



First Baptist Church At The Villages

COMPANION STUDY TO MESSAGE: CONFIDENCE THROUGH GOD'S PROVISION (7/12) •
STUDY TITLE: GOSPEL FUELED GENEROSITY • 2 CORINTHIANS 8-9 •
FOR USE 7/12 THROUGH 7/18/2020

MAIN POINT

Generous giving is rooted in and reflects the generosity of God.

INTRODUCTION

As your study time begins, use this section to focus your mind and your heart on the topic of this lesson.

When have you felt the strongest sense of community with our church?

During what time in your life were you most in need of help from other people? Who helped you out during that situation? What was your relationship with that person/people like?

On the other hand, when have you been most helpful to a friend in need? What motivated you to lend a hand?

What are you most likely to sacrifice for the sake of others—time or money? Why?

How we use our time, money, and talents reveals what we value. As part of the body of Christ, we are called to sacrifice these areas of our lives in ways that reveal our love for other believers. Living generously in community requires sacrifice on our part, but it should be a natural result of God's generosity in our lives. Christ's sacrifice on our behalf was one of love given freely.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15.

Sacrificial generosity was a practice of the church established at its very conception, and in these verses from 2 Corinthians we read Paul's reminder to the Corinthian church that generosity should be fundamental in their ministry to one another. Paul told the Corinthians about the generosity of the Macedonian churches who—despite their own poverty—had raised money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Even though they were poor, they gave generously because the Christian community was in need.

What do you learn about the Macedonians from their giving? What amazed Paul about their giving?

What “grace” had God given to the Macedonian Christians?

The giving discussed in 2 Corinthians 8 was a special offering, not the regular church offering, and it was collected to meet a special need. Paul had hoped the Christians in Macedonia would support the offering. But because of their own deprived circumstances, he evidently did not expect they would give very much. Their giving was spontaneous and voluntary, fueled by grace, not by pressure.

What four principles about giving do you observe in this passage? (out of devotion to Jesus, love for fellow believers, the joy of helping those in need, and the good and right thing to do)

Why is it significant that the Macedonians gave both “according to” and “beyond” their ability?

The Macedonians knew what it was to be in need because they had experienced poverty—yet they gave most generously. Anyone can be generous. But for Christians, we have no choice—the love of Christ should compel us to take care of each other.

In what ways does taking care of each other strengthen community? What do we communicate to people at our church or in our group when we sacrifice our time, money, or other resources to meet their needs?

Why is it important for you, as an individual Christian, to be generous? Why is it important for the church, as a collective body, to be generous?

Generous giving is a ministry, and ministry requires faithful and generous giving. It was this ministry that the Macedonians shared. They saw their giving as a partnership with other believers to help with the needs of the saints, a preferred description of Paul's for followers of Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9 again. This verse reveals what should motivate all believers to willingly sacrifice of themselves for the sake of others in the community—Jesus’ sacrifice for us. Jesus practiced and taught sacrificial giving. Gratitude for what Jesus has done for us motivates us to demonstrate responsible stewardship of our lives and our possessions.

| READ 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8.

Paul sought to help the Corinthians gain the proper perspective on giving. He realized they needed to move beyond their good intentions to action because the time to deliver the offering to Jerusalem was drawing near. Paul hoped to lead the Corinthians to give as a ministry and to set a positive Christian example.

What words in these verses describe the attitude about giving that God will honor?

What words describe attitudes God will not honor?

Which words best describe the giving culture of our church?

How does your attitude affect your giving? What is the result of giving reluctantly or because someone compelled you to do so?

How did Paul instruct the Corinthians to become more cheerful givers?

“Giving is a tangible expression of our trust in God.” Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why?

Paul was not advocating that we give so we can get rich. On the contrary, when one’s giving is an expression of God’s grace, God will provide more to the giver, who then will be able to give even more. God sees far more clearly than we do that all worldly wealth is temporary. God has given us excess so that we will live generously and take care of others. He expects His people to invest their financial resources in ways that will endure for eternity. Generous giving is not to be done haphazardly but purposefully.

What is the relationship between accumulating wealth and giving generously in ministry to others?

CONTEMPLATION & APPLICATION

Identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to your life.

How should God’s ultimate gift to us compel you to give? What can you do to keep this truth in your thoughts this week?

How do you know if your giving is truly generous?

What can you do to stay encouraged and accountable to being truly joyful and generous in our giving to the work of God?

PRAYER

Pray that God would continually remind your group that giving should be done cheerfully, not reluctantly. Also pray that our stewardship would ultimately glorify God and bring others into His kingdom.

COMMENTARY (additional background and/or explanation of the verses to help understanding the biblical text)

| 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

8:1-5. When Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans, he indicated that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had “been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” and that he would take the contribution to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-27). Paul mentioned the offering also in Acts 24:17. Paul had assigned Titus the task of collecting the offering in Corinth. The problems in the church there had delayed the process. Paul, however, wanted Titus to complete the task (2 Cor. 8:6).

Why were the Jerusalem Christians in such dire straits at this time? Perhaps the primary reason was that the unbelieving Jews persecuted Jewish Christians. These Christians must have been socially and economically ostracized. Their businesses in many cases were ruined. Moreover, when large numbers of Jewish pilgrims were converted at Pentecost, many of them apparently chose to remain in Jerusalem, thus worsening the economic crisis. Some interpreters believe the early Christian communal life was a failure, thus adding to the crisis (Acts 4:34-37). Luke, however, made no statement of disapproval regarding the community of goods. Instead, he recorded that “abundant grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

Why did Paul remind the Corinthian church of a monetary offering in view of the church’s problems with which he earlier had dealt? Perhaps Paul felt that Christians who are right with God in stewardship matters also will be right with one another in other matters. You may recall that the Corinthian church already had begun to collect the offering a year earlier (8:10). The Greek word for grace occurs five times in 8:1-9 where it is variously translated grace (vv. 1,9), favor (v. 4), and “gracious work” (vv. 6,7). When used of God, the term refers to His unmerited

favor. When used of Christians, the word may refer to our expressions of kindness to others in response to God's grace toward us.

Paul used the churches of Macedonia (located at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) as a great model of generous and joyful giving. In contrast to the wealthier Corinthian church, the Macedonians experienced deep poverty (v. 2). They also suffered persecution. Yet the Macedonian Christians gave sacrificially, generously, and voluntarily. By the phrase beyond their ability (v. 3), Paul perhaps meant that the Macedonians gave sacrificially from their meager supplies. They even begged to give (v. 4)! Having gone beyond Paul's expectations, the Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God (v. 5). The term first may refer to first in time or in importance. If it means first in time, the point is that giving oneself precedes other kinds of giving. If it means first in importance, the point is that their total giving of themselves to the Lord and to Paul was their most important act of giving. In application, the meanings are similar. They were willing to give themselves in service in any way needed.

8:6-9. Titus, a Gentile convert, apparently accompanied Paul to the Jerusalem Council with reference to requiring Gentile converts to be circumcised and to obey certain Jewish laws (Acts 15:2; Gal. 2:1) although others distinguish between the events recorded in Acts 15 and those in Galatians 2. Paul did not have Titus circumcised because circumcision had no part in salvation (Gal. 2:3). Titus was Paul's capable coworker in Corinth.

Second Corinthians 8:6 indicates that Titus had begun the task of collecting the offering in Corinth, and Paul wanted him to complete it. In 8:16-23 Paul expressed thanks to God that Titus shared Paul's deep concern for the Corinthians (v. 16). In verse 23 Paul indicated his high regard for Titus as Paul's "partner and fellow worker."

Although giving has little significance to some who profess to be Christians, the expression gracious work (v. 7) shows that Paul considered giving an act of grace. Paul urged the Corinthians to grow in the grace of giving. Instead of exercising his authority as an apostle, Paul chose to soften his appeal by stating that he did not intend his words as a command (v. 8). He wanted the Corinthians to give voluntarily. He also wanted to prove, or test, the sincerity of (their) love. The Greek word translated love in this phrase is agape, a self-giving love that results from God's action toward us in Christ. Since love by nature is active, it demonstrates itself in helpful deeds (Jas. 2:14-17). In the expression earnestness of others, Paul referred to the Macedonians' generous and inspiring example of giving. Paul focused on the great generosity of the Macedonians in spite of their poverty (2 Cor. 8:1) to inspire the Corinthians to give.

Paul also appealed to the example of Christ to motivate the Corinthians (v. 9). Jesus is the supreme example of generous giving. Verse 9 may remind us of Philippians 2:5-11. Christ

became poor in the sense of humbling Himself, taking the role of a servant, and experiencing suffering and death. He freely gave up the glory of heaven in order to make all who trust Him spiritually rich. Furthermore, Christ's emptying of Himself is to be understood in a personal way. He gave up everything for you and me. We may conclude that if Christ's supreme example of giving did not inspire the Corinthians to give, nothing else would.

8:10-11. In these verses Paul challenged the Corinthians to put their earlier good intentions into practice by completing what they had started. Paul suggested that the completion of their offering was to their advantage, or "profitable" for them. They had begun the project a year ago. Paul had suggested a plan of weekly offerings to reach their goal (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Presumably, their failure to complete the project either had stemmed from lack of concern or from preoccupation with other matters.

Nevertheless, Paul urged the Corinthians to complete the project. He wanted them to act now (v. 11). What they needed to do was, not to renew their promise to give, but to actually give. The eager spirit they had demonstrated by their willingness to begin the task of collecting the offering needed at this point to be matched by action in completing the project. No matter how strong and good our intentions and desires may be, they are fruitless if we do not carry them through to completion of the action. Our failure to act on our intentions can harm our reputations. We need to put good intentions into practice. Although the Macedonians had given beyond their ability (v. 3), Paul challenged the Corinthians to give according to their ability (v. 11). Paul did not intend the collection to be a burden to the Corinthians.

8:12. Verse 12 builds on verse 11. The word translated readiness also means "willingness." Since the Corinthians previously had expressed a willingness to give, Paul currently was concerned with their present willingness, as well as with their performance. The motive was important. Moreover, the amount they gave was to be based on what the people possessed, not on what they did not have.

8:13-14. Paul did not expect the Corinthians to burden themselves so that others might live in ease at their expense. Paul did not want the Corinthians to cause themselves hardship by giving. Paul stressed equality. Paul viewed all believers as comprising one spiritual body of Christ, the church. When any part of the body of believers hurts, the other parts have a responsibility to help the ailing part (see 1 Cor. 12:12-27). In particular, the wealthier Corinthian church ought to help the suffering Judean Christians. God uses Christian giving to meet human needs. On the other hand, Paul did not teach that a wealthier Christian should support an idle church member (2 Thess. 3:10). All Christians are interdependent and our mutual sharing can benefit one another.

Thus, in 2 Corinthians 8:12-14 Paul presented the principles of proportionate and reciprocal giving.

| 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8

9:6. Some Corinthian Christians may have reasoned that the more they gave, the less they would have and the more likely they would become dependent on the giving of others. Paul explained how the grace of giving operates in the lives of those who trust in God. A farmer reaps in proportion to what he sows. A wise farmer sows generously in order to reap generously. He was not advocating that we give so we can get rich. On the contrary, one's giving is an expression of God's grace.

9:7. Generous giving is not to be done haphazardly but purposefully. Each person should do as he has decided in his heart. The word decided indicates a choice and could be translated "purposed." Again, Paul made clear he was not trying to compel the Corinthians to give. Individuals are responsible to God for their giving.

Some Christians give but fail to practice Christian giving. Out of regret is literally "from sorrow." The phrase describes a person who grieves over the loss of what was given rather than rejoices over the ministry it renders. God loves a cheerful giver. Why? Because God is a cheerful giver. Cheerful translates a word that basically means "merry" and is used to indicate the idea of willingness.

9:8. God alone is able to make every grace overflow to you. God is not a miser. If He were, the Corinthians prudently should have hoarded all of their resources and given nothing away. God is, however, a generous Provider. Paul reminded the Corinthians that God is capable of meeting their needs as they followed His leadership in meeting the needs of others.