

THAT YOU GIVE

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-24

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.

But as you abound in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us - see that you abound in this grace also.

I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted

according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack - that there may be equality. As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."

But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us - providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you.

If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

Once there was an infant playing on the carpet.

She picked up a quarter, stuck it in her mouth, and

swallowed the coin. The mom saw what happened and went hysterical. She screamed to her husband, "Quick, call 9-1-1, our baby girl just swallowed a quarter."

The husband responded, "Forget about 9-1-1, call the pastor... he can get money out of anybody!"

Well, in 2 Corinthians 8-9 Pastor Paul's intent is to get money out of the Corinthians. He teaches them on the topic of giving. In a sense, his epistle becomes a fundraising letter - *but it's really so much more...*

In Chapter 8 Paul builds a case for Christian giving. He explains *that we need to give*. In Chapter 9 he tells us *how we should give...* **That we give. How we give.**

And that's the title of my message this week and next... Today, **That we give.** Next week, **How we give.**

Now, understand the circumstances at the time...

A famine had struck the region of Judea. The land of the Jews had fallen on hard times. Christian brothers and sisters in Jerusalem were *hungry and hurting*.

And Paul saw their need as an opportunity to build a bridge between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Paul decides to collecting an offering for the Jewish Christians from the Gentile churches in the west.

Remember, the Jerusalem Church sponsored the missionaries that brought the Gospel to the Gentiles.

These Gentile believers now owed a debt of gratitude to the first church in Jerusalem. What better way to say thanks, than to extend their support in a time of need. This offering would

show the genuineness of their faith, and love, and appreciation.

Paul had already collected an offering in Macedonia.

Now he uses their offering as an example to inspire the Corinthians. Verse 1, “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.” Notice, Paul doesn't call their monetary offering a *gift*, but a *grace*!

Whenever we receive the spiritual favors of God's grace, our instinctive reaction is to respond by giving.

God's grace and *our giving* go hand in hand.

Isn't it interesting how certain actions in life are reflexive. We do them without thinking... *on impulse*.

A blink... a sneeze... a wince... a shiver... these are all responses to external stimuli... involuntary actions.

As is applying the brakes when you see a police car... Or getting back to work when the boss enters the room... Or slowing to observe a traffic accident... Or seeing a group photo and looking to find yourself first...

But here Paul mentions another reflexive action, and that's *the act of giving to God*. Once you've been on the receiving end of God's undeserved love and favor, it's only natural for you to want to give back to Him.

Did you hear about the girl with the rich boyfriend. She was chit-chatting with a pal one day. Her friend asked her,

"Weren't you kind of nervous when your boyfriend started giving you all those beautiful gifts?"

The girl replied, *"No. I just kept calm and collected."*

But you can't keep collecting the blessings of God, and just stay calm. When God gives to you in such abundance, you get this involuntary twitch - it's a desire, an impulse, a compulsion - to give back to God.

This is why you don't have to badger, or hassle, or pester, or coerce a person into giving to God. Just point them to His unmerited riches - introduce that person to amazing grace - and you'll transform a stingy Ebenezer into a cheerful and generous giver to God.

Once a family attended a church who's practice was to collect the offering just before they took communion.

The dad would always give his kids a dime to put in the collection. Well, one Sunday the youngest boy, who was new to the adult service, went to receive communion. His mom gently whispered, *"Son, sit down you're not ready to take communion yet."* With a loud voice the boy protested, *"Why not, I just paid for it!"*

And sadly, this is how many Christians think it works.

They assume God's favor can be purchased. The tokens of grace are up for sale. Thus, when such a person gives an offering their trying to buy God's forgiveness or blessing. *That's a horrible attitude! If that's you, put your money back in your wallet!*

God's grace is *unwrought, unsought, un-bought!*

Here's the point, *we don't give to get - we give to show*

gratitude! Giving is our response. God has been so good to us, the least we can do is give back to Him.

This is why our giving is called **"Thanks-giving."**

And apparently the Macedonian churches - Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea - had all been grateful for God's grace. Though *times* were tough *they* were generous.

The Greek phrase in verse 2 translated, **"deep poverty"** is graphic. It meant **"rock-bottom destitution."**

The term was used for a beggar with nothing to his name, and with no hope of improving his lot.

You've heard the phrase, **"dirt poor?"** That describes the believers in Philippi and Thessalonica. They were so broke they didn't have two nickels to rub together.

Yet, even though these Macedonians had very little, they still gave generously. It just goes to show if you wait until you can *afford to give* - you'll never start!

As a matter of fact, statistics show that poor people are proportionately more generous than rich people.

I once read a study by a group called **"Independent Sector"** that showed folks making under \$25,000 a year, gave away 4.2% of their income to charity. While over \$75,000 a year wage earners gave just 2.7%.

A recent quote from the NY Times confirms this, **"For decades, surveys show that upper-income Americans are particularly undistinguished as givers when compared with the poor. Lower-income Americans give proportionally more of their incomes to charity."**

This proves a willingness to give isn't as much about *what's in the bank account*, as it is *what's in their heart*.

Our giving is more about our **faith** than **finances**.

The balance in your bank account might effect *the amount* you can give, but it should never effect *your willingness to give*, or *the regularity of your giving*.

Remember Jesus' story of the widow's mite...

What impressed our Lord wasn't the size of the woman's offering, but the amount leftover afterwards.

She didn't just tip God. *She gave all that she had*. Her giving was sacrificial and came from her heart.

This is what impressed Paul about the Macedonians. They were on food stamps no less, yet they found a way to give to God. An author paints a vivid picture of their generosity, **"In a parched existence, squalid little churches gushed forth with the joy of giving."**

Verse 3, **"For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability..."** Paul mentions the extravagance of their giving. They gave **"beyond their ability"** - in essence, *above what they could afford*.

The Macedonians were motivated not by how much they could give, but by the greatness of the need.

Obviously, faith factored into their giving. They gave, and then believed that God would take care of them.

When it came to giving, Paul says, **"they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."** The

Macedonians weren't pressured or badgered into giving. They weren't *guilted into giving*.

Paul didn't pound them with a 10-week sermon series on the joys and responsibilities of giving. In contrast, Paul says *they asked him if they could give!*

"Imploring us... that we would receive the gift."

It blesses me when somebody comes up after a service, and asks me the question, "Pastor Sandy, you guys don't pass the plate. How do I give an offering around here?" Hey, I think we're doing it right, when people have to ask us how they can give an offering!

Paul adds, "And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." The way the Macedonians gave to the Lord surpassed Paul's expectation. They didn't just give an offering to the Lord, they *first gave themselves*.

Some folks give an offering *instead* of themselves.

They try to buy God off with a few bucks. They give, to get God off their back, so He'll leave them alone. They do just enough to pacify their own conscience.

But here's the problem... *God could care less about your money until* you give Him your heart, your mind, your soul, your strength. He wants you, not money.

Yet on the flip-side how can you say you're giving all to God, if you're not willing to give a tithe - *just 10%*?

What if one day you looked on your counter and there were ten apples - nine red and one green. Along with the apples was a note from God, explaining that the apples were a gift

from Him. God gave you the apples out of the goodness of His heart - *no charge*.

The note read, “The red apples are yours to use as you please.” But the note had one stipulation. It read, “All I want back is the one green apple. It’s mine.”

Yet here’s what subsequently happened, “*The car needed new tires - the kids signed up for soccer - you wanted that vacation.*” And rather than paying for it out of your nine red apples, you kept biting into God’s one green apple. *Until this is what you gave to God...* This is what you do to God, when you refuse to give a tithe.

In Medieval times when armies were converted to Christianity many of the soldiers were baptized holding their right hand out of the water. It was a way of saying they were giving everything to the Lord - *except their sword-hand* - just in case they wanted to fight and kill.

Today, it seems people get baptized holding their wallet out of the water. They’re willing to give Jesus every area of their lives - ***except their finances!***

The Macedonians gave themselves first - and because they were sincere - their finances followed.

Verse 6, “So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.”

Since Paul wasn’t present, he appointed his sidekick, Titus, to collect the offering from the Corinthians.

“But as you abound in everything in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us - see that

you abound in this grace also." Remember, the church at Corinth prided themselves in their use of spiritual gifts. They spoke in tongues and prophecies.

But realize Paul's attitude... so what if a Christian praises God in a supernatural language, and heals the sick, and discerns spirits - *if they're greedy and stingy.*

On occasion you'll find a Christian who excuses away his responsibility to give to God financially. He'll say, "**Well, it's just not my gift.**" Paul disagrees. Giving is everyone's gift. It's our response to His grace. We're all called to open up *our hearts and our wallets...*

Realize the ramifications of verse 7... It doesn't matter if you experience supernatural power, and are used by God in mighty ways... real Christian maturity doesn't occur until you can trust God with your money.

Perhaps some of you have stopped growing in the Lord. You're stuck spiritually. In your walk with God it feels like you've stepped in wet cement. This could be the problem - *are you disobeying both the Scriptures and your conscience by not giving financially to God?*

Don't pretend. Don't walk around all high and mighty, acting spiritual if you never drop an offering in the box.

Kent Hughes writes these sobering words, "**Jesus can have our money and not have our hearts, but he cannot have our hearts without having our money.**"

Verse 8, "**I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.**" Paul's mention of the Macedonian believers as an example, was to

stir up the church at Corinth.

But there's another example to which he points...

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

Paul is saying, if you won't follow the Macedonians' example, *follow Jesus!* Our Lord became *materially poor* to make us *spiritually rich*. Now that's real giving!

Jesus was likely born in a cave. He had paupers for parents. When Joseph and Mary dedicated Jesus they gave a turtledove because they couldn't afford a lamb.

Jesus became poor so we could become rich in love.

Thus, how can we call ourselves “*His followers*” if we're not willing to give a few lousy bucks to God?

“And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have.”

It's been said, “Christianity and tennis are a lot alike: a good serve requires a good follow-through!” Good intentions aren't enough. *Could'a, would'a, should'a* - doesn't cut it in the Christian life, or in our giving.

A year earlier the Corinthians had begun collecting the offering for the Jews in Judea, but never finished.

Paul is telling them to complete what they started.

It reminds me of a pastor's son who grew up hearing lots of

theological terms, like *justification*, *sanctification*, *glorification*, *reconciliation* - all these various “ations...”

One day at school, the teacher called on the pastor's son to answer the question, "Who can define the word '*procrastination*'?" The little boy answered, "I'm not sure what it means, but I know my church believes in it!"

God wants there to be no procrastination in our giving... *don't just dream of giving, or talk about giving, or plan to give one day... do God's will today!*

Once a pastor was visiting with a farmer. He asked his friend, "If you had \$200, would give \$100 to the Lord?" The farmer answered, "*Well, of course I would.*"

The pastor also asked, "If you had two cows, would you give one cow to the Lord?" The farmer, "*Sure!*"

Finally, the pastor asked, "If you had two pigs, would you give one of the pigs to the Lord?" The farmer said, "*Pastor, that's not fair. You know I got two pigs.*"

In other words, when it comes to giving it's always easier to talk hypothetically, than to actually obey!

Paul says in verse 12, "*For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have...*" In other words, don't get hung up on *the amount* you give. What's most important is "*a willing mind*" - *the readiness to give.*

Make your giving *regular* and *sacrificial* - and God will be please with whatever amount that ends up.

He says, "*For I do not mean that others should be eased*

and you burdened; but by an equality..."

And this is the genius behind the biblical principle of a tithe. We all give a different amount, but we all give the same percentage. The word "tithe" means tenth.

This is beautiful. God wants everyone giving to support His work. He wants all believers with skin in the game. To have something on the line. To be vested.

It would create a horrible dynamic if the church were floated by a single, wealthy benefactor. Giving needs to be spread around. It should be shared by everyone.

Here, Paul doesn't expect the Corinthians to give it all. He's collecting money from many Gentile church.

Here's God's wisdom in action... *If everybody gives their share, then the giving isn't a burden on anybody.*

So here's the question... *Are you giving your share?*

Once, an ole country pastor needed to boost the church's revenues. He stood up just before the offering was collected, and announced to his congregation...

"Now before we pass the plate I just want to ask the person who stole Brother Harvey's chickens not give their offering. God doesn't want a thief's money."

Needless to say, for the first time in months everyone in the church chipped in, and gave their offering.

This is God's financial plan... *everybody chips in!*

God wants all Christians, rich and poor, to help shoulder the giving, *"that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack that*

there may be equality.

As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."

Paul proves his point by quoting Exodus 16:18.

When God rained manna on the camp, every person was given the same ration. And just as they received equally, now we should give back... an equal portion.

In verse 15 Paul is saying that sometimes I'll give more than you. And sometimes you'll give more than me. But if we all give our share then it balances out.

In the future, there might be a time when famine strikes the Corinthian peninsula, and the church in Corinth is in need. That's when it'll be the responsibility of the Jerusalem Church to give back to them...

Right now its the church in Jerusalem that's hurting.

And right now **you** might be hurting financially, needing assistance. Don't be proud or embarrassed, and refuse to ask. Every week our elders are available upfront to hear people's situations and determine if we can help... Sometimes we do. Sometimes we don't.

We want to be lead by God's Spirit... But we really like to help. And when we do, all we ask in return is when you get back on your feet, you give back to God.

The church is like a blood bank. Sometimes you're in need and you come in for a transfusion. At other times you're here to donate blood. It works both ways.

Verse 16, "But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest

care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord.” Receiving an offering was just one reason Titus came to Corinth.

He shared Paul’s concern for the divisions among them - the distortions in their worship - their carnality and compromise - just their overall spiritual health.

God had put Paul’s concerns in the Titus’ heart.

“And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches” Who this was we don’t know... perhaps Luke - maybe Timothy.

But this notable brother was picked for a vital task.

“And not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift...” It’s interesting, the churches who gave the money chose men to travel with Paul, to insure that it was delivered.

It reminds me of the old miser who’d always heard, “You can’t take your money with you.” Well, he wanted to prove that statement wrong. So just before he died he called together a doctor, a pastor, and a lawyer.

He gave each man an envelope filled with \$100,000 cash. He told them, “Now just before they close my casket I want you to toss in your envelope.” Well, when the funeral rolled around they did what the man asked.

Each of them tossed their envelope into the casket.

After the funeral they started talking. The doctor said, “I’ve got a confession to make, I’m building a medical clinic, so I

held back 25 grand. *He'll never know?"*

The pastor also had to confess, "Yea, our church has a building fund, so I took out \$50,000..." Finally the lawyer scolded them, "Men, I'm ashamed of you both. My envelope contained a check for the full amount."

Obviously, the miser's money wasn't distributed to trustworthy people. Whereas, the Macedonians entrusted their offering to men of integrity like Titus.

Verse 19, "Which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us..." Paul wanted other people part of delivering this offering. He didn't want sole responsibility for what was a sizable sum.

If something happened along the way - if the money was lost, or stolen, or it sunk in a shipwreck - Paul didn't want anyone accusing him of absconding with church funds. *Paul willingly made himself accountable.*

And this is the attitude CC has with our offerings.

Like Paul, your church has safeguards for the handling of the offering. *The money is counted by more than one person. The counters get vetted. They leave us a report that gets matched with the bank's receipt.*

The books are balanced monthly by outside eyes.

We can even monitor who's counting and how much cash gets taken in that Sunday. If there's very little cash every time the same person counts, it's a red flag.

He or she could be skimming the cash. *That's never*

happened, but if it does we want catch the scoundrel!

We just want to handle the finances in such a way that no one can blame us for spoiling **“this lavish gift...”**

That’s how we should view the offering - as **“a lavish gift.”** It’s God’s money, not ours. You’re trusting us to take your monies and use them for God and His glory.

That’s a sacred trust we take very, very seriously.

Paul writes, **“providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”**

I like what commentator Charles Hodge writes, **“It was not enough for the Apostle to do right, he recognized the importance of appearing right... We are bound to act in such a way that not only God, who sees the heart and knows all things, may approve of our conduct, but also that men may be constrained to recognize our integrity.”** This is an vital principle that spans all ministry. You can’t just say, **“I’m accountable to God, but I don’t really care what people think.”**

You do need to care what people think! In Christian ministry we’re not only responsible for our motivation, but also for how we come across - *our appearance*.

I can be sitting at the bar in Longhorns, eating a steak, watching the game on television. *Getting drunk could be the farthest thing from my mind...* Or me and the church secretary could be innocently driving by ourselves to the Office Depot to pick up supplies. *There’s nothing more to it than she needed some help.*

In both situations I’m totally innocent, but God cares not only

about *intentions*, but also *appearances*.

So what if I didn't intend to do something sinful, yet I gave the appearance. The damage is still done.

This 1 Thessalonians 5:22 tells us, “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” Someone who represents Jesus should avoid any appearance of impropriety.

I read an interesting comment about Paul, “The same Paul who could write like a poet, and think like a theologian, could also act with the meticulous scrutiny of an accountant. Paul was a big enough man to do the little things and the practical things supremely well.”

It's true, especially in Christian ministry. A man may be remember for the one or two big victories he won in his life, but it was his faithfulness in the little things and the daily duties that set him up for his public triumphs.

This was the case with the Apostle Paul.

“And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you.” Bible commentators have titled verses 16-24 as **The Tale Of Three Brothers** - the soul brother, the famous brother, and the diligent brother.

Paul's **soul brother** was Titus. As Paul said in verse 16 Titus shared his care for the church. It's a blessing to minister with a person who shares your heart.

Paul's **famous brother** is mentioned in verse 18. He was renown in all the churches. He was the choice to deliver the offering. He was known for his honesty. *We no longer know*

his name, but he is still an example...

And lastly, verse 22 we have Paul's **diligent brother**. Again, we don't have this man's identity, but we know what he was. He was "**diligent in many things**" - *detail oriented, no doubt*. He was *a brother on the ball!* This is why he was picked to help handle the offering.

And if you put all three of these brothers together you have the perfect picture of an assistant pastor.

Here's a guy you want to serve the Lord beside.

He shares the pastor's heart for God and for the people... He's thought of highly by the congregation, *he's famous in the family...* And he's **diligent in many things**. He's someone you can trust with the details...

Come to think of it, I know somebody just like that. I'm blessed to have an assistant like Pastor James.

And then verse 23, "**If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you.**"

Paul and Titus were "**partners**" - the word means "**partakers**." They'd tasted the same blessings, fought the same battles, rode out the same storms, knew the same Lord... You can't imagine the depth of their bond.

I know there's a real camaraderie among men who serve together in the military. But I don't think anything fuses lives together more than serving God together.

You get close when you're a "**fellow worker**" for the Kings of kings. If you're lonely and long for community with other people - sign on and start serving the Lord. You'll be surprised how many friends you'll make.

Chapter 8 closes, “Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore show to them, and before the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.” Here Paul refers to his three brothers by the title, “*messengers (or apostles) of the churches.*”

He gives them an esteemed title. They’re *apostles*. They were official emissaries of the Gentile churches.

And Paul instructs everyone to treat them that way. They were on an important mission. The offering they were collecting from church to church was significant.

Remember, the motive behind this offering wasn’t just to feed a few Jewish stomachs in Jerusalem. It had a higher, more strategic, more spiritual purpose.

This offering was a demonstration of the power of the Gospel. It was proof God could change the hearts of men - He could overcome racial divides and social hostilities. *He could put love for a Jew in the heart of a Gentile.* That Greeks were willing to share with Jews.

And in the first century that was a bigger breach than any of the divisions we have in our world today.

Once, the Red Cross was busy gathering medical supplies for Africans suffering from a natural disaster.

In a donated box they found several sheets that had been worn by KKK members... *along with a note...*

Someone had written, “*We’ve recently been saved by Jesus and because of our conversion we desire to help. We won’t*

ever need these robes again. Can you use them?" The sheets were cut into ribbons and used as gauze to treat the wounds of injured Africans.

Symbols of hatred were transformed into bandages of love - *this is the power of the Gospel*. That people who were former enemies - alienated by pride and prejudice - can see each other as brothers and sisters, and reach out to relieve the other person's hurt.

Remember, the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Corinth who gave this offering had never met members of the Jerusalem church, yet due to *a spiritual bond* they were willing to share *their hard earned money*.

And this is what happens each week at CC, when you put your offering in those boxes - your money goes to needs both at home and in far-away places.

In our giving we are demonstrating *our changed hearts, our love for God, and the power of the Gospel!*