

Grace and Giving

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2 Corinthians 8:1-15

November 19, 2017

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. ⁵And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. ⁶So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you^[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

⁸I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹For 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.

¹⁰And 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. ¹¹Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.¹²For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

¹³Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴At 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, ¹⁵as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."^[b]

Very soon—well, it has started already with “Pre-Black Friday” sales events—we are headed into the season of gift giving. So here’s just as a little lesson in Greek.

The word for “gift”,
The word for “joy”,
The word for “generosity”,
The word for “grace”,

ALL share the same root word in Greek: Charis/chara

In the first 9 verses of this chapter, Paul uses the word five times.

Verse 1: grace

Verse 4: “Privilege”

Verse 6: “this act of grace”

Verse 7: “so that you also excel in this grace of giving”

Verse 9: “for you know the grace”

One could say that this message is part two of “The Sermon on the Amount”, for if you recall in that message the scripture made clear that God wants not just ten percent of our income or of our time or our talent. Nope. God wants one hundred percent of us—lock, stock, and barrel. Every little bit of us.

This is what had happened to the Macedonian believers...”: They **gave** themselves **first of all to the Lord**, and **then** by the will of God **also to us**. (v.6)

They gave themselves –100 percent—to the Lord.

Why would anyone do that??

I can think of only one reason: **We give, in response to the grace we have already received.**

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. (v.9)

Paul is upholding the Macedonian believers as an example to the believers in Corinth, because the Macedonians were responding to the grace of God expressed toward them in the person of Jesus Christ. When we are recipients of such an amazing gift, it activates the “**generosity gene**” within each of us, to respond in kind. We **want to share** what we have. We **want to give** out of our new found abundance.

Justin Borger is a pastor who befriended a homeless woman who lived under a bridge, not far from the church he served in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

After providing Tammy with some basic hygiene supplies, Justin didn't hear from her for a few weeks—until she called and said that she had been raped. Justin arranged for her to get the medical attention she needed. Soon after, Tammy started attending Borger's church.

The church started providing vouchers so she could buy food and other items. But that created a problem: Tammy kept giving the vouchers to other people. Justin told her, "Tammy, you need to keep this for yourself. Otherwise you'll run out of food."

But living under the bridge meant living with other needy people, and it was unthinkable for Tammy to receive a gift and then not share it with others. So with an incredulous stare she asked Justin, "Why can't I give some too?"

Borger writes:

I found myself taken aback. Why shouldn't Tammy be allowed to give some of what she'd received? Wasn't that exactly what I was doing? I paused for a moment. But then I gave her a very pragmatic answer: "We're giving this to you, not to everyone else you meet." Yet, I recognized the deeper problem: to only receive and never give back is to be belittled—to be humiliated. Over time, I had begun to think of Tammy as a kind of pet project in which I was always the giver and she was always the recipient But the good news is that God not only made us to be recipients of his grace but also participants in the movement of his own generosity.

(Source: God So Loved, He Gave (Zondervan, 2010), pp. 147-148)

Everyone enjoys giving! If giving does not bring you joy—don't do it. There is something wrong. Come talk to me. Giving should bring us joy!!

Even the believers in Macedonia. And they were poor. Very poor. In fact the word in Greek used here for “poor” is “bathos”, meaning “deep”. (It is

the word from which we get bathysphere, a submersible vessel made with the intention of going down to the depths of the ocean floor.) In other words, the believers in Macedonia were the poorest of the poor.

Under Roman oppression, many experienced grinding poverty, in addition to religious persecution.

During the early years following Jesus' resurrection the church grew, and it grew largely among the lower classes, slaves, and those of little economic means. That was the case here. And yet, Paul says the church in Macedonia not only received the grace of God in Christ, but responded with a similar generosity born of that very grace.

Paul writes:

²In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. ⁵And they exceeded our expectations...

John Crysostom, a bishop in the early church during the 4th-5th century, marveled as he reflected on this passage: "They did the begging, not Paul."

The believers in Macedonia were pleading with Paul to be able give! They begged him for the honor—the privilege—the JOY—of giving! That is every Pastor's dream—to have folks begging to write checks or to name the church as a beneficiary in their will!

One day a woman joined us for worship. Honestly, she looked like a bag lady. She was clean, but disheveled. Very, very quiet. Shy. She slipped in after the service started and slipped out before it ended for about a month, before anyone could even get her name. Gradually she got more comfortable. She invited her adult son to come with her. It took him awhile to warm up to us, but gradually we got to know them. Little by little.

At the time, the church was in a capital campaign—a fundraising drive to "raise the roof"—\$60,000. was needed to replace the leaky roof. One day, "Stella" knocked on the office door. I greeted her, and she asked if we could talk privately. I led her into the conference room and closed the door. She opened her purse and handed me a cashier's check —made out to the church—for \$40,000! I was stunned. She wanted it to go in the Raise the Roof fund.

I started to protest, because we were very close to the goal. We didn't need that much. (Silly me!) But she insisted that I take the gift, that it go in the roof fund, and that no one know who gave the gift. She wanted to remain anonymous.

Wow...what unexpected generosity, from a person who appeared to have very few means. Surprise, surprise!

I think there is a "generosity gene" built into us but it is not "triggered" or put into play until we have first been recipients of something amazing. That is to say, in order to be givers, we must first be receivers. Isn't that true? We are born into this world, totally dependent on others to give to us what we need. At a certain point, most of us then are able to provide our own self-care, and once that is mastered, we are also able to care for and give to others. We need not remain as recipients our whole lives.

I see this in my seven year old granddaughter. For instance when she knows a family member is going to be having a birthday, she starts thinking about what she can give him/her as a present. She has little or no money—and she is conditioned by our consumer mentality to think that unless she buys something, whatever she might give has no value. I've tried to teach her that giving comes from the heart. So a picture she draws, a card she makes, are meaningful gifts that a family member will treasure. (She doesn't always believe me, because the message the world sends is reinforced so well.)

Against all odds, the believers in Macedonia give, and they give generously—and joyfully--above and beyond Paul's expectations. Paul is using their example to motivate the Corinthians to also give.

⁶So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷But 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.

There is a difference between these two churches. One is poor. The other is rich in spiritual gifts. But they did not excel in the grace of giving. Despite all their fine qualities, Paul says they are immature, incomplete, lacking in this area of generosity or giving. Spiritual growth and maturity is not possible without committing our whole selves, including all we are and have,

including all our financial assets, to the Lord. "Jesus can have our money and not have our hearts but he cannot have our hearts without our money." (Kent Hughes) That's what Jesus meant when he said : "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

A preacher visited one of his parishoners, a farmer. He asked him: "If you had two hundred dollars, would you give a hundred to the Lord?" "Sure would", he replied.

"If you had two cows, would you give one cow to the Lord?" "Sure would," he replied.

"If you had two pigs, would you give one of them to the Lord?"

The farmer replied: "That's not fair. You know I have two pigs!"

Paul says to the Corinthians, and to us:

⁸I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹For 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.

This is not a command. This is a description of how the amazing grace of God in Christ created unprecedented generosity on the part of its recipients.

Think about your life...the comforts of three meals a day...the warmth of shelter...for transportation to worship, to work, and meaningful activities, for the comfort of companionship, for blessing of friendship and family, for state of the art health care, for freedom to worship, and the best gift of all, the grace of God that enriches us beyond all measure with eternal life through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Having been recipients of these gracious and generous gifts, how shall we respond?

God does not need nor does God want your money...God wants YOU...100%.

Today and always. How much will you give?