

The Joy of Giving Generously
2 Corinthians 8:1-7; 9:6-15

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Who are the most generous people in the world? Well, that depends on how we define generosity. If we solely look at financial generosity, then some of the richest people turn out to be the most generous. American Wealth Investor Warren Buffet has donated an estimated 34 billion US dollars to healthcare, education, AIDS prevention and sanitation. Bill Gates of Microsoft is estimated to have donated 35.8 billion to health care, extreme poverty, education and access to information technology. It's estimated Andrew Carnegie donated 9.5 billion to libraries, education and peace¹ during the early 1900s. But what about the most generous countries in the world?

Say we broaden the definition of generosity. We get a slightly different picture. A British organization called the Charities Aid Foundation does a yearly study to come up with what it calls the "World Giving Index." It surveys citizens from many countries and measures generosity in 3 areas: Donating money; Helping a stranger; Volunteering in the past month. Based on the percentage of people who participated in each area, each country gets an average score. So here are the top 10 countries in generosity for 2018.²

#10 – Bahrain in the Persian Gulf (53 percent); #9 – Myanmar (54 percent); #8 – Kenya – 54 percent; #7 – Singapore – 54 percent; #6 – United Kingdom – 55 percent; #5 – Ireland at 56%; #4 – US – 58 percent; #3 – New Zealand at 58 percent; #2 – Australia at 59 percent; The most generous nation of 2018 was Indonesia at 59 percent. Canada did not make the top 10 list and has been dropping yearly since this study began back in 2010.

The authors of the report state that because Indonesia is dominated by Islam which encourages its followers to donate money this may have contributed to its high rating. The survey also found that globally, those from developing countries are more likely to help a stranger while those in developed countries are more likely to donate money. Stranger Danger!

Now wherever we're at as a country when it comes to generosity, the question facing us today is where are we as a church and as individuals when it comes to generosity? Specifically, where are we when it comes to generosity with our wealth and resources? We have been looking at this question for the past month. Today is the final message from this

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_philanthropists#Greatest_philanthropists_by_amount_of_USD

² <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/11/02/welcome-to-the-most-generous-country-in-the-world-indonesia.html>

series. It provides opportunity to think about our level of generosity. We're going to do that by following the story of an ancient church and their own struggles with generosity.

IT was located in the ancient city of Corinth in southern Greece. We have preserved for us 2 letters that were sent to this church by a guy named Paul. In both letters, he talks to them about giving and generosity. The passage we're looking at today contains Paul's attempt to encourage these Corinthians to generosity. Then, as now, talking to people about their wealth and resources was a delicate subject. But what made things even more difficult was the reality that several people in the Corinthian church opposed Paul. They did not like him. They did not respect him or his authority. So we will see him teach and encourage the Corinthian Christians to be generous in the midst of this tension. As we look in on this correspondence, I pray that God will speak to all of us with encouragement about the joys of giving generously.

So if you have a Bible, please find 2 Corinthians 8 in it. It's found on page 821 in the Bibles in front of you. Or you can find it on your phone. We'll start in the first seven verses of chapter 8 and then go to another passage in chapter 9.

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

8 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷But 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.

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,¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

So what is this all about? Well Paul was on a missionary journey in the Greek speaking world. He has received word that Christians in Jerusalem have great needs. They are short on food and many are poor. So wherever he goes on this journey, he asks Christians to give some money to provide relief for these Christian Jews suffering in Jerusalem. We see this in the first letter to the Corinthians. If you have a Bible, go back to 1st Corinthians 16:1-4. There Paul talks about the collection for the saints. He writes “as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.”

The Corinthian Christians had agreed to support this. A couple of times in 2 Corinthians Paul refers to their decision. So look at 2 Corinthians 8:10 – “And in this matter, I give my judgment; this benefits you, who a year ago started not only do this work but also desire to do it.” So it seems like they had started a collection a year ago. Paul knew this and told other people about their desire, so look at 2 Cor. 9:2 – “For I know your readiness, of which I boast about to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia (the region or province which included Corinth) has been ready since last year.” So the intention to support this offering existed among the Corinthian Christians. Some collection seems to have happened. But somehow it had stopped. It certainly had not been delivered to the Christians in Jerusalem. Chapters 8 and 9 of Second Corinthians deals with this issue. Some have called it “Paul’s sermon on the amount.”

Paul is in northern Greece or Macedonia when he writes this letter. He starts into this delicate topic by giving the Corinthians a good example. So in chapter 8, verse 1 he begins by talking about the churches in Macedonia. In verse 2, he describes what happened. “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.” Now wait a minute. Did he say they had displayed a wealth of generosity? How could that be in light of their circumstances?

Did you see their circumstances in verse 2? They had a severe test of affliction. They lived in extreme poverty. How on earth could they have abundant joy and overflow in a wealth of generosity? Not only did they give, they gave beyond what was sensible. Verse 3 – “For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord.” So it seems like they were willing to give generously even if it meant they would suffer some shortage themselves.

It seems like Paul recognized that what they offered to give might deprive them of their basic needs. In verse 4, it says “they begged earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.” Why would they beg? Maybe Paul said, “No, I can’t accept what you’re offering because I know it will put your own families at a disadvantage.” Maybe they offered to give so sacrificially that their families would have to reduce their daily meals from 3 to 2. But they insisted on giving.

Well where did this insistence come from? Are these people crazy? Well we get a clue of their motivation in verse 5. “They gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” So severely afflicted, extremely poor Macedonian Christians gave themselves first to the Lord. They trusted Him to provide for their needs even as they gave away wealth that would provide food for their own families.

“Well those must have been some pretty incredible people. They were of good stock or they must have been raised to be generous like that.” Actually, that’s unlikely. One scholar on that time period talks about the uncommonness of generosity in the ancient Greek World. She writes that in the Greco-Roman world, giving was done by the wealthy to other wealthy people. So-called generosity happened only among the elites to other elites who had passed a stringent “worthiness” test. In the Jewish world, everyone who could was responsible to aid the poor, and the giving was in proportion to one’s means. Here (in Macedonia) we have people from the Greco-Roman world acting out of character for their natural heritage. But they are very much in character with respect to their adopted (i.e. Jewish) Christian heritage. A profound shift had taken place in them.³

So giving generously to benefit others was not a normal cultural practice for this people. What happened? They met Jesus. They gave themselves first to the Lord. God’s grace enabled them to give. We see that back in verse 1. “We want you to know brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.” So it was the grace of God that enabled the Macedonians to give so generously. If God could do that for them, He can also do that for us.

So here’s our first major point for today. **Good news messengers grow into generous givers by God’s grace. (2 Cor. 8:1-7).** We are called to be good news messengers who announce or bring the good news of God’s saving work and reign

³ Deborah E. Watson, “Paul’s Collection in Light of Motivations and Mechanisms for Aid to the Poor in the First Century World.” Ph.D. diss. University of Durham, 2006, 171-172.

to others. Remember our theme verse for this year – Isaiah 52:7 on the front page of your bulletins. A generous giver is someone who gives beyond their means even when they are in difficulty or extreme poverty. We need God’s grace flowing through us to give generously. These Macedonian Christians gave themselves to God and then gave generously by His grace.

Well that’s a pretty powerful example for Paul to begin with in speaking to the Corinthian Christians. Making this even more powerful was the economic reality of Corinth and Achaia compared to Macedonia. Corinth was a wealthy thriving city. Many of the Christians in that community likely did well financially. Yet these afflicted and extremely poor Macedonians beg Paul for the privilege of giving to this relief collection.

So Paul then takes the next step. He reminds them that they had already started this collection when Titus was with them. Verse 6 - “Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.” So he must have been there a year ago when the Corinthians had started this collection. Now Paul would send him back with the letter now known as 2 Corinthians and to complete the collection. So in verse 7, Paul makes the ask. “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.” So you Corinthians who have lots of faith, speaking and knowledge about God; you who excel in earnestness of faith and love from us must now exceed in generosity. There’s his first ask.

But it’s a sensitive topic. So he will unpack this request in a sensitive way through the next verses. Even in verse 8 he writes, “I say this not as a command.” He will not authoritatively command them. In verse 9, He uses Jesus as an example of one who gave up His riches and became poor so that we could gain the spiritual riches.

Then in verses 16-24 of chapter 8, he explains why he sent Titus and 2 others to come and initiate the collection. Remember, they didn’t have a mail system in those days. If you sent a letter, you had to pay a rider to deliver it or send it with a friend. So he’s sent this letter with Titus and 2 other guys. The Corinthians see the three of them show up one day and wonder what they’re doing there. They find out they’ve come to collect money. Well that’s not going to go well without an explanation.

Notice in 8:20 and 21, Paul explains that he sent 3 people to ensure accountability regarding the money. Verse 20 – “We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift. (So it is a significant amount of money

that's being collected. He's going to ensure there's credible people and more than one to get it to the right people in Jerusalem. "For," verse 21, "we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man."

Then in chapter 9:1-5, he explains why he sent these guys ahead of him. He told the Christians in Macedonia how the Christians in Corinth desired to participate in this offering. He planned to travel with some Christians from Macedonia down to Corinth. But imagine if they arrived and no collection had taken place? What if there was resistance to the collection with this preparation? Paul would be humiliated about his boast. The Corinthians might be embarrassed. The Macedonians might get discouraged or wonder why they had sacrificed so much when the rich Corinthian church had sacrificed nothing. So Paul explains all this.

Then Paul makes his second appeal in verses 6-15 of chapter 9. But he not only asks for an offering. He asks for a generous offering. So Verse 6 "The point is this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." He appeals to a basic reality of planting. If you plant 2 carrot seeds, how many carrots will you get? But if you plant an innumerable amount, you will have a bountiful harvest at the end of the summer. The more generous you are, the more spiritual harvest you will experience.

Verse 7 – "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." So notice, Paul does not want a forced gift. He doesn't want this collection from sad people who mourn their loss of money. He tell us God loves a cheerful giver. Why does God love that? He himself is a cheerful and generous giver.

What happens when God's people give generously? (2 Cor. 9:6-15)

The giver receives spiritual and emotional enrichment. (8-11) We see this all through verses 8-11. In verse 8, we see God able to make grace abound or overflow in us. Which is a spiritual blessing to become more like God. So he works in us to be gracious and generous. God also promises to be sufficient for us even as we give. In verse 10, Paul reminds them of one of the principles we talked about earlier. All we have comes from God. So any ability to give generously comes from God in the first place. Then in verse 11, God promises to "enrich us in every way to be generous." The prosperity gospel people try to hijack this verse to say it justifies the claim that God wants you to rich spiritually, materially and physically. But it can't mean generous giving guarantees material wealth and health. How do I know that?

The Macedonian Christians! They gave out of their affliction and extreme poverty. But they were rich in joy and generosity. The giver receives spiritual and emotional enrichment when he or she gives.

When God's people give generously, we see, secondly that **Others have their needs met. (12a)**. "For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints." But let's not miss that it is supplying the needs of the saints. Their offering will help the suffering Christians in Jerusalem meet their needs.

But the third result of giving generously is perhaps the most important. **God is glorified. (12b-15)**. Verse 12 again – For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 – By their approval of this service, they will glorify God. So the Jerusalem Christians will give thanks to God and will glorify Him. And look what else happens in verse 14 – While they long for you and pray for you because of this surpassing grace of God upon you." So the Macedonian, Corinthian and Galatian Christians give money for a relief offering to Jewish Christians whom they have never met. The Jewish Christians thank and glorify God for this. They suddenly experience a connection with these Christians whom they have never met. They long for them and pray for them. The church is strengthened. Paul concludes by praising God for his inexpressible gift. This gift could refer to the grace that enabled the Greek Christians to give or the Gospel that brought them all together or the relief offering itself that God will use for many deep purposes. All this happens when God's people give generously by His grace.

I can testify to this in my own life. About 17 years ago, I started a program to do some more education desire. It was a school in the Boston area that was a distance education program. We were a young family with 3 children. So on top of regular expenses, we had to pay for school in US dollars. The church I was part of at that time said yes to going to school but couldn't afford to help with funding. So we budgeted. We saved. We scraped together funds to meet each payment deadline. But eventually the fees exceeded what we could regularly pay. We started to get behind.

I remember one day to check the amount owed. I saw the balance. I thought "that can't be right. They must have missed putting on last month's fees. So I went to the actual statement of account. There I saw something that completely shocked and amazed me. The last entry on the account said "Anonymous Donor – 1000 USD." Lori and I were overjoyed and humbled. That injection of funds at that point enabled us to get over the hump of payment. To this day, I don't know the name of that anonymous donor. But through their gift God met our needs. I'm sure that somehow they were enriched

knowing that the education I received would be used to impact many others. So we glorified God and gave thanks to Him. And we continue to do so every time we tell that story.

God honors those who give cheerfully and generously. Many of you have given out of your difficulty and poverty to still help. Many give quietly and no one actually knows your sacrifices. But God does know and honors that. In doing so, you demonstrate your heart love to the Lord.

To become a generous giver, you need God's grace. If you have never received God's grace into your life, you can receive it today. Grace is unearned favor. God offers it to us. We were all born with a sin nature and we have all sinned. Such sin separates us from God. The just requirement for our sin against our Creator is our death. Yet God sent His Son to take our place. That's what the cross is all about. Jesus offered Himself as a substitute on the cross in our place. He died and rose again. So when anyone puts the trust of their life onto Jesus, God recognizes Jesus death as payment for the person trusting Jesus. Through our faith God's grace floods into our lives. We receive forgiveness and right standing before God and the grace to grow as generous givers. You can receive that grace today by trusting your life to Christ in prayer.

Oh and what happened with the Corinthians? Well in the letter to the Romans written after Corinthians, we read this in Romans 15:26. "For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem." So it seems the Corinthians on the whole responded well to Paul's appeal and to God's grace.

So how will we respond as we come to the end of this giving series? I know and realize this is a difficult time financially for many here today. There is concern because of the recent federal election and the uncertainty about the oil industry. Some of you face uncertainty because of the provincial budget and cutbacks there. Some here may identify with the Macedonians. You are going through difficulty and live in some poverty. Others may identify more with the Corinthians. You are not in such difficulty right now. But you may be seeking the Lord for what He would have you do.

In your bulletin, there is a yellow insert entitled "The good news messenger and resources." We can agree in our minds with what we have heard over the last four weeks. But will we act on what we have heard? We started today by asking "where are we at in being generous?" What is God saying to you in light of this series? Where might He be asking you to change? There are several possible responses that might reflect where you are. I would like to hear from you what God might have been saying to you. I would like to maybe publish some of the comments of what you've heard or sensed

from God. And we as a leadership need to hear where you are at in this area so we can think and prayerfully plan ahead. So after you've spent some time maybe as a couple or as an individual, I would like to invite you to come and place your response in the brown box here at the front. The worship team will be playing. When it seems like we are done, I will close our time in prayer.