

newDAY

“The Truth About Giving”

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Idea: The Lord will supply our needs, bless our church, and use our efforts for eternity.

Intro: A church board was concerned that people in the congregation were embarrassed when the offering plates were passed. So they decided they needed a new system that wouldn't embarrass anyone, especially those who “couldn't” give. They asked the pastor to design a way of handling it so people could give as they came in or went out. The pastor thought about it for a while until he came up with a plan. He built several interesting boxes and put them at each door. But these boxes were unique. If you dropped in a dollar or more, it made no noise; it was silent. If you gave a half dollar, a little bell dinged. If you gave a quarter, it blew a whistle. If you gave a dime, a siren went off. If you gave a nickel, a shot sounded. If you gave nothing, it took your picture!

As you exit this morning, I hope you notice the new boxes that were installed this past week. Just kidding.

The last several weeks, we have been dealing with a subject that can be uncomfortable to some, so I thought we might start out with a little humor to lighten the mood.

Here's a funny line I found this week that was printed in a church bulletin: “The Lord loveth a cheerful giver. He also accepteth from a grouch.”

The subject of giving or biblical stewardship is one of discipleship. You may not like to hear about it, but in many ways stewardship is a thermometer that reveals your spiritual health. Here is a statement that we all need to understand: “You are never more like Jesus than when you are giving.”

The responsibility of being a faithful steward of God is a constant obligation for the Christian. The weekly, monthly, and yearly responsibility of giving your tithes and offerings to the Lord as an act of worship for the support of His kingdom is a perpetual and enduring spiritual discipline. But there are times in the life of God's people when the Lord leads us to be involved in an extra-ordinary effort. He gives us an unrepeatable opportunity that will allow us to take the next step in the life of our church and of our ministries.

So it is in these exciting days. We are mounting up a great and extra-ordinary campaign, designed to raise the resources needed for what God is calling us to do in this place for His glory. In seeking the wisdom of God in these matters, we have devoted the last few messages to the great stewardship campaigns of Scripture.

There are four of them. Three of these special stewardship campaigns come from the pages of the Old Testament and are directed toward the building of the Tabernacle in the book of Exodus, the building of the Temple in 1 Chronicles, and the rebuilding of the Temple in Ezra and Haggai.

Today, we are looking at the fourth and final major stewardship campaign in Scripture. It is referred to in Romans 15, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16, and described extensively in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. We have been studying these passages in our small groups over the last few Sundays, so many of you already understand the background. Let me summarize it briefly.

Inquiry: The Apostle Paul had a two-fold purpose for his third missionary journey, which is recorded in Acts 18:23-21:16. First, he wanted to plant the gospel and edify the churches in Asia Minor and Europe. Second, he sought to raise a large amount of money from these churches for a special project that was on his heart. The Jewish Christians in Judea were in dire straits. They were destitute, having been pummeled by both famine and persecution. Paul knew they needed a large infusion of cash. Furthermore, he knew that if the Greek and Gentile churches of Europe would meet this need, it would help heal the rift between the Jewish Church of Judea and the Greek Church in the Gentile world. So during this third missionary tour, the apostle mounted a special, one-of-a-kind effort to raise a large amount of money for the financing of what God had placed on his heart.

Today, I'm not going to reteach our small group lessons. I do want to tell you the truth about giving, though; because there are a lot of misconceptions in the church about giving. I'm going to share with you five truth statements about giving as Paul articulates them in 2 Corinthians 8. First, the Bible tells us here that giving is nothing less than an act of grace.

1. Giving is an act of grace. (vs. 1)

We find in the opening verse of chapter 8 one of the most unusual uses of the word *grace* in all of Scripture. We're familiar with the word *grace*. We know that it is a mighty word, and we often sing about God's...*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me*. But here Paul used *grace* as a kind of synonym for the act of financial giving.

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia

– 2 Cor 8:1

The Macedonian churches were those congregations in northern Greece that had given a sacrificial offering toward this campaign, and Paul wanted to use their example to motivate the Corinthians. Often when we see or hear of the example of other Christians or churches, it spurs and prods us forward in our own hearts.

Skip down to verses 6-8 and notice that the word *grace* is again used in this way.

Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.

– 2 Cor 8:6

This refers to the financial gift Paul was expecting from the Christians of Corinth. He referred to their anticipated gift as *this act of grace*. He goes on to say:

But as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you (or in your love for us) – see that you excel in this act of grace also. (vs. 7)

In verse 9, he tells us that giving is an act of grace that mirrors the grace of God Himself: *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 by his poverty might become rich.*

In other words, giving is the result of God's work of grace in our lives. We are not givers by nature. No, by nature we are sinful, selfish, self-centered, and stingy. Spending and consuming come easily to us, a reality not lost on the credit card companies and the advertising agencies. This is why, despite the prosperity of our times, so many Americans are steeped in debt.

But as we grow in the grace of Jesus Christ, we become more like Him. We understand the value of sacrifice and self-denial. We grow concerned about the souls of men and women, and we come to understand that giving is God-like. Our most familiar verse in the Bible says, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave...*" And the overflow of God's grace in our lives empowers us to be givers.

Illust: Share how the leaders of the orphanage in Uganda gave to my team and I their best even though their food supply was extremely low.

Verse 2 adds another dimension to our view of stewardship.

2. Giving doesn't depend on prosperity. (vs. 2)

Referring again to the churches of Macedonia, Paul continues: *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.*

What can we say about these churches in Macedonia who had made such significant contributions to the Lord's work? Were they rich? Were they enjoying a time of prosperity? The answer is "No." They were going through a severe trial, yet they possessed overflowing joy. They were themselves living in poverty, yet somehow this resulted in a richness of generosity that served as an example and as a rebuke to other churches in the Roman world.

Illust: Some time ago, Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago had a stewardship campaign much like ours but much larger. They needed to raise fifty million dollars, and it seemed impossible. But the tide turned during a staff meeting. One of the young, single ladies on staff shared her testimony. She said that it wasn't possible for her to commit as much as she felt God wanted her to give toward this project based on her weekly income alone. So she made a hard decision. She decided that for the next three years, she would take in a roommate and share her home with another young lady for a certain amount of rent. She committed every penny of that monthly amount to the capital campaign as a portion of her pledge. This enabled her to give as she felt the Lord wanted her to give. Her testimony that day had a profound impact on other staff members and on the whole leadership of the church, and it was one of the factors that enabled them to receive – not fifty million – but eighty million dollars in commitments.

Doesn't that sound like the Macedonian churches? *In a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty...overflowed in a wealth of generosity.* Giving is an act of grace that does not depend on prosperity. Verse 3 takes this thought a step farther.

3. Giving should not be limited by your ability. (vs. 3)

Sometimes I hear people say something like, “I’ll try to do such and such to the best of my ability.” Well, when it comes to the Lord’s work, we are not called to operate on the basis of our ability. We are to operate on the basis of God’s ability.

Look at the way it is put in verse 3: *For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord.*

Look over to chapter 9, verse 8: *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.*

Read 2 Cor 9:10-11.

God does not call us to give to the best of our ability. He calls us to follow His leadership and to give to according to His ability. Are Christians in America doing that today?

The answer unfortunately is no. The discipline of regular tithing is fading. According to a 2004 study conducted by the Barna Group, only 4% of Americans tithed (gave 10%) to a local church. Fortunately, the study revealed that Evangelicals were more apt to tithe, but still only 23% tithed to a local church. This study is a little dated, but data I have seen from other research shows me our giving has not improved. In fact there are several studies that show 15%-20% of born-again believers give no money at all to churches.

These people are not even giving to the best of their own abilities, yet the Bible tells us that the One who gives us seeds and bread, the One who meets our daily needs, wants to give us all we need so that we can be generous on every occasion. This brings us to the fourth truth about giving.

4. Giving is something we get to do. (vs. 3-4)

John D. Rockefeller Jr. once said, “Think of giving not as a duty but as a privilege.” That is the attitude of Scripture.

...of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints
– 2 Cor 8:3b-4

The churches in Macedonia begged Paul to let them have the joy and the honor of financially participating in God’s work. They viewed it as a privilege, as something they *got* to do.

Let me give you a highly hypothetical example. Suppose someone – someone completely infallible and utterly trustworthy – came to you with a surefire offer, saying, “We are starting a new company with contacts, contracts, and customers already in place. We need investors who will give one hundred dollars each, but they should know that this is the best investment in the history of business and commerce. We guarantee that those who invest one hundred dollars now will be multi-millionaires within a few months.”

Suppose you knew this was failsafe, that it was truly an opportunity of a lifetime. Would you waver and hesitate? Would you begrudge the one hundred dollars? No! You would say, “Here,

take two and three hundred dollars! Let me see if I can come up with a thousand dollars. How much can I give? How much can I invest?”

When we invest in the Lord’s work, it extends His Kingdom to the ends of the earth; it populates heaven for all eternity. It results in dividends that will outlast this life, outlast this world, and outlast time itself. It will be paying returns into eternity. It is the best investment opportunity in the universe. Jesus said, *“but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal”* (Matt 6:20).

Who would not want to be a part of that? We don’t have to give. We get to give! Paul calls it, *“the favor of taking part.”*

5. Giving reflects our personal commitment to God and His church. (vs. 5)

Read 2 Cor 8:5.

Think of your check stubs in the same way you would think of a barometer with the weather. It is an indicator, a reflection, or a gauge of where you and I are spiritually. In other words, the reason the Macedonians gave to the Lord with liberality and generosity was because their giving was predicated and preceded by a total-life commitment to the Lord Himself and to His work.

Illust: There was a man in Texas whose son was charged with murder. The man found the best criminal attorney in Dallas to defend his boy, and the young man was acquitted. When the lawyer presented his bill, which was staggering, the father gladly paid it because the lawyer had saved his son.

Later in the year, a faithful pastor led that young man to faith in Christ, saving him from a life of drunkenness and sin. In contrast to the lawyer, God didn’t send his father a bill, and the preacher didn’t invoice him either. The man, however, never seemed to recognize the importance of giving God an offer of thanksgiving. He gave vast sums to keep his son out of jail, but he had no contributions for those who kept his son out of hell. There was no commitment to God in his life, and that was reflected in his banking account.

Has God done great things in your life? Has He saved you from a life of sin? Has He changed your eternal address? Does your heart belong to Him? We don’t give to His cause as though we were paying a bill or responding to an invoice. We don’t give to Him because someone nags us to make a contribution to a worthy cause. We give because we love Jesus and because we are utterly committed to His cause in this world. Giving reflects our personal commitment to Christ and His Kingdom. We have experienced God’s grace, so that from grace we freely give to the Lord and His church because we deeply love both.

Conclusion: As we seek God’s face and His will regarding our own personal obligations to give of our substance for God’s great work here, may we bear in mind these truths of Scripture: Giving is an act of grace. It doesn’t depend on prosperity, and it shouldn’t be limited by our abilities. It is a privilege, something we get to do. Therefore, it is a reflection of our own personal commitment to Christ and the expansion of His Church. The Lord will supply our needs, bless our church, and use our efforts for eternity.

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 by his poverty might become rich. – 2 Cor 8:9

How is the Lord leading you to give toward our newDay campaign? I am overwhelmed by God's grace in our church right now. It has been so refreshing to hear many great stories of how people in our church are following the Lord's direction in their lives. They are rearranging their budgets, cutting out excesses, and making sacrifices. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have already been pledged, and people have gone ahead and started to give to newDay six weeks before Celebration Sunday. I can't wait to see what the final outcome will be. More than that, I can't wait to see how the sacrifices of God's people will result in the gospel being birthed in the hearts of people in Powhatan and around the world.