

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

English Standard Version (ESV)

8 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. 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹² For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵ As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

“Models in Grace-Fueled Giving”

Second Corinthians 8 and 9 contain the most sustained and detailed treatment of the topic of financial giving in the entire Bible. If you’ll excuse the pun, these 39 verses are a veritable gold mine as it relates to the issue of stewardship. And that’s why we’re here. We are going to consider what the Bible says about generosity as we follow the logic of the inspired Apostle Paul. We’re going to unfold God’s counsel on this matter in three basic steps: step one is *models* in giving, step two is *motives* for giving, and step three is *means* of giving. Models, motives, and means for giving financially to the work of the gospel through the local church.

These two chapters of the Bible bear witness to a special, one-time financial gift from a number of first century churches to a single needy church among them. Paul is addressing the issue of what has become known as the Jerusalem collection. An inter-congregational relief effort for the poor and persecuted mother church in Jerusalem. So while the immediate context here may not seem to apply to us, it’s the *way* that Paul argues for the *priority* and the *importance* of giving as a church that’s key for us here. There are principles of giving for us quite literally everywhere we look in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. From models, to motives, to the means of generous financial, grace-fueled giving. And...

The first step toward grace-fueled giving is to ponder the examples of those who model it

The name we've given this booklet is "grace-fueled giving". I frankly don't see how I had any other choice in the matter given how often Paul uses that word "grace" in these two chapters. 10 times in 39 verses we see the word "grace". In fact, the word for "grace" appears five times in the first 15 verses of chapter eight alone. Grace-fueled giving. That's what we're looking to lay a foundation for as a church together. Not *guilt*-fueled giving. Not *shame*-fueled giving. God help us if we participate in *pride*-fueled giving. No. Grace-fueled giving. How many of us are interested in knowing more about that? Me, too. The first step toward grace-fueled giving is to ponder the examples of those who model it. Let's look at our first example.

When you think you don't have enough resources, consider the churches of Macedonia (vv.1-5)

In verse one, Paul speaks of "the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia". The region of Macedonia contained ancient cities like Thessalonica, Philippi, and Berea. And in these five verses, I'd like to call your attention to several observations related to the work of God's grace in their lives that made them such a stunning model for financial generosity.

First, their *affliction*. Paul says in verse 2, that the churches in these cities were put to "a severe test of affliction". This is undoubtedly religious persecution for their faith in Christ. And make no mistake about it, it is God's design for them. In Philippians 1:29 Paul says to this Macedonian church: "...it has been *granted* to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only *believe* in him but also *suffer* for his sake" [emphasis mine]. Suffering was "granted" them. *Given* to them, like a *gift*. Who's doing that? The same one in verse 29 who grants them to "believe". God did that. The call, the destiny, the granting to suffer persecution for their faith. The churches of Macedonia were afflicted and it happened on God's watch by God's design through God's grace.

Secondly, note their *joy*. 2 Corinthians 8:2 – "for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy...overflowed." That's grace for sure. Remember, Paul wants the Corinthian believers to know about the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia. And the evidence of God's grace here is their joy in the midst of affliction. What is your first response when you endure hardship for your faith? Do you endure hardship for your faith? I hope you do. If you do not, you want to make sure that you are indeed in the faith. If you do not experience any

persecution for following Christ, ask yourself just how many compromises have you made in order that it remain so. But if you endure persecution for Christ...what is your knee-jerk response? You know what mine usually is? Whining. Murmuring. Self-pity. That is not the response of the Macedonian churches. In a severe test of affliction, what was brought to the surface was (in Paul's words) "their abundance of joy". That's grace.

With that as the foundation, now we move to the financial picture. Let's finish verse 2 and on into verse 3: "their extreme poverty [has] overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means..." The first evidence of God's grace in their lives was joy in affliction. The second evidence of God's grace is a "wealth of generosity" amid "extreme poverty". Notice both of the descriptors. This isn't just generic generosity; it is a "wealth" of generosity. Ridiculous, absurd generosity. They didn't just give *according* to their means. They gave *beyond* their means. How do you give *beyond* your means? And it's not moderate poverty; it's "extreme" poverty. Grinding, rock-bottom poverty. That's what these words mean. How does that happen? How does one give beyond their means out of extreme poverty? Verse one is the only answer: "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia". It's because of the grace of God at work in their lives that they are able to give in this way.

And just in case we hadn't *made* the case...consider verse three into verse four. How did the Macedonians get connected to the opportunity to give? They did it (according to these verses) "of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints." Part of the reason they likely had to beg him was because Paul probably looked at their impoverished condition and figured he wouldn't tap them for his project. Nevertheless, the poor Macedonian churches *knew* of it and they wanted in. Like a shrewd businessman spotting a deal only the reverse. They *begged him* to *let them* give the text says. Have you ever heard of anything like this in your life?

And then verse 5: "and this [earnest begging] not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God to us." That's the order, of course. When we get the order right, we begin to live this way. When you give yourself to God, God will see to it that you are given to others. The Victorian preacher Alexander Maclaren once wrote: "If a man feels that he does not own himself, much less will he feel that his goods are his own. A slave's owner possesses the slave's

bit of garden ground, his hut, and its furniture. If I belong to Christ, to whom does my money belong?"¹ We are not our own, we belong to Christ. He purchased us at the price of his own blood and now everything we have rightly belongs to him.

The first step toward grace-fueled giving is to ponder the examples of those who model it. Do you ever think about being more generous with your giving to this local church but when you do, the thought creeps into your head: "There's just not enough money right now." Maybe you're facing mountain of debt. Or maybe you live fairly comfortably and you're debt is under control but when you look at how you've budgeted, how you spend, you simply can't imagine where it's going to come from. If that's you today, ask yourself these questions: "Am I suffering persecution for my faith?" "Do I well up with joy in Christ on a regular basis?" "Do I not only *not live* in extreme poverty but rather in the most prosperous nation in the history of the world?" "Do I give beyond my means?" "Have I ever begged for the grace to give generously?" "Have I given myself to the Lord so that I might be given to others?" When you think *you* don't have enough resources, consider the churches of Macedonia. The first step toward grace-fueled giving is to ponder the examples of those who model it. Secondly:

If you'd like to give more generously one day in the future, or you don't regard giving to be your primary spiritual gift, consider the church in Corinth (vv.6-8, 10-15)

Let's take the second half of that point first. Look with me at verse 7. The issue of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the church in Corinth is a story that stretches back to Paul's first letter to this church. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are God-given abilities used in the ministry of the church for the glory of Christ and the building up of the fellowship. Verse 7 refers to several of them: "faith...speech...knowledge" and so on. And what he's telling them here is that they so clearly have been graced by God in so many areas. They have been given many spiritual gifts. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 1:4 and following, Paul writes of this church: "...in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge...so that you are not lacking in any gift..." Now make no mistake, Paul has very strong words of correction for this church later on in 1 Corinthians as he assesses their use of their spiritual gifts, but he does affirm that they are a *gifted* church. He affirms it in 1 Corinthians 1 and he affirms

¹ Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*. Volume 14. Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI. (18--) 1984. p.23.

it here in this passage. "...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."

Do you see what he's saying here? He *knows* how extraordinary this church is. And so he draws their attention to what he already regards to be evidences of God's grace at work among them in the form of these gifts. This is so wise. Because Paul is about to make a very big ask of this church. He's already set up the impoverished and persecuted churches in Macedonia as the Corinthians model for giving. And you can imagine that without verse 7, the thinking of both Paul and the Corinthian church might be terribly skewed. On Paul's part, if he doesn't remind himself of how wonderfully God's grace has already manifested itself in this church, he could get real bitter real quick and become a single-issue apostle. Like whenever he thinks of the church in Corinth, all he can picture is a church that's stingy. And that's a warped picture. Giving may not be their strong suit, but they have a lot going for them in the grace department. God is at work. Furthermore, if this church does not hear affirmation from the pen of the Apostle at this point, they're only going to hear criticism. And of course, he's not simply seeking to criticize. He needs to proceed carefully.

The same is true with the spirit driving this little booklet. Ours is a gifted local church. Our fellowship is loaded with the grace of God. For many years this church has carried the gospel in the Westonka area. Lives have been altered for eternity. People have been converted, baptized, grown up in their faith, and set to serve in the mission of being and making disciples of Jesus Christ. Our church has had a noble track record on many fronts: from musical worship to preaching and teaching to compassion ministry and global missions. Our church has received much grace. But I look at our giving trend over the last several years and I also say with the Apostle Paul: "see that you excel in this act of grace also". The grace of giving generously. The first step toward grace-fueled giving is to ponder the examples of those who model it. And Paul did not let the church in Corinth off the hook on this point, and I don't think God will let the church in Mound off the hook here either.

Now the second aspect here in point two has to do with finishing our resolves for good. That is, for those of us who would like to be strong financial givers...one day. You know, later. Some day in the future. If that's you think, take a look at how Paul counsels the Corinthian church in verses 6, 8, and 10 through 15 (go ahead and re-read them). Paul could command them to give but he doesn't. He could. But then that would defeat the point. Paul's looking for grace-fueled giving. And

grace-fueled giving doesn't come about by laying down laws or by tightening the screws or roughing people up. All he really wants them to do is to finish what they initially started. As you read verse 6: "complete among you this act of grace" and verse 11: "finish doing it" you get the sense that the church in Corinth may have even been among the first of the Gentile churches to pitch in for the Jerusalem collection but somewhere along the line they lost their steam in giving. We read about their awareness and interest in the collection as early as 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. Nevertheless, their giving simply trailed off over time.

And I know when it comes to giving to our local church that this is sometimes the case, too. We look at some sort of giving goal, say the tithe...and we think: "I'm gonna get there some day." Maybe you're a young person with very little income to your name and you think about this. Perhaps you're a poor college student and you've got plans. You've got very generous plans for later in life. You know, when you're out from under your school loans. You've got a steady job, and so on. Then you'll start giving more generously. Maybe you're a family living in the crunch time right now. You've got kids in college or soon to be. And the expenses are mounting up. But your conscience is clear: one day, when my money's not tied up in so many places – *then* we'll give like we've always wanted. Or maybe you're an empty nester who's looking to finish paying your mortgage. Then, *then* you'll have some disposable income you can re-route to kingdom purposes in the local church but you just need another few years. You know how this works. And apart from the grace of God, this day never comes. It just never comes.

Notice here in verses 10-15 that Paul never once gives them a hard figure. Not even a giving percentage. In view of the Old Testament's clear teaching on tithing, I think that is incredibly suggestive. New Testament scholar Murray Harris puts it this way: "If Paul had advocated the practice of tithing, this would have been an appropriate place for him to mention it or defend it. But far from championing the practice of giving by percentage, he argues for proportional giving."² Does the Bible command tithing in the New Testament? No it does not. You could argue that in a couple of places that it *assumes* the practice, but you'd be skating on very thin ice to say the New Testament plainly

² Murry Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI. 2005. p.587.

commands us to tithe. Rather, Paul argues for giving that is proportional, sacrificial, and joyful.

No matter what your current level of giving, consider afresh what Christ is giving to you (v.9)

I've said this before and I will say it again: I've never counted an offering in all my years here as pastor of this church and never plan to. I simply have no clue what you all give to this church apart from what all of us read on the back of the bulletin and the numbers that are made public in our business meetings. No idea what you give. But if you are a Christian, I do know what Christ is giving to you. In verse nine, the Apostle Paul preaches the gospel to the church in Corinth. As he does so, he reminds us that whether we give out of their affliction and poverty like the Macedonian churches or whether we give out of their considerable means like the Corinthians, *if we give...we give because Christ first gives to us.* Verse nine: "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."

Puritan Pastor Matthew Henry wrote: "This is a good reason why we should be charitable...out of what we have, because we ourselves live upon the charity of the Lord Jesus Christ."³ He's so spot on. It's not simply that Christ has done much for us (though he has: his substitutionary life, death, resurrection for us). He has done much. But furthermore, he *is active right now* in laying himself out for us. We should be charitable for we ourselves *live our very lives* upon the charity of the Lord Jesus Christ. That we though his poverty might become "rich" verse nine says. When Paul speaks of riches here in verse 9, we can assume a couple of things on his mind. Just a few chapters earlier in 2 Corinthians 1:22 and also in chapter 5 verse 5 he speaks of the Holy Spirit who has been given us in our hearts as a down payment on heaven. And then once more he says of these riches in chapter 4 verse 7 that "we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." We *do* know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in this church, don't we? That's who we are. We're striving to be a gospel-centered church, one that celebrates, demonstrates, and communicates the good news of Jesus Christ among all people. That though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that we by his poverty might become rich. If you have been made rich by the Lord

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*. Volume 6: Acts to Revelation. MacDonald Publishing Company: McLean, VA. (17--) p.630.

Jesus Christ...indwelt by the Holy Spirit, given this treasure in jars of clay – if you have been converted...has your wallet? Has your pocketbook?

“Motives for Grace-Fueled Giving”

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5

¹⁶ But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹ And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. ²⁰ We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. ²² And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. ²⁴ So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

⁹ Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction

The second step toward grace-fueled giving is to view financial stewardship as less a duty and more a delight

Of course, this alteration (when it happens in our souls) is a gift of God's grace *itself*. We *need* the grace of God in order to move from *threatened* to *thrilled* when it comes to giving financially to the advance of the gospel through the local church. We *have* to have God's help for this change. This sort of renovation of the heart is a miracle, plain and simple. But underneath the grace of this miracle, there are other forces that draw us toward or drive us from giving generously and willingly. And in this section of our text, we'll uncover two of them. The first has to do with integrity and the second has to do with readiness. First...

****Churches that give generously and willingly to the work of the gospel...***

...have come to trust in the complete financial integrity of their leaders (8:16-24)

Recall the context here. For a number of reasons, the Jerusalem church had become poor and they were suffering greatly. So Paul is a man on a mission here in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. In chapter 8 verses 16 to 24, Paul is addressing the church in Corinth about their participation in the Jerusalem collection. And the lessons that we can glean from these verses are powerful.

In these nine verses Paul refers to himself and to his associates and traveling companions. The text indicates he is sending Titus and two of the other men in their party on ahead to Corinth. But why? The reason is spelled out starting at the tail end of verse 19 and on into verses 20 and 21. Money and ministers of the gospel. This is a huge issue today, just as it was a huge issue in the first century. Paul and his associates' reputations were not spotless in Corinth. In fact, that's in large measure why he wrote the letter of 2 Corinthians – to defend his ministry as an apostle.

So Paul is assuming *nothing* here (other than the worst) as he's soliciting funds for a collection. He wants them to give generously, willingly. Well, how can he *motivate* them to contribute financially to the work of the gospel? The move he makes is nothing less than brilliant. If Paul can't actually step into their souls and do open-heart surgery to correct their thinking about him (which he of course can't) then the *next best thing* is remove *every barrier possible* to their financial giving *so far as it depends on him*. And in this case, that means sending a delegation of three men (Titus and the two accompanying him) on ahead to Corinth. *They* will finalize the collection (not Paul). *That* is financial integrity. Do you think this had an effect on the church in Corinth? Yes it did. In the book of Romans Paul confirms that these folks indeed got in on the giving opportunity. And I think, by the grace of God, it happened in large measure because they came to trust in Paul and his coworkers.

Churches that give generously and willingly to the work of the gospel have come to trust in the complete financial integrity of their leaders. And if you'll excuse the pun, the million dollar question for Mound Free Church today is *do we? Have you?* Have you come to trust in the *complete financial integrity* of your leaders at Mound Evangelical Free Church? It makes a difference in how much you're willing to invest in this fellowship. How's your confidence with the discretion and integrity of our ushers? Our counters? Our treasurer? Our auditors? How's your comfort level with the accessibility of the numbers in our budget? From

what we *project*, to what we *take in* to what we actually *spend*...all of it is made fully public for everyone to access at any time. Are you aware of this? Do you take advantage of this?

Another aspect of having a high degree of confidence in the financial integrity of your leaders is to know what types of ministry we think we could engage in more fully were there more resources at our disposal. If you think the leadership of this (or any) church is going to take an increase in Sunday offerings and spend it on *magic beans* (for instance) then I can certainly understand your hesitancy. But what if (by God's grace) there was an uptick in our giving over the next year or so? Can you *dream* with me for a minute about what that might mean for our ability to do effective ministry in through this church? It might mean an ability to increase ministry staff instead of shrinking it. It might mean the ability to increase our investment in foreign missions instead of cutting back. An increase in giving might mean for us the ability to purchase a baptistry for the first time in the history of this sanctuary, maybe an expansion of our library resources. If we saw sustained growth in our financial giving, we might be able even to begin a relationship with a church planter in residence with a view to sending them out with a core group to plan the first church plant in the history of our fellowship. Will you *dream* with me for a little bit? Do you *trust* the leadership of this church? If not, what stands in your way? Are you willing to take concrete steps in discussing these things with one of our pastors or elders if something does stand in your way? If you do trust in the financial integrity of your leaders, does your giving reflect the trust that you say you have? Churches that give generously and willingly to the work of the gospel have come to trust in the complete financial integrity of their leaders. Also...

****Churches that give generously and willingly to the work of the gospel...***

...have developed a clear theology of giving and are prepared and ready to put it into practice (9:1-5)

Look with me now and 2 Corinthians 9 verses 1 to 5. We've already noted Paul's confidence in the Corinthian church despite what appears to be (at least from some quarters) a distinct *lack* of confidence in *him*. In chapter 8 verse 7 remember that he said to this church: "...you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness and in our love for you...". Paul *loved this church* and he had confidence in the work that God had begun among them. And they *know* about his plans for the collection. That's why he says in chapter 9 verse 1: "Now it

is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints...”. You see, he knows of their “readiness” (verse 2). In fact, he said to the churches in Macedonia, Corinth has been “ready” since last year! Now verse 2 says “Achaia” not “Corinth” but Corinth was the capital city in the region of Achaia so he’s talking about them here. I know you guys have been ready. But there’s two kinds of ready. The first kind of “ready” is when you know you have it coming to you and you’re ready for your punishment or you’re ready to accept the consequences of your actions. Just take it on the chin. There’s *that* kind of ready. Paul uses the phrase: “ready...as an exaction” in verse 5. But there’s also *another* kind of ready. And it’s the kind of ready he also describes in verse 5: “ready as a willing gift”. *That’s* the way to be ready to give. Prepared and prepared to give generously. Not because you gotta...because you wanna. Not out of ‘duty for Christ’ but from sheer delight in Christ.

The church at Corinth did have a clear theology of giving, and as it turns out, they were *ready* to give to the ministry. Not only ready, but ready and willing. Romans 15:25 to 27 (written a short time after 2 Corinthians) says— “At present...I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia *and Achaia* have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were *pleased to do it*, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.” You see how strongly he felt about this collection. It was a big deal to him. And they did give willingly. As Romans 15:27 says: “they were *pleased* to do it.”

Churches that give generously and willingly to the work of the gospel have developed a clear theology of giving and are prepared and ready to put it into practice. It happened in Corinth. It happened in Macedonia. The question remains...will it happen at Mound Free Church? Do you have a *theology* of giving? Do you know what the Bible says about the joy, the wisdom, and the unexpected blessings of giving generously to your local church? Do you know that New Testament pattern for giving isn’t the tithe (10% of your gross income) but rather significantly above and beyond the tithe? Christians aren’t commanded to consider 10% of their income as belonging to the Lord but rather *all* of it. Christians aren’t under law but grace and if law-driven given yielded a tithe of one’s income, how much are we to suppose grace-fueled giving to yield? Do you know that you can’t out-give God? Do you know (as Randy Alcorn says) that you are the *manager* of the assets God has *entrusted* – not given – to you? Do you know that God prospers you not to raise your standard of *living* but to

raise your standard of *giving*? Do you *know* these things? Do you have a theology of giving?

If you do have a theology of giving, we just need to ask the Dr. Phil question: “how’s that workin’ for ya?” If you know *what* to give, and if you are *prepared* to give...are you giving generously? For those of you who do give generously to this local church, I want to thank you and encourage you to stay the course. By God’s grace, we quite literally could not be doing what we’re doing without you. I also want to encourage you to keep reaching. Keep shoveling it out to the Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom work – I guarantee you he’s got a bigger shovel and he’ll bless you right back. For those of you who need some help in this area, I have two encouragements for you. The first is simply this: believe the gospel. Believe the gospel. If you, as someone living in the most prosperous nation in the history of the planet are struggling to be joyfully generous with all that God has entrusted to you, I simply want to encourage you to remember that Jesus died for the tight-fisted and miserly among us as well. Pray (and pray and keep praying!) that the Lord would convict you of your sin and free you to give more generously and joyfully. Turn from your selfishness and throw yourself on the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ where you *will* find mercy. He won’t cast you out. And if you’re thinking: “Who are you to call me miserly and tight-fisted?” just know – I didn’t. That finger in your chest right now doesn’t belong to me. That’s the conviction of the Holy Spirit calling you to a life of greater generosity and freedom with it.

“Means of Grace-Fueled Giving”

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And 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. ⁹As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰He 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. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹²For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³By 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, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

**The third step toward grace-fueled giving is to
act on the conviction that God's supply to you will
meet his demand of you**

So *how* does grace-fueled giving actually *work*? What are the *means*?

****If you are a Christian...***

**God expects you to give lavishly and lovingly to the
advance of the gospel (vv.6-7)**

God's concern is for the *what* as well as the *how*. For the *matter* of giving and the *manner* of giving. Both *content* and *intent* are important to God when it comes to how we give to the work of the kingdom. It should be lavish and it should be loving. Let's read 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. We know that Paul is in summary mode in verse 6 of 2 Corinthians 9 because he begins with the phrase: "the point is this...". What's the point of all this, Paul? He answers in verse 6: "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." That's the point. And make no mistake about it, he doesn't give us this agricultural metaphor to encourage us to sow sparingly. The thrust behind verse 6 is the implication: "sow bountifully!!" Now he doesn't actually come out and command them here. And we will search in vain for any such command in all of chapters 8 and 9. Here he is simply setting out the principle that all farmers know to be true (all things being equal): whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Paul saw fit to compare giving financially to the church to the work of planting seeds in the ground. Some observations are in order. First, just as a farmer scatters seed, when we entrust our finances to the local church we are parting with something of value. Seed itself represents an investment. And just as a farmer sends the seed sailing into the air and then proceeds to till the soil around it until he loses sight of his investment, when we give our resources we are flinging them from us and they, too, seem to disappear. And then there's the waiting period. A farmer sows seed in one season but doesn't reap the harvest until some time later. So, too, in our giving. We entrust our resources to the local church and sometimes we just don't see an immediate return. But just as the farmer would be a fool to give up on his crops in the summer, so we would be foolish to write off our financial investments in the local church before

the time. And just as verse 6 implies, we aren't simply to sow modestly, we should sow "bountifully".

Now here's where we want a figure so we know exactly how much to give. A percentage. Or at least a guideline to get us going. But Paul doesn't give us one. He almost does. He comes *so* close in verse seven where he says: "Each one *must* give...". And okay, here we go – he's gonna give us a number...and he doesn't do it. Verse seven says: "Each one must give *as he has decided in his heart...*". Arrgghh. *That's* the amount we ought to give financially...as we have decided in our heart? Yep. He doesn't suggest a tithe to the people of Corinth. A tenth of their gross income. He doesn't even hint at it. Why not? Because we don't need to be giving that extravagantly to the local church? Wrong! Dead wrong. The reason he doesn't suggest 10% (as Old Testament law required) is because he is treating the Corinthians as spiritual adults, not children. The law is our tutor, as Paul says in Galatians 3:24 (our schoolmaster and guardian) to lead us to Christ. The law treated Israel as a child taking his first steps in the faith. That's what tithing is. To change the metaphor, the law commanded Israelites to tithe just as we require training wheels on the bicycles of our three-year olds. But training wheels are for children, not adults. And Paul is dealing with the Corinthians as mature, responsible spiritual grown-ups in the gospel. A grown up should be a better and more accomplished cyclist than three-year old – far better. And a new covenant Christian should be a far more accomplished giver than an old covenant Israelite.

Think about it for a minute...if the tithe was the floor (not the ceiling) of old covenant giving under Moses, then what are we saying about the power of the gospel when we don't even give that much today? The average American Christian gives 2.5% of the income to their local church. 2.5%. That is one quarter of the absolute minimum requirement under the law. Randy Alcorn sums up the state of 21st century giving in the American church this way: "...using 10 percent as a measure, the Israelites were four times more responsive to the law of Moses than the average American Christian is to the grace of Christ."⁴ That is a frightening sentence if there ever was one. Regarding financial generosity: *The Israelites were four times more responsive to the law of Moses than the average American Christian is to the grace of Christ.* I'm not sure where the families in our church fall as compared with the

⁴ Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*. Revised and Updated. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc: Carol Stream, IL. (1989) 2003. p.182.

national average (as I've said before the only family's giving records I know in this fellowship are my own). But I hope these numbers bother you. I hope they create a sort of holy discontent with your own current level of giving – whatever it may be. God expects you to give lavishly. So...sow bountifully.

Now that's mainly verse 6 and it has to do with the amount we give. The rest of verse 7 takes aim at the affections with which we give. Verse 7: "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." God expects you to give lavishly and God expects you to give lovingly. God loves a cheerful giver. This subjective state is the flipside of the objective truth of Acts 20:35 where Paul quotes Jesus saying: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Do you believe that? Not all of us do. If you're ever putting an offering into the plate as it goes by and you catch yourself thinking: 'I'm not really enjoying this' ...rest assured that God isn't either! God loves a cheerful giver. But *why*? Why does the *intent* of our giving matter as much to him as the *content* of our giving? To put it another way...why *doesn't* God love a reluctant giver or a disinterested giver? Isn't he just happy to have the resources? No he is not. He doesn't need them. God doesn't love a moping giver because God is *least glorified* in us when we are *least satisfied* in him. If you are a Christian, God expects you to give lavishly *and* lovingly to the advance of the gospel. He cares about *how* we give at *least* as much (if not more) than *how much* we give.

Now at this point, all we've done is review Paul's teaching here in these two verses. We've seen this so far in chapters 8 and 9. You may be tracking up 'till now and thinking: I'm *moved* by the models of giving we've seen, I'm *sensing* some growth in my motives for giving...now the question is simply: *how*? I want to give lavishly and lovingly – but given the concrete realities with which I'm dealing...*how*? How does this *actually work*? Here's where we need to remember the third step to grace-filled giving: the third step toward grace-fueled giving is to *act* on the conviction that God's *supply* to you will meet his *demand* of you.

**As you step out in faith to give...*

You will get God's help (vv.8-11a)

As you step out in faith to give, you will get God's help. *That's* how we can be brought to give lavishly and lovingly to the advance of the gospel. God's gracious help. Paul says it *three* different times in *three* different ways from verse 8 into the first half of verse 11. You're gonna get help. As you step out in faith to give, you will get God's help.

Observe how this works in verse 8: “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.” If you’ll excuse the pun, this verse richly repays your meditation. There’s so much to see here but I will limit myself to one crucial observation, and that’s this: God’s help and your work happen *simultaneously*. If you can grasp this, I assure you, you are holding one of the most powerful keys in the entire Christian life. As you step out in faith to give, you will get God’s help. As you take action, God takes action. God is able to make all grace abound to you...so that...you may abound in every good work. Notice that this isn’t “let go and let God”. This is “trust God and *get going*.”⁵

Consider another place in the New Testament where Paul speaks in this way (that God’s help and your work happen simultaneously) but apply it to giving lavishly and lovingly. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul says – “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, *I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*” Whose work? Paul’s. Whose grace? God’s! This is how it works. Financial generosity is toil, struggle, and just plain hard work. But as you step out in faith to give, you will get God’s help. Your toil, struggle, and hard work will be met with God’s energy, power, work, and grace toward you. Here’s how one pastor described this dynamic. Again, apply this to stepping out in faith to give. His name is Charles Bridges and he said:

“Shall we then indolently wait until he works? Far from it. We must work, but in dependence upon him. He works not without us, but with us, through us, in us, by us; and we work in him...Ours is the duty; his is the strength. Ours the agency; his the quickening life. His commands do not imply our power to obey, but our dependence upon him for the grace of obedience. ‘The work, as it is a duty, is ours; but as a performance, it is God’s. He gives what he requires, and his promises are the foundation of our performances.’ Our works are not the cause, but the effect, of his grace; and never could they come out of us, until God had first put them in us.”⁶

As you step out in faith to give, you will get God’s help. If this reality gets a hold of you, you will pray as King David did as offerings were made in 1 Chronicles 29:14 – “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own we have given you.”

⁵ I am indebted to J.I. Packer for this observation.

⁶ Charles Bridges (containing a brief quote from Bishop Reynolds), *Proverbs*. Geneva Series of Commentaries. The Banner of Truth Trust: Carlisle, PA. (1846) 2008. p.224.

****As you step out in faith to give...***

God will get his glory (vv.11b-15)

Allow me to share one of my favorite moments on what must have been Christmas of 1984. That Christmas I was 8 years old, and I received a gift from my 85 year old grandmother that changed my life: a copy of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album. Now I loved my Grandmommy, but this dear woman knew *nothing* about Michael Jackson's latest record or my great passion for his music. She *couldn't* have known. But my dad *did*. So while I was over the moon about getting *Thriller* that year (with all due respect to my grandmother) I knew precisely where to assign credit. Grandmommy sent the check, but Dad picked out the present. My father got the glory for that gift.

Now the exact same dynamic is at work here in the tail end of our text. Look with me at verses 11 to 15 to see just who it is who gets the credit for the generosity of the Corinthian church. When you and I (sinners though we are) become the sorts of people who are giving both lavishly and lovingly to the advance of the gospel, it doesn't take long to connect the dots and draw the conclusion about where the help is coming from and therefore where the glory should be assigned. The one who gives the help gets the glory, not the one who gives the offering. In verse 11 Paul says that this sort of generosity "produce[s] thanksgiving to God". In verse 12 he says this sort of generosity overflows "in many thanksgivings to God". In verse 13: "they will glorify God". Verse 15: "Thanks be to God". How could we miss it? Giving lavishly and lovingly to the advance of the gospel through the local church at the end of the day isn't just about finding ourselves in the black in January (although that's always nice). It's not just about meeting ministry needs inside and outside this church although that would be great. Ultimately, generous giving is about finding ourselves face down in reverence and worship before a holy God who gave all of the resources and the grace to begin with. *That* is what it's all about.

Don't you love this final verse? "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" The word Paul uses for "inexpressible" here didn't exist in his language before he wrote it down. He was searching for words to describe God's grace and his vocabulary simply failed him. He didn't have a word. So he coined one. We translate it "inexpressible". Isn't that appropriate? It *is* appropriate. For this gift to which Paul's referring sure isn't the Jerusalem collection. And the gift isn't the boomerang blessing that Paul says will come back to the Corinthian

church in verse 14. The gift (without a doubt) is Christ. The gift is Jesus himself. The unspeakable, indescribable, inexpressible gift is the gospel.

Grace-fueled giving is gospel-fueled giving. When Jesus Christ invades our lives and sets up shop in our souls he takes all of it over. And we are motivated to be generous with our resources. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are not calling us to “dig deep” and to give out of our resources or to “find it in our heart” to be generous with what we have. That’s not how the Bible motivates. God’s Word here is not calling us to dig deep but rather to see that in Christ God has already dug deep and forgiven us a truck load of sin. Our sins deserve divine judgment. But God in his grace has sent his Son to live in our place, to absorb the judgment of God in his body on the tree, and to be raised to life on the third day. And he stands ready to receive all who would ever turn from their sins and seek shelter in him. Paul’s thinking about that and he says: “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”

The story is told of the great John Wesley (founder of the Methodist church). When Wesley died it was reported that although the man handled the equivalent of millions of dollars in his life time that he died essentially penniless. The reason is that by the time of his death, he had given it all away to others in need. He literally only had some loose change in a drawer when he was on his death bed. He was an extraordinary steward of God’s resources. Wesley said this: “Make all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.”⁷ Precisely. Forgiven and fueled by the grace of almighty God, give to the advance of the gospel!

⁷ John Wesley. <http://quotationsbook.com/quote/27221/#sthash.BIAIKKiC.dpbs>
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