finally act? For them, they had stalled for over a year and Paul is calling them recognize that "now" was the time to give. But for us today it causes me to wonder, "Are we ready to be generous?" There is a sense in which we may never feel ready. Much like the young married couple who is waiting for the perfect time to have a baby, there are many young Christians who are waiting for the perfect time to be generous. The problem is that the "perfect time" never comes. There is always another bill, an unexpected expense, or something that catches us off guard. The point with generosity is that we should work, we should save, we should manage our

money wisely, and we should discipline ourselves so that we are ready and willing to give for the glory of God and for the good of others. God saw this as so important that He gave clear instructions to all people. To the thief, He commanded in **Ephesians 4:28**, “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.” God says, “Get to work. Work hard and well and do your best. In doing so you will receive earnings. Be disciplined in managing your money so that you can share something with those in need. Then to all Christians God commanded in **Galatians 6:9-10**, “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

Are you prepared to be generous? What changes need to happen in your life so that you can be ready to be generous? What luxury can you go without? What sacrifices should you make in order to be ready to be generous for the glory of God and good of others? The Corinthian believer appeared to be ready because they had put aside money every week and had saved. We would be wise to do the same so that we are ready to be generous.

B. We Must be Proportionate in Our Generosity

Here Paul says, “It is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” 1 Corinthians 16:2 says that the giver is to give “as he may prosper.” Last week in 2 Corinthians 8:3 we saw that the Macedonians were commended for giving “according to their ability.” Please notice that God here doesn’t spell out a specific amount. He doesn’t even give a specific percentage. While I believe that the general principle of a tithe is 10% that is simply the starting point. That was the initial demand of the law, but I should be much more generous when I am giving in grace. Paul was calling them to give out of love and grace and to give according to what one has. To me, this is so encouraging. God doesn’t say, “Now give me this amount,” as if He is some overbearing dictator. He simply calls me to give willingly and generously of what He has placed in my hands. I am not responsible for what He hasn’t given me, but I must be generous with what He has. The same is true with my spiritual gifts and abilities. God doesn’t hold me accountable for the gifts and abilities that He hasn’t given to me. That’s good news. Can you imagine what it would be like if God demanded that we would all use our voices to sing on stage in front of people? I know some people that would never come back to church. But God is calling us to serve and give according to what He has personally given to us. This is easy to understand. We can’t give what we don’t have, but what we do have we are to give generously to the Lord.

IV. The Principles of Generosity (vs. 13-15)

I’m going to close this message with two simple principles about generosity. We will see many more in the coming weeks. For now, I want us to see two simple but powerful principles about our giving.

A. Generosity is God’s Means of Partnership in His Work

In verse 13, Paul is going out of his way to explain that this isn’t about asking God’s people to suffer while others live in ease. He is showing the Corinthians that the request to give to the saints in Jerusalem isn’t about making their lives more comfortable. Instead, the Jerusalem saints were greatly in need because of the persecution that they faced. Paul is saying, “You have been blessed to be a blessing.” He even expounds upon this in the next verse. He states clearly, “At this present time your abundance being a supply for their need.” Please understand that your state of abundance isn’t guaranteed. Paul emphasized that they were experiencing an abundance at the present time, but there was nothing to suggest that they would always be in this state. In fact, he even suggests that they didn’t know when they themselves would be in need and would need assistance and support from others. The circumstances could’ve been reversed at any time. I believe that the Jerusalem church had already done a great deal for the church at Corinth. Truthfully the church at Corinth wouldn’t have even been established if the disciples had never left Jerusalem to take the Gospel throughout the world. So, in many ways the Corinthians had already been blessed by the saints in Jerusalem, but now it was time for the Corinthians to bless the believers in Jerusalem. They had been blessed to be a blessing.

Partnering in the work of the Lord was a beautiful thing. They didn’t have to go to Jerusalem and didn’t have to know every name in order to make an impact. They could pray, support, and give and partner in God’s work.

B. Generosity is God’s Means of Provision in Our Lives

This may sound odd, but our giving is God’s channel of blessing to provide for our needs. The emphasis of verse 14 is that through generosity our needs are met. But, notice closely the illustration that Paul used in verse 15. He is referring to the miracle of the manna that was recorded in **Exodus 16**. As the Israelite wandered in the wilderness God miraculously provided food for them. The bread He provided was called manna. God provided it daily, but He gave a key instruction. He commanded them to gather what was needed for their own household. The Bible tells us specifically that those who gathered much had not excess, and those who gathered little had no lack. Everyone was able to gather enough for their families and God met their need. Some, though, tried to hoard the manna so that they would have more and more, but they found it was impossible because it would begin to decay and stink. The lesson is clear – gather what you need, share what you can, and don’t try to hoard God’s blessings. God will see to it that you will not be in need if your trust Him and obey His Word. This is what Jesus was saying in **Matthew 6:33**, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Warren Wiersbe summarized the point well, “Grace giving is a matter of faith: we obey God and believe that He will meet our needs as we help to meet the needs of others. As the Jews gathered manna each day, so must we depend on God to ‘give us our daily bread.’ We must not waste or squander what God gives us neither must we hoard it.” In other words, we’ve been blessed to be a blessing!