

Now More Than Ever: Excel in Giving – 2 Cor 8:6-7

What a way to prepare our hearts to receive God's Word – so let's turn to 2 Cor 8:6-7 (p967), and get started; With our capital campaign in high gear the next few months . . . We're going to take a break from our Issues series in 1 Corinthians, and focus on giving for a couple of weeks
And I want to start with this text, b/c this is the point
This is the point of the entire *message*, and the point of the entire *passage* here in 2 Cor 8-9 – excel in giving (**Intro**)

- With Paul saying in 2 Cor 8:6 – *Accordingly* [i.e. just like the churches in Macedonia to the north; who had given so much out of so little to relieve the churches in Jerusalem of their hardship, and further the work of ministry there] . . .
Accordingly, we urged Titus [One of Paul's partners in ministry, who had spent some time in Corinth and was going back there] . . .
We urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace [this privilege and gift of God, to give].

That's the idea of *this act of grace*; It wasn't Titus' act of grace toward them; Nor was it *their* act of grace to give
Rather, he's referring to *God's* act of grace toward them, to be able to give at all; V1-2

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.

The grace of God in this instance, was his act of unmerited favor, enabling them to give at all; Even out of their extreme poverty and affliction

And the same is true in v6; *Accordingly*, that's the linking word, *this act of grace* is *God's* act of grace toward the Corinthians, to give

- Which is a very important principle as we get started here – giving is an act of grace
It's a *gift* of God; Just like faith is a gift; And speech, and knowledge, and helping, and teaching, and so on
Which means, *you* are not the source of your *ability* to give; Nor the source of your impulse to give; Those are gifts from God, start to finish
Acts of his favor to bless us with the privilege to give in the first place

So it's no wonder Paul says in v7 – *But as you excel in everything* [as opposed to using your giftedness in a mediocre way]
As you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you [they even excelled in *being* loved] . . .
As you excel in everything . . . see that you excel in this act of grace also.
See that you excel in exercising this gift of giving, just as much as you excel in the other gifts

Which is exactly what I want to urge and encourage *you* to do – excel in giving
Excel at it; Do better at it; Give more; Stand out; Overflow

And it starts, by giving regularly; If you're going excel in giving, if *we* are going to excel in giving, we need to . . .

Give regularly (Mal 3:10)

As in **Mal 3:10** – *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house* God says; Which means, give 10% of your income, to the church; *Your* church 10% b/c that's what tithe means; And to your church, b/c that's the idea of a *storehouse*
It was a literal room that was connected to the side of the *temple* in Malachi's day, used to store the *tithes* that people gave – like grain, and olive oil, and money
So God was essentially saying, bring your tithes to the *temple* – the focal point of his work of ministry; Just like the *church* is the focal point of his ministry, in our day

The most direct application then, is to give a tenth of your income to the *church*; Your primary place of worship, service, fellowship, and growth
It's called storehouse tithing

- And don't miss the word *full* here in Malachi; *Bring the full tithes* into the storehouse
As in a tenth of everything you earn or receive
If you earn \$10, give a \$1; If you get a paycheck or a bonus, give a tenth
If you cash in a stock or bond, give 10% of your *gain*
If you sell a piece of land or a business, tithe your *profit*
If you receive a *gift*, give a tenth to the Lord

That's why my mom used to give the girls \$23 dollars for their birthday – so they could tithe on it, and still have \$20 left
In fact, it was a subtle encouragement to give over and above their tithe, \$3 instead of \$2.30 – and still have \$20 left over

In any case, if you're going to excel in giving, bring the *full* tithes into the storehouse
Stop trying to *keep* as much as you can, and start trying to *give* as much as you can
From *all* your income, off the top, before you pay taxes, before you contribute to your 401k, before you do anything – give regularly to the Lord*****

- It's something Becky and I have done from the get-go in our lives, and still do
We give a *minimum* of 10% of our income, right here – we always have, and we always will; And you know what? The blessing is ours
The blessing of knowing that we're doing *exactly* what God wants . . .
The blessing of *seeing* his work of ministry fully supported . . .
The blessing of *receiving* the abundance of his provision . . .
The blessing of *experiencing* the security of his protection . . .
And the blessing of *overflowing* with the fullness of joy
All of which are promised in the subsequent verses of Mal 3

The blessing is ours; And it can be yours as well, if you'll excel in giving regularly

And then second . . .

Give generously (2 Cor 9:6-7)

Look at 2 Cor 9:6; Paul's still talking about the special offering for the church in Jerusalem, and says in v6 . . .

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully [generously] will also reap bountifully.

An obvious farming analogy to say that if you *invest* little in the work of ministry, little relative to what you *have* – you'll get little out of it

But if you invest *much*, if you're generous in your giving – you'll be *blessed* much

Blessed by knowing it's making an impact for righteousness, and blessed by being given all the more; That's what Paul goes on to say in the next few verses
Namely, that the more you give, the more you *get* to give; That's what he says
And then comes full circle in v11 to say – *You will be enriched* [blessed] *in every way for all your generosity*

- Which is similar to what Solomon said 1000 years earlier in **Prov 11:24-25**
One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want [his needs go unmet; he reaps sparingly]. *25 Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters* [as in gives of his water for someone else's sheep] *will himself be watered.*
Generous giving leads to blessing for both yourself and others

And then there's Jesus in **Lk 6:38**, who said – *Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.*
Like when people of that day bought grain from a generous merchant – he would pack it down and make sure it was running over
Jesus said give like that and you'll be blessed like that
For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.
If your income was determined by that verse, how much would you make?

The point being, if you're generous in your giving, God will be generous with you
And the extent of your blessing depends on the extent of your giving
It may not come in the form of *money* every time, but it will come*****
God rewards generous giving

- As long, as you do so out of desire, and not compulsion
Out of love, and not obligation; Out of joy, and not drudgery
That's v7 – *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

When it comes to giving over and above your tithe, when it comes to giving generously, Paul's like – give b/c you *want* to
According to what *you* think; As you've made up *your* mind
Not b/c someone *else* wants you to; Or tells you how *much* to give

That way, you'll give freely instead of *reluctantly*
Willingly instead of *under compulsion* – feeling like you have to, but not wanting to
Don't do that; Give freely and willingly, b/c that's where the joy is, and that's the kind of giver God loves

- So if you're feeling pressure about giving toward our build-out – either give less, or change your heart
If you're feeling pressure, you're either giving too much out of compulsion, or too little out of reluctance

So try lowering the amount you're considering, and see if that alleviates your feeling
If it does, you were probably giving too much; If it doesn't, you're probably not giving enough; You're reluctant
In which case, the solution is to change your *heart*, not the amount

And if you don't want to give at all – figure out why; don't let that go
Is it a lack of information? Or a lack of trust that God will provide for *you*, if you provide for our church? Or a lack of trust in me, or our leadership?
Or lack of commitment to our church in general?

Whatever it is, figure it out, and do everything you can to remove it – to remove your reluctance; Don't let your doubts, or lack of trust, or lack of information . . .
Be a convenient excuse for a lack of giving; If you do, you'll miss out on God's blessing

And one more thing on this; If your income and worth far exceeds what you need to live on, that is, if you're rich – take special note of **1 Tim 6:18**
That's where Paul says – *As for the rich in this present age . . . They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share*
To the extent that God has generously blessed, generously give

- Having said that, generous giving, giving over and above your tithe – is not just for the rich; It's for everyone*****
Even those who are poor, like the Macedonians were in Paul's day

But it requires that you put your house in order
That you free up your finances by paying down your debt, setting aside appropriate reserves, and fixing your standard of living; Or even lowering it
Otherwise you'll *spend* all your increases in income, and have just as little to give as when you started

That doesn't mean, that you can't give generously if you still have debt – you can, and you should; But it does mean that you won't be able to give as much, or as often
Better to put your house in order, and *excel* in giving, as God has given to you

And then third . . .

Give sacrificially (2 Cor 8:1-3)

If you're going to excel in giving, if *we're* going to excel in giving, there are times when we need to give sacrificially; Once again, just like the Macedonians
Who Paul says in 2 Cor 8:3 – *gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord*

That's sacrificial giving – they gave *beyond their means*
IOW they gave, to point of doing w/out; Doing w/out something they wanted or needed
And sometimes, as God moves, and the need arises, and the opportunity requires – we need to do the same; We need to give sacrificially
That's part of what it means to excel in giving

- The Macedonians did it; The poor widow in Mk 12 did it – putting two small coins in the offering box, which was *everything she had*, [and] *all she had to live on* (v44)
And *more* than the large sums that were given by the rich

You see, the amount you give doesn't determine the extent of your sacrifice
What you give *up* determines the extent of your sacrifice
And the poor widow gave up everything

As did Elisha in the OT, when he left everything to follow Elijah in 1 Kings 19
He butchered his oxen, cooked them with the wood of his plow, and shared it with those nearby – instead of selling them and taking the proceeds along; He gave sacrificially

And don't forget about the woman in Mk 14, who anointed Jesus with ointment worth a *year's* wages; Giving up money that she no doubt could have used

And last but not least, there's Jesus himself in 2 Cor 8:9

Who, *though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich*; He gave sacrificially for the benefit of others

And sometimes, we need to do the same

Sometimes, we need to give to the point of doing without – when God prompts, the need arises, and the opportunity requires

- That's why Becky and I sold our two cars a year ago, and bought cheaper ones – cars with half the room and twice the miles
Do they fit our family as well? Not at all; Do they have as many bells and whistles? Not even close; Will they last as long? I doubt it
But we trust God for their dependability, and we're happy to do it
Why? B/c there's a need, and there's an opportunity with this build-out
And just to remind myself of that, I keep this little piece of cardboard right next to my gear shift, that says, "Now More Than Ever"

We sacrificed, and we're *sacrificing*, b/c there's a need, there's an opportunity, and God's in it; And I believe this build-out is going to require more of that, from all of us
In fact, I think it's going to require more than what we think
That's one of the reasons I encouraged you to pray from the get-go – that God would prepare us for the sacrifices ahead
And that's also why I'd like to encourage you to *fast* one meal a week for the next 40 days

- In fact, that's the first of 3 *things* I'd like to do as a church in the next few weeks – fast and pray; Will you do that?
And not just for the first weekend in March when we give our checks . . .
But for the months afterwards, when we all live with less b/c of it

It could be the *same* meal each week, or a different one

But whatever it is, will you take some of the time u would have spent eating, and **pray**?

Asking God to: Provide for the build-out; Prepare us for the sacrifices; And knit our hearts together in the process

That's the first thing I'd like to do together – fast and pray

The second, is to work our way through this 40 Day Devotional **booklet** on giving
From 4th grade on up, I'd like for *every single person* to have one of these, and work through it in the next 6 or 7 weeks

It's not a lot; It's mostly Scripture; And it's very good

The ushers will have them available at the door, and they'll also have copies of our capital campaign booklet if haven't yet received one

And then third, will you **email** me this week with your personal stories of generosity and sacrifice?

Maybe it's how you've been blessed in *giving*, or blessed in receiving . . .

Or how you've been challenged in that respect, or changed . . .

Whatever it is, I'd love to hear from you; And with your permission, share some of them over the next several weeks, to encourage the rest of us; Would you do that?

So that we can excel in this act of grace called giving? (**Summary**)

And not just for now, but for the rest of our lives; And in every *aspect* of our lives

That's the point; Excel in giving by giving regularly, generously, and sometimes even sacrificially – just as God gives regularly and generously and sacrificially to us

Pray – Thank you God, for the grace you've already lavished on us in this respect

And for the response of so many here, who give regularly and generously b/c of it

But I pray, Lord, that you would do more; That you would give us an even greater desire to *excel* in this, and the discipline to follow through

And for our build-out God, would you stir the hearts of every single one of us to give sacrificially? And prepare us for that?

To give, and give up, that which we want, and maybe even need – for the work of ministry?

In fact, would you use the next 40 days to transform our lives even more than you already have? I know you can and trust you will