

2 Corinthians Ch8v1-15 - Generous Grace, Generous Giving: Part 1

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[0:00] Yeah, thanks. Thanks. Good morning, everyone. It's nice to see you.

! Thank you. Thank you. One response, not bad. Please turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

We took a break there just before Christmas when we were looking at Isaiah 42. And now we're back to 2 Corinthians again.

So we're going to read chapter 8, verses 1 through to 15 together. 2 Corinthians 8, starting at verse 1.

Let's hear God's word to us. And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace God has given the Macedonian churches.

[1:22] In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in the service of the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations. They gave themselves first of all to the Lord and then by the will of God also to us.

So we urge Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.

But since you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and in the love we have kindled in you, see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

[2:32] I'm not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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, through his poverty, might become rich.

And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give, but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it according to your means.

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard-pressed, but that there might be equality.

At the present time, your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality.

As it is written, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.

[4:11] Well, let's keep our Bibles open there at 2 Corinthians. We'll pray, and then we'll get into God's Word. So let's pray together. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Father, help us now by your Spirit to feed on your Word so that we may see and experience your goodness in our lives and that we may be changed to be those who are good in our generosity and giving to others.

Help us now, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Back a number of years ago when I was training for pastoral ministry, I was given a list by the minister to visit people I had to go and see.

One man that I went to see was in a very exclusive care home. I arrived one day to find him in his right mind, but all in a panic.

He had misplaced a 20-cent coin and he couldn't find it. He'd become overwhelmed with anxiety and concern.

[5:48] But the thing is, this man was a very, very wealthy man. But yet he was concerned for a missing few pennies. How sad, I thought, to get to that stage and to be worried about a few pence.

I also visited an older lady. She lived alone in her small house and on most occasions whenever I was leaving, she would hand me an envelope with a name on it or a mission organisation on it and say, make sure this gets to the right person.

She didn't have much, but there was a desire to give. One was wealthy and tight-fisted.

The other was poor but open-handed. Now what makes the difference between those two people?

Well, very simply and in one word, grace. Knowing God's goodness and kindness and love and acceptance made all the difference.

[7:09] You see, experiencing God's grace will transform us into generous givers. Look at verse 1.

And now, brothers and sisters, so he's changing course here. For the first seven chapters, it's been an encouragement about how we should live our Christian life and ministry.

Now the focus changes to financial giving. Verse 1. And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given.

God is a generous giver, especially in the area of grace, in pouring out his favour and his kindness and his goodness upon people.

So, look at the very end of verse 7. As we think about the grace God has given, end of verse 7, and see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

[8:22] Just as God has been gracious and generous to us, may we excel in the grace of giving. But why this sudden change in the letter to suddenly talk about finances?

It seems a bit random. Well, part of Paul's ministry was taking up a financial collection to help the church back in Jerusalem.

The church there was experiencing a lot of persecution. People had lost their jobs, others were kicked out of their homes, and so when Paul went visiting these churches and wrote to these churches, he reminded them of the financial needs and encouraged the other churches to give.

So, have a look with me back to 1 Corinthians chapter 16, just back a couple of pages. So, this is a previous letter written about a year before 2 Corinthians.

So, chapter 16, verse 1. Now, about the collection for the Lord's people, do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

[9:42] So, it's the same message I've been saying to all the churches I've been visiting. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come, no collection will have to be made.

In other words, it'll all be there ready to collect and to bring. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem, the church that was struggling.

If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me. Let's go back to chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians.

So, there was the reminder to give to the other churches. Now, the problem we're getting to in chapter 8 is that the church, it seems, in Corinth have forgotten their promise to give.

But instead of berating them and telling them off and shoving the collection bag in their face, Paul reminds them of God's generous grace.

[10:59] You see, experiencing God's grace will transform us into generous givers. In fact, it's a sign, it's evidence that we are Christians and that we are following the Lord Jesus.

So, we're going to look at three things through this text. First, that grace leads to rich generosity, loving sincerity, and genuine equality.

So, let's see the difference that grace makes. First, it leads to rich generosity. Let's go back to verse 1, chapter 8.

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. But what's so special about these churches in Macedonia?

Well, they were an example of a church that had been transformed by grace. Look at verse 2. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy, and their extreme wealth welled up in rich generosity.

[12:19] Is that what your Bible says? No, extreme poverty. It's extraordinary isn't it? It literally doesn't add up.

Do the math. Severe trial plus extreme poverty equals what? It's amazing.

Rich generosity. We don't know what the trial was. Perhaps it was also persecution like in Jerusalem. them. But whatever they were going through, the impact was devastating.

They were now living in poverty. But here's the amazing thing, and it's wonderfully beautiful to think about. They're not anxious. They're not sad.

Verse 2, overflowing with joy. Have you ever been in financial difficulty? I wonder if you would describe that moment as overflowing joy.

[13:31] It's a challenge, isn't it? They had come to experience God's saving and sustaining grace, and it had utterly changed and transformed their lives.

Look at the way it had changed them. First, their sacrificial giving. Verse 3, For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability.

They not only gave, they gave in a way that was costly. Their giving was putting their own lives at risk. It was sacrificial. But more than that, look at their joyful desire.

No moaning minis here when it came to giving their money. Look at the end of verse 3. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in the service of the Lord's people.

Now, you could imagine Paul saying to them, listen, guys, you don't have to give anything because, well, look, you're going through your hard time at the minute. Just keep it. no, Paul, we want to give.

[14:42] Please let us be part of this giving. God has been so good and kind to us. Please don't say no. Extraordinary, isn't it?

This joyful desire in their extreme poverty, their joyfulness in wanting to give. but there's more.

Verse 5, look at their faithful response. They exceeded our expectations. They gave of themselves first of all to the Lord and then by the will of God also to us.

Not only were they willing to give what pennies they had left, they gave of their very lives. Because the only right and best response to God's grace is first to give yourself to God and then to give ourselves to others.

You see, giving financially is not a way to earn God's grace and favour and acceptance. It's the evidence that you have already received that grace.

[15:55] Paul Tripp, some of you will know, he's an author, put it like this, if you gave every cent of every euro that you ever earned in every job that you ever had, you could not give enough to deserve God's grace.

No, giving is the sign that we have received and experienced the life transforming wallet opening grace of God.

God. This was the message to the church in Corinth and it's the message to the church in Carigoline. Now it seems the church in Corinth had lost sight of all God's goodness and grace to them.

That's why he's reminding them of how God had worked in the Macedonian churches and saying he can do the same in you. So we urged Titus just as he had made an earlier let me start again verse 6 so we urged Titus just as he had earlier made a beginning to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.

He had sent Titus to Corinth to start the collection and now he's saying finish what you started. You see they had become tight fisted not open handed instead of writing the checks they were counting their pennies and it's not just a Corinthian problem I've discovered in doing the studies on this that it's actually a me problem you see I like to keep a firm grip on my wallet to my shame I excel in spending but lack in giving what about you are you tight fisted or are you open handed do you

sacrificially give do you plead for opportunities to give do you faithfully offer your life as a gift now those are questions only we as individuals can answer but if we have experienced the grace of [18:31] God the evidence will be seen in our giving so end of verse seven see that you also excel in this grace of giving so first of all grace leads to generous giving second grace leads to loving sincerity loving sincerity let's go to verse eight I'm not commanding you I'm not berating you but I do want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others you say that you love your brothers and sisters you say that you want to be able to give to the Lord's work well prove your love prove the sincerity of your love but if you're like me and you struggle to part with your hard earned cash if you find it's hard to prize open your wallet or to flash revolute and do whatever else you might do well let me talk about three ways in which you possibly might be able to change to be a generous giver three ways the first two are wrong the last one is right if you want to change my heart you could try manipulation look at all the bombing that is going on in

Ukraine what about those poor people how about giving to them what about those poor children who make all those clothes for Sheen what about them you could try couldn't you by manipulation to try and force some pennies out of my wallet or you could try guilt Johnny you say you're a Christian you say you really do care you say that you love people why aren't you doing anything about it you could heap on guilt and shame well manipulation what happens when we watch enough pictures and see the news of children starving and wars that are going on but we become desensitized to it don't we it doesn't really last and the guilt where you can put on guilt upon guilt and shame upon shame but eventually we just become hardened to all of that and it doesn't take effect at all no manipulation and guilt isn't going to change a thing not in the long term the only motive the only thing that is going to change us is by looking at God's grace not looking at how difficult it is for other people not by looking inside my own heart and how bad I am but by taking our gaze and looking at Christ and his amazing grace because you are very very rich look at 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 through his poverty might become rich if you're going to change the bad habits in my life if you're going to change the habits in your life if we're going to be sincere givers look at the beauty and wonder of

Christ Christ had it all every atom and every planet belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ he made it he owns it but what did he do he made himself nothing he's king of the universe but he became a servant and he embraced our poverty walking in the midst of a broken world but not just materially spiritually he took on our poverty what does that mean well have a look back to chapter 5 verse 21 here's a good summary of what it means that Christ took on our poverty and gave us his riches 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21 god made him that is christ who had no sin to be sin for us so that in christ we might become the righteousness of god isn't that wonderful that christ took on himself my sin debt all the mess and all my brokenness and all my failure and he paid that debt for me by dying in my place on the cross he took my condemnation that

I deserve so that I might receive his salvation as I trust in him you see the only way you will change the bad habits in my heart and enable me to release whatever in my wallet is by not looking at others not looking inside my own heart but by helping me focus on the goodness and kindness of our lord jesus christ so if you have trusted in jesus if you are a recipient of god's gracious generosity if he has taken the poverty of your sin and you have received his riches forgiveness of all of your sin and life forever in his eternal kingdom you are exceedingly wealthy you have you have all that you ever need in christ he loved us sincerely so let's keep each other focused on the grace of god you are rich and that has an impact complete the task that's what follows in verse 10

[26:05] Paul is writing to the church in Corinth here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so now finish the work you said you were going to do it you promised you were going to do!

now show the sincerity of your love and do the job write the check set up that direct debit revolute towards that mission put the cash in the envelope do it just as Christ followed through on his promise to give his life for you just as he proves the sincerity of his love by dying for you and for me

so follow through on your promise to give what you said let's prove the sincerity of our love and let's continue to be generous in our giving but let's also remember that it's according to our means our giving our sincerity must be matched by what we have not what we don't have look at the end of verse 11 according to your means for if the willingness is there the gift is acceptable according to what one has not according to what one does not have now this is going to be different for each of us some of us have more some of us have less we all give but we don't all give the same there's no point in promising oh

I'm going to give 300 euro a week if we can only give 20 euro a week or two euro a week whatever it might be but the command is give according to your means you're not accountable to one another but accountable to God who has given to us what we have you see there's only one kind of Christianity and that is sincere Christianity a sincerity that not only speaks about love but is active in loving the gift of giving to those in need so grace leads us to sincere giving and then third grace leads to genuine equality it's also very practical for us isn't it verse 13 our desire is not that others might be relieved while we are hard pressed but that there might be equality at the present time your plenty will supply what they need so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need the goal is equality you see there's going to be seasons in life when we have very little but then there'll be seasons in our life when we have much maybe that's been your experience in your life the times when you've had and the times when you haven't had

I think of my own parents when we were growing up they served in pastoral ministry without a guaranteed regular income they would often get towards the end of the month and there would be nothing and I mean literally nothing left in the bank account we laugh about it now but my mum used to water down the milk it was lovely not but that's what they did because they didn't have but you know what people were kind checks would arrive anonymously in the post they out of their plenty gave to those like my parents who were in need but things changed for my parents support became more regular and they in turn were able to support others they were and they are generous givers you see sometimes we are receivers other times we are givers but never is there to be a time when there is inequality no one should ever be in need and we're given an example aren't we as we finish here verse 15 as it is written so this is taking us back to

Exodus the one who gathered much did not have too much and the one who gathered little did not have too little remember remember the account in Exodus where God graciously intervened and rescued his people out of Egypt out of their slavery and bondage and took them through the desert but there was a problem when they were walking through the desert there was no done stores or super value there nowhere to buy food so God provided manna that bread like substance that appeared every morning every day around the camp they would wake up and there would all be these flakes of bread on the ground and God's command to the people was very simple gather what you need for the day and no more don't gather for tomorrow don't gather for the weekend just take what you need for that day so verse 15 the one who gathered much did not have too much and the one who gathered little did not have too little you see

[32:38] God graciously gave according to each family's need so in the same way just as God has given to us so we are released to give to those who are in need and let's be clear that means we spend what we have to meet our needs not our wants or our luxuries so that we are enabled to give to those who are most needy the principle is this work as hard as you can to save all you can so that you give as much as you can you see in chapter eight we have a most beautiful example of churches who in their extreme poverty were able to give richly and joyfully and if we are to become like that the only way that we will truly be released and set free to be generous givers is by directing one another's gaze not to our hearts or to others but to

Christ and to see his amazing grace and all that he has done for us and how wealthy and rich we are in the Lord Jesus Christ and that releases us and gives us the freedom to help all those in need you see as we experience God's grace we are transformed into generous givers to rich generosity loving sincerity and genuine equality let's just pause before we pray and maybe there's something that the Lord has been pressing upon your hearts in terms of giving let's just take a moment to reflect on what we have heard and how we should respond

Lord God thank you thank you so much for all that you have provided for us all of us come from homes where we are warm where we have been fed and where we are kept safe for most of us we will go to work tomorrow!

and at the end of the week or the end of the months we will receive a wage you have been very kind to us and you have blessed us as a church and we thank you father for generous givers who have given out of all that they have father please help us to keep our eyes firmly fixed on the Lord Jesus remembering all that he did for us taking our poverty our sin and giving his riches his righteousness so that we might be blessed father thank you so much encourage us and help us to give to those in need around us and those whom we come to know we pray in Jesus name Amen