**The Grace of Giving**

2 Corinthians 8:1-11

Today and next Sunday we wrap up our series on Stewardship - managing everything God has entrusted to us for His glory and His kingdom. We’ll come back to 2 Corinthians in a minute but for now turn with me to Mark chapter 12 for a key lesson Jesus taught on giving.

And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces **39** and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, **40** who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

**41** And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. **42** And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. **43** And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. **44** For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” Mark 12:38-44

This may be ***Jesus’ most important teaching on giving*** and the context is especially important. He is warning his disciples about the scribes - the religious elite who prayed and fasted and made financial contributions very publicly. They weren’t the only ones making large, visible donations. Wealth was more obvious in those days because of how people dressed. You could tell by the long robes and the rich fabric if someone was wealthy. And if they had a shabby, worn-out tunic without any ornamentation, they were more obviously poor.

It was also, somehow, clear - probably from the size and visible value of coins placed in the offering box - if someone was placing in a large, high value donation or a smaller, lower value contribution. Those looking on could see this old, shabbily dressed widow and could tell that she was just dropping in two small coins worth about a penny. But Jesus assessed her gift this way:

“Truly, I say to you, this poor widow ***has put in more*** than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, ***but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had***, all she had to live on.” Mark 12:43-44

**Her penny was worth more to the Lord** than the $1,000 and $10,000 and million dollar donations of the super wealthy. Those rich people were giving from their excess - giving relatively large amounts compared to poor people but amounts that didn’t really cost them, that didn’t reflect any kind of faith or sacrifice.

***How often do we give out of our abundance as opposed to giving out of our POVERTY?***

How often do we give primarily or only when we have a little extra and when it doesn’t really cost us anything? When it doesn’t involve any real exercise of faith or any actual sacrifice?

This poor widow who put her last penny into the offering box for the upkeep of the temple area - in other words, for the worship and honor of her God - **she is the example** of true, generous, faith-filled giving. ***She is just like the Macedonian Christians*** Paul uses as an example to inspire the believers in Corinth.

Turn back to 2 Corinthians 8 and let’s walk through this inspiring and practical passage on what Biblical generosity looks like. We’ll see **two principles of what giving IS**, then three applications of HOW we should give. First:

* Giving is an act of worship **to the Lord**

“But they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God to us.” 2 Corinthians 8:5

Just like the poor widow who loved the Lord so much that she wanted to contribute to the temple services, so the believers in the early church were so overflowing with gratitude for the gospel and love for God and each other that they pulled together a generous contribution for the Christians in Jerusalem.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the-genesis-of-the-jerusalem-donation/>

***Jesus Himself had predicted famines*** and earthquakes as a mark of the onset of the end times that began with his arrival. Around AD 44, Acts 11 documents a prophet named Agabus who predicted a famine that would concentrate in Judea, and that did in fact begin around a year later. The church in Antioch immediately took up a collection and sent it to Jerusalem through Barnabas and Paul - a sign of those more northern Christians showing solidarity with the sharing practices of the early church where people sold houses and lands to provide for the needy among them so that no one went without.

That **mutual generosity of the early church** continued then, primarily through the church in Philippi but also - through their example - through many of the early churches in the Roman Empire, sending material support back to Israel in gratitude for the spiritual riches they had received from Israel’s long awaited Messiah.

Here in 2 Corinthians Paul talks about the Macedonians who “gave themselves first to the Lord.” What a beautiful restatement of Jesus’ principle to ***“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”*** That is what worship is - to give ourselves FIRST to the Lord - to make Him ultimate and primary in our hearts and lives. And that must include our giving. Are we giving ourselves FIRST to the Lord?

Look just a little further down, in 2 Corinthians 9.

* Giving is an act of worship **to the Lord**

“You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.” 2 Corinthians 9:11

What a gospel promise! “You will be enriched in every way!” In Christ we have been enriched in every way! **We have in HIM every spiritual blessing**. We have the fullness of the love of God, we have the Holy Spirit - God Himself - in our hearts - who fills us with love, joy, peace, patience and the rest. And because we have the infinite wealth of Jesus, it enables us to be generous as He was to us.

* We forgive because we have been forgiven.
* We love because we have been so richly loved.
* We give because of how much He has given us.
* We sacrifice because of the incomprehensible sacrifice of our Lord for us.
* We serve because He served us with such humility and grace.

And as we give back from the overflowing grace that has been given to us, ***the result is WORSHIP***. Our generous living is worship. And people who experience our time, our talents and our treasure also overflow and abound in gratitude and praise.

* Giving is an act of worship **to the Lord**

“For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.” 2 Corinthians 9:12

What a picture of how the grace of God abounds from Him to us and through us to others. It overflows “in many thanksgivings to God.” Listen to how Paul closes out this section:

“By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” 2 Corinthians 9:13-14

Just talking about the beauty of this generous gift from believers in Greece to believers in Israel moves Paul himself to praise. Giving is first of all an act of worship. It is between you and the Lord on the one hand, but it is also between you and other believers and as you give and share, the gift overflows with grateful praise from OTHERS as a result of YOUR giving. ***So giving is a DOUBLE act of worship!*** It is YOUR act of worship to the Lord, and it prompts others to respond in thanksgiving and praise to God as well!

Our second principle flows directly from the first:

* Giving is a gift of grace **to you** even as it is a gift of grace **through you**

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.” 2 Corinthians 8:1

We just saw that Paul closes this part of the letter with worship. ***This is how Paul opens this section - with GRACE.*** He is sharing a God story with the church in Corinth about the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and that region. You can read more about this in Philippians chapter 4, which we will turn to next week to close out the series. The grace of God Paul is talking about here is the spontaneous offering collected from Macedonia for the hungry and poor believers in Judea. And it wasn’t that the Macedonian believers were super rich at this time - quite the opposite in fact!

* Giving is a gift of grace **to you** even as it is a gift of grace **through you**

“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.” 2 Corinthians 8:2

Two things welled up in Macedonia: JOY AND POVERTY. What?

Abundance of joy - ok, that we can see for new believers in a newly planted church. But combine that joy with EXTREME POVERTY. Hold on. ***How did those two things combine to produce overflowing generosity?*** Not through any practical, physical reality. And certainly not through a professional fund-raising campaign! This is the supernatural grace of God. This is ***the loaves and fishes power of the Lord*** alone to multiply a meager offering and satisfy crowds, with pieces left over.

* Giving is a gift of grace **to you** even as it is a gift of grace **through you**
  + The gift of **Joy**

“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.” 2 Corinthians 8:2

We see here that ***joy is the SOURCE of the giving***. What motivated these believers to sacrificially give out off their poverty, like the poor widow? The answer is JOY.

Fear, duty, and obligation may squeeze a small financial gift from your pocket. But the only way to grow to higher levels of generosity is to experience the gift of JOY in the Lord. When Jesus is the supreme treasure of your heart, when He is the treasure in the field for whom you have forsaken everything else, when you can say with Paul, “to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain,” then the joy of the Lord will be your strength even in a time of extreme poverty.

Because joy is not only the best source of generous giving, but it is the natural RESULT of giving as well. ***Do we believe our Lord Jesus when He says, “it is more blessed to give than to receive”*** (Acts 20:35)?

<https://apologeticspress.org/did-jesus-say-that-1805/>

**Do we really believe Jesus** when he says “Blessed are you who are POOR now and WOE to you who are rich?” Do we really believe Him when He says that those who leave houses and lands and parents and children for the sake of the gospel will receive all of those blessings back and more beyond?

God’s Old Testament challenge in Malachi 3 was to TEST HIM and see. Just try to out-give God. Those who have graduated to the higher levels of love giving and faith giving attest over and over - ***you simply cannot outgive the Great Giver.***

The first grace of giving is JOY. There are two more Paul mentions here.

* Giving is a gift of grace **to you** even as it is a gift of grace **through you**
  + The gift of **Love**

“Of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.” 2 Corinthians 8:3-4

It is a FAVOR - it is a gift of God’s grace - to take part in addressing the practical needs of another person.

* You feel the blessing of ***sitting with someone in their sadness***, when they have just lost a loved one. It’s a dark and tragic and painful moment - but in the midst of it there is a beautiful grace in just being with someone in their pain.
* You feel the blessing of ***sitting with someone in the hospital*** - processing news from the doctors, praying for wisdom and strength for the next round of chemo, or the next infusion or whatever.
* You feel the grace of ***working alongside someone on their house or car*** - sweating and chopping and working on some tangible project that you have the experience and ability to help with.
* **You feel the grace of GIVING** - of helping a missionary who is short on their monthly support, of raising money for their next big project, of helping someone who is recently unemployed with groceries and maybe a mortgage payment.

And the joy with that giving is increased, isn’t it - ***if you can find a way to do it SECRETLY?*** They might suspect it was you, but what they know for sure is that **it is from the LORD**. What a joy and privilege - what a gift of grace - to be God’s direct agent of LOVE! You are a conduit of His love to touch the heart and life of another person. What grace to you and through you. Giving is a gift of joy, a gift of love and:

* Giving is a gift of grace **to you** even as it is a gift of grace **through you**
  + The gift of **Growth**

“So he should complete among you this act of grace. But as you excel in everything… see that you excel in this act of grace also.” 2 Corinthians 8:6-7

It seems ***Titus was the first to suggest to the church in Corinth*** that they participate in the collection for Judea. Paul was working with his apprentice to finish a task he started - which we see later in this chapter that Paul was sending Titus there for that purpose. So this section is **a DISCIPLESHIP passage** both for the growth of the believers in Corinth and for Titus and the other two guys going with him to teach and encourage and meet with the believers in Corinth. See how Paul expresses this task? That Titus should “complete this act of grace.” Even a fund-raising project can be an act of grace! This is all DISCIPLESHIP!

* Giving is a gift of grace **to you** even as it is a gift of grace **through you**
  + The gift of **Growth**

“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.” 2 Corinthians 8:6-7

***Paul is being so affirming here.*** “As you excel in everything.” And keep in mind, this is a letter to the church in CORINTH - which was far and away the most messed up church that Paul dealt with. And yet, he can encourage them for their growth and progress. There is an important discipleship principle here: ***you make more disciples with honey than you do with vinegar.*** There’s a marriage application here. You have more influence with the honey of affirmation and encouragement than you do with the vinegar of criticism and judgment. The same is true with parenting, and youth ministry and discipleship in general. Positive affirmation goes a long way!

***Who can you encourage today?*** Send a text or email of affirmation. Appreciate the grace you see in someone for how they are growing and serving!

* Giving is a gift of grace **to you** even as it is a gift of grace **through you**
  + The gift of **Growth**

“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.” 2 Corinthians 8:11

There is a grace in starting a project, but ***an even greater grace in finishing it***, right? In this case it was one thing to WANT TO raise money for the believers in Jerusalem and another thing to actually collect the cash. That may have been the primary reason for Paul to send this particular letter. In verse 10 he comments that they started this fund-raising project a full year before, so now he is encouraging them to finish it.

* Giving is a gift of grace **to you** even as it is a gift of grace **through you**
  + The gift of **Growth**

“This benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.” 2 Corinthians 8:10

***“This benefits you.”*** You need this. It’s actually not good for your SOUL to start something and not finish it. The intention and desire to serve others with your money is a good and wonderful grace. But the follow through to actually give the money is even better. It BENEFITS YOU. “It truly is more blessed to give than to receive.” Listen to how Paul prays in 2 Thes.:

* Giving is a gift of grace **to you** even as it is a gift of grace **through you**
  + The gift of **Growth**

“So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do.” 2 Thes. 1:11, NLT

***The Holy Spirit is always prompting us*** - always leading us to that next step. A key to our growth in Christ is listening and responding to those promptings. We need to pray this for one another! “May he give you the power to ACCOMPLISH all the good things your faith prompts you to do.” Yes, to desire them and intend to do them - but than also the power to accomplish them. Help us Lord Jesus!

We’ve seen that giving is an act of worship to the Lord. We present ourselves and our money “first to the Lord.” Then we’ve seen that giving is as much a gift of grace TO US as it is a gift of grace THROUGH US. Yes, people benefit when we give generously. But we also benefit. There is a grace we RECEIVE even as there is a grace we pass on when we give sacrificially. We experience joy when we give. We experience love. And we experience growth. So now let’s turn to application. ***Based on all of this, HOW should we give?*** Three ways.

1. Therefore give **Boldly**

“Their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity.” 2 Cor. 8:2

If you feel any hesitation about giving at all or giving a certain amount, think of the Macedonian believers who were ***facing EXTREME POVERTY***. 2,000 years ago poverty - not American suburbs poverty. Think of the poor widow who was down to her literal last penny. If you think your faith needs some polishing toward boldness, think of that widow in the temple courts that day praying that the Name of Yahweh would be exalted in Israel and through Israel to the world. All she had was those two copper coins - and remarkably, she didn’t keep one and donate the other. She dropped both into that offering box. And Jesus smiled. Paul said in verse 5:

1. Therefore give **Boldly**

“They gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” 2 Corinthians 8:5

When you invest in the support of a missionary or a local church or a local ministry, you are not just giving yourself to the Lord in worship, ***you are giving yourself to those people***. When you give to Oakwood, you are giving yourself to the Oakwood family. When you give to Oasis pregnancy centers or Love Is refugee ministry you are giving yourself to those moms in crisis and to those refugees who are new to Tampa. So give boldly. Give in faith, knowing that the God of all grace will meet all of your needs according to His glorious riches.

1. Therefore give **Boldly**

“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.” 2 Corinthians 9:8

Could Paul have written that more comprehensively? All grace. All sufficiency. All things. All times. Every good work. Just listen to the Holy Spirit and step forward in bold faith. Give boldly. Second:

1. Therefore give **Freely**

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7

This may be the most famous Bible verse about giving. And rightly so since it comes right before verse 8 with those amazing promises. But what is a “cheerful giver”? We all want to be one. Yet often we feel reluctant, and we feel like we are under compulsion. But the answer is right there - just give what you have decided in your heart. That’s it.

Pray about it. Listen to the Holy Spirit. Talk it over with your husband or wife if applicable. Don’t go rogue on this stuff. Talk about your values and priorities. Pray together. It’s amazing, in my church leadership experience, how a group can talk for a few minutes and pray together and then someone throws out a number and it just seems right to everyone. ***We had this a few months ago with Jason.*** We wanted to give some kind of financial gift to appreciate Jason and Emma and all they gave to Oakwood.

Since his last day was April 16, the board quickly agreed, let’s pay him through the whole month of April. And we couldn’t land on a gift amount beyond that so we decided to let the church family give as the Lord led each of you. And the final amount, as different people chipped in different amounts - was just under five thousand dollars. I don’t know if you realize how remarkably generous that is. Churches tend not to give you a lot of money when you LEAVE. They might give some kind of moving allowance or financial bonus when you COME. But Oakwood was so loving and generous! Praise the Lord!

And at the same time we were asking you all to help us finish the fiscal year strong. And the response was absolutely incredible. We went from being almost 20K behind to finishing through June 23K ahead. All through individual believers and couples just deciding in your hearts what the Lord would have you give. And it works out beautifully. So give freely. Don’t ever feel any compulsion or guilt here at Oakwood. We don’t need your money or want your obligation. What we want is your joy in the Lord. We want to see you abounding in the overflowing grace of God. And if that means some money sloshes over our way, praise the Lord. But do you see how it isn’t really about the money in the end? It’s really about our hearts. As a leadership team, we trust completely in the Lord to meet all of our needs as a church. And as individual believers and families we trust the Lord completely to meet our needs.

So give boldly. Give freely. One more application.

1. Therefore give **Earnestly**

“I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love is genuine.” 2 Cor. 8:8

***Paul is inviting a comparison here.*** He is lifting up the example of the Macedonian believers - primarily in Philippi - as an example of earnest, faith-filled giving. And he is challenging the believers in Corinth to say, “how does the genuineness of your love compare to the folks in Macedonia?”

Let’s be inspired by the early church. Even in times of great poverty and famine and fear and persecution, they were profoundly generous with their money and houses and lands. “No one thought of anything they had as their own.”

If you read the rest of 2 Corinthians 8 you’ll see Paul’s explanation of why he was sending Titus and two other men to Corinth. And the word that comes up most in that explanation is this word “earnest.” “The importance of being earnest,” as it were. I *think* that’s a reference to Shakespeare or Jane Eyre or Jane Foster. Regardless, it is important to be earnest. Now all we can think is about Ernest going to camp or going to jail. So, think SINCERE. Passionate. Genuine.

Give boldly. Give freely. Give earnestly.

Experience the grace of God to you and through you. Feel the joy, the love, the growth. And above all, let your giving be an act of worship - a way you give more of yourself to the Lord who gave everything for you!

Let’s pray!