
**"Missions and Money - Generosity"
(2 Corinthians 8:1-15)
Pastor Peter Yi
February 25, 2018**

(2 Corinthians 8:1-15)

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—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."

This month we've been looking at the subject of money, especially as it relates to missions. In week one we looked at the dangers of greed and how greed will not only hinder missions from happening, but it will also endanger our souls. In the second message we looked at the idea of stewardship, and how each of us has been given resources, in particular, financial resources that we are to invest for God's kingdom purposes. Today we are looking at the subject of generosity.

I want to suggest to you that the key to generosity is the gospel. So, let's begin.

2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 is probably the go to passage to look at the idea of generosity and giving. Paul goes to great length to talk about this subject. Let's start with the practical, the 'how-tos' of giving and then let's look at the heart of giving.

We are to give sacrificially. (3a)

³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

Paul is holding up to the Corinthian Christians the example of the Macedonian Christians. He tells us they were incredibly sacrificial givers. Despite being extremely poor they were rich in generosity. Paul tells us what sacrificial giving looks like.

First, they gave as much as they were able. What does that mean? I think it means this. Everyone has an income and we all have to learn how to live on that income. We have to pay our taxes, pay the bills, and feed and clothe the family. And so we look at our finances, our income vs our expenses, and we say, we are able to give this much. The dollar amount is going to look differently for everyone.

Now, what if you look at your finances and it appears that you are unable to give. Then you have to look at it again and begin to trim the non-essentials. Now emotionally, we say we can't do this, but we know this is not true. If our car insurance rates go up, or property taxes go up, or even if our income goes down, we make these kinds of adjustments all the time. Let me say this. You cannot know if you are giving sacrificially unless you first do a personal or family budget. You might think you're giving sacrificially because you tithe (and yes, Christians are required to tithe, give a tenth of their gross earnings to God), but unless you know your budget, you can't really know if you are giving sacrificially or not. So, that's the first step. We are to give as much as we are able, but that's not all, we're not yet at the point of sacrificial giving.

The next statement says, "and even beyond their ability." The first part was looking at my numbers, and you say, after tithe and bills and savings, I have this amount available and then some more. I believe that this is where faith comes in. I think this is where we sit down and do round 2 with our budget and say, let's eat out less often. Let's cut out cable TV. Junior doesn't have to be signed up for 17 programs. I think we can cut it down to 16. I think I can stop buying coffee and instead make it at home. For example our family was looking at our budget and we said, "We can get by with not buying any clothing for one year." I think most of us, if not all of us could look at our clothing budget and say, for 2018 I'm going to give that to God. What is it for you? What does it mean for you to begin giving sacrificially?

We are to give willingly. (3b;12)

^{3b} "Entirely on their own,"

¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

The giving wasn't compulsory. It wasn't forced or demanded. When we sense that kind of motivation, we are more inclined to withdraw rather than reach out. For all our acts of obedience to God, they must come from a willing heart, not because of the fear or reprisals or punishment. Nor should we give thinking that it'll result in some sort of special blessing from God, so that the only reason you give, is ultimately selfish, to use God, or to get God indebted to you, as if that were even possible. So it is important for us to check ourselves and see if we are giving because we have to give, or because we are willing to give. Ask God to change your heart to be a more willing giver.

We are to give enthusiastically (4)

⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.

This is an insane church. It's a church that says, "Don't you dare keep us from having the privilege of giving." "Don't you dare rob us of that opportunity!"

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (**2 Corinthians 9:7**)

Several years ago while on vacation I visited a church and like most churches you go to, there's the opening praise and the prayer and the announcements and the sermon and the offering. In this church the offering came before, rather than after the sermon, which might be good, so that one's giving isn't based on how blessed one is by the sermon. In any case the presider came up on stage and enthusiastically said, "Okay church, it's time for the offering!" to which the people responded with cheering and applause. I couldn't believe it. I had never ever seen anything like it. They were taking very literally, God loves a cheerful giver.

Friends, is it important how you give, that is, with what attitude you give? Yes it is. When we are at home and we pull out the cheque book or wallet and get ready to insert that money in our offering envelope, we should pray, every time, and say, "Lord, I love giving this money to you. I'm not doing this just because you commanded it, though you did. I'm doing this because I love you. There is nothing I'd rather do with this money than to give it to you and your church." Or, if you don't feel so happy about giving, then you should pray, "Lord, would you help me? I know you want me to be a cheerful giver, but I've debts up to my eyeballs. I'm barely making ends meat. Would you help me still to give with joy?"

Their giving was an overflow of their giving of themselves to the Lord. (5)

⁵ And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

What was this giving of themselves to God? One commentator says that the Macedonian Christians used this opportunity to rededicate their lives and their commitment to God and his work, that is his mission. They didn't know about the great need, but when they found out, they used it as an opportunity to give themselves again to God and to commit to his work.

I remember hearing the story of a missionary. He was a Korean-American man with a family and they were missionaries in Japan. And they decided to take this policy for giving. If someone asks, we will give. And he made it public at a conference, which is probably now on YouTube! Now that is a very dangerous thing to do. Can you imagine what mail time must look like every day at his home? Or what things go into his mind every time he opens his inbox? But seen another way, every time he receives one of those support letters, it's an opportunity to rededicate himself to God, and to his work, to trust in him, to walk by faith, to believe that God will help him not only to give as he's able, but even beyond his ability.

Giving is a discipline we must grow in.

⁷ But 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.

Look at the Paul lists that the Corinthians are doing really well in. He says you excel in everything. In faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness (that is zeal and exertion), and in love. These Christians were growing great in all these aspects of Christian life. Paul exhorts them to also excel in this grace of giving. Giving is a huge aspect of our spiritual development and it takes time and effort to grow in it.

When I was a boy, my mother forced me to do two things regarding money. She forced me to always give my first paycheque to the church and then she forced me to tithe. And yes, she forced me. As a poor highschool kid making \$5-6 per hour, that really hurt, but what that instilled in me was the spiritual discipline of tithing.

Parents, it's on you to teach and train your children to give, so they can grow in that discipline.

When our kids were younger, we started giving them an allowance of \$20 a month. And that allowance was for doing chores around the house, like vacuuming, brushing the dogs, cutting the grass, doing the dishes and so on. From that \$20 we instructed them to give a dollar every week for offering.

How about for you as an adult. Are you growing in giving? Are you exceling in giving? We set out to pray more, we set out to read our bibles. We make a decision to join a life group. We do all sorts of things to commit to grow as Christians. We should do as well with the spiritual discipline of giving.

Give proportionately

¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

For Christians that means starting with the tithe. A tithe is ten percent of your gross earnings. Go home, look at your budget and before you list all of your expenses, put at the top of your list, your tithe. Sadly, many give out of what's left over. That's not the right way. That's not a God honoring way. We must give God the firstfruits of our earnings and then live off the rest. After you have listed your tithe on your budget, then look at the rest of your expenses.

What if you're a poor student with no income? I have met so many no income college students wearing Canada Goose jackets. It's a miracle! If you're wearing a Canada Goose jacket, you are not poor, and you surely have an income, or wealthy parents. All joking aside, for students, I say, do not tithe your OSAP. That is not your money, it is a loan from the government. However, at the same time you shouldn't come to the house of the Lord empty handed. If you haven't given an offering to the church for 4-5 years of the most formative years of your life, it'll be very difficult to start tithing once you start earning a salary.

To meet a genuine need

¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.

The sacrificial giving of God's people is to meet genuine needs. Our church is filled with incredibly generous people. It's really amazing. When a need arises and it's made known, with love and compassion and sacrifice people step up to the plate to give. They open up their homes for a person who needs a place to stay. They cook food for a sick family. They babysit for families going through suffering. They give away possessions, no strings attached to those in need. They are willing to give their hard earned dollars to those who are going through a rough time.

Last November as our church celebrated our 40th anniversary, one of our founding members, an older woman was sharing what the spirit of the church was back then in the late 70s, early 80s. Back then she said, very few families owned a home. They all rented, mostly in the less desirable neighbourhoods in our city. But they loved each other and they loved the Lord. But what grabbed my attention was this thing she said. It's not right that we own a house before we purchase a church building. Commitment to the Lord, sacrifice, and a need all merging together in order to meet a genuine need.

Last week we adopted Bihar India as our new missions focus. Part of that focus is to send a missionary family to that part of the world. As well, we are committed to sending a missionary family to Kyrgyzstan. To send those two families in the next 2-3 years means a minimum of \$25,000 per family per year. That's a real need.

There are so many real needs. Most, if not all of our local missionary partners are under-funded. At the bare minimum they need around \$2500 a month to live and to work full time reaching the city and reaching the campus. We all know that Toronto is a very expensive place to live. If twenty people committed to \$20-50 a month that'll contribute 400-1000 to their income so they can reach some of the most fertile and needy mission fields in our city.

Okay, let's recap:

- We are to give Sacrificially
- We do it Willingly
- And Enthusiastically, cheerfully
- As an overflow of their dedication to the Lord
- As a discipline to grow in.
- We give proportionately
- And we give to meet a genuine need
- Now that's a lot of stuff

But, it gives us a more complete picture of Christian generosity.

How do we do that? **The Secret is the Gospel**

What was it about the Macedonian churches and Christians that made them a model for Paul to use to challenge the Christians at Corinth? Two things he tells us in verse 2. First he says that the Macedonian Christians were going through an extreme trial. This trial could easily have been some kind of persecution. We read in Acts 17 that Paul had to leave Thessalonica because of persecution. And when he went down to Berea, the persecution followed him there as well. However, even in the midst of this severe trial, they were filled with overflowing joy. Now, where have we heard that idea before? James 1:1. That's how James begins his letter.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,
(**James 1:2**)

Here's the second thing that Paul mentions about the Macedonian Christians. Their extreme poverty welled up or abounded in rich generosity. Now if ever there were two ideas that should not be married together it is these two. For us too, doesn't it seem ridiculous to pair these two ideas together? "Extreme poverty and rich generosity, I now pronounce you husband and wife." Do you see the picture he's trying to paint?

From the first description he's following the pattern of all the saints of the bible, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, that our suffering does not eliminate our joy. Just because we are suffering, doesn't mean we can't experience a rich and deep joy, because joy is never circumstantial. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, that's planted within Christians and overflows as we walk with Christ. So, even though we are going through terrible suffering, we can be joyful, because Christ is in us.

In the second point, Paul says that our poverty does not eliminate our generosity. Now let's spend a little more time here. Sure, we learned and we now know that greed will keep us from being generous. But this passage has nothing to do with greed. It's talking about an other-worldly generosity. Think about it, what might be the two biggest legitimate reasons for not being generous? Suffering and poverty. I can't think of any other two reasons that are stronger than these two. If you are going through suffering, we wouldn't expect you to be filled with joy. No one would say, "Hey I'm sorry about the suffering you're going through, but can you still give?" That'd be heartless. But it wasn't like that at all. It was the suffering Macedonian Christians who were themselves eager and enthusiastic to give.

At the same time, if you are experiencing severe poverty, we wouldn't expect you to be richly generous. If you just lost your job, or had a financial setback, or just never made that much money, no one would fault you for not giving. What this passage teaches us is that a person's wealth has nothing to do with their generosity.

What made the Macedonian believers live this way? It's one word: Grace. Look with me to verse 1 and 9:

¹ And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

⁹ 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.

It was grace that made the Macedonians give in a completely other-worldly way. Grace is most magnificently seen in Jesus Christ. He was the Lord, the creator, the king of heaven and earth. He was the richest of all. Everything, absolutely everything belonged to him. Yet he became poor—poor physically, and he became poor in spirit. Why did he do that? Three words. "For Your Sake." For the sake of rebels, for the sake of sinners, for the sake of his enemies, for the sake of the greedy, for the sake of the selfish, for the sake of the covetous. For your sake and for my sake—in order to save people like us. The only way we can be other-worldly generous is through grace. First by understanding what Jesus did for us, and then by being so captured by that grace, by Christ's generosity to you, only then will we be generous.

Let's pray.