

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL
LETTERS TO GOD’S PEOPLE
THE GOD WHO CHANGES US
Once Greedy – Now Generous

In order to point our hearts in the right direction from the beginning of this lesson, let’s read the last verse of our focal passage first!

Read 2 Corinthians 9:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

No matter the translation, the praise is the same! Whether it’s: *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!* OR *Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!* OR *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!* OR as the Bible in Basic English puts it: *Praise be to God for what he has given, which words have no power to say.* Regardless of how much we give to others, we can never out give God. No one can approach the gift that God gave. We are saved from eternal death into everlasting life because our God believed in giving so much that He gave His only Son to die in our place!

This lesson examines a portion of the second letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning greediness vs. a generous heart. It contrasts the differences among ‘church givers’. Some are greedy – while others are generous. However, this is not a lesson about money and how much we should give. It is instead a reminder to examine the intents of our hearts as we give. If you are not ready to give completely from a sincere heart, try giving a little out of a desire to be obedient and see what He does – with your gift and your heart. The one who gives out of a genuine love for God will be blessed.

God calls us to be generous as He has been generous.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (ESV) ¹ *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia,* ² *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.* ³ *For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,* ⁴ *begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—* ⁵ *and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*

Macedonia is located on the Balkan Peninsula and Christianity is still practiced there today by most of the ethnic Macedonians. The Macedonians came to know Jesus when Paul responded to a vision. We read in ***Acts 16:9 (ESV)*** ⁹ *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”*

During his third missionary journey, Paul collected money for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem from the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea). The Macedonians were willing to give even though they were experiencing great affliction. Their giving was filled with joy. They gave despite their economic status. They went beyond their ability to give. They begged to be a part of the ministry. And, they gave themselves before they gave their money.

This can only be described as **grace giving**. Grace is undeserved acceptance and love received from another, especially the characteristic attitude of God in providing salvation for sinners. For the purpose of sharing Christ, the Macedonians showed God's grace through their financial gifts. The Corinthians had not yet learned the grace of giving as the Macedonians had.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:6-9 (ESV) ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 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 by his poverty might become rich.

Grace giving is spiritual. Paul recognized that the Corinthians valued faith, speech, knowledge and earnestness. In fact, they had previously told Titus they would participate in giving. They made a promise but fulfilling that promise was another matter. Willingness can never be a substitute for doing. The Corinthians were known for their interest in the gifts of the Spirit but their interest in grace giving was limited. The Macedonian churches had an "abundance of deep poverty" and yet they were rich in their giving. The Corinthians had an abundance of spiritual gifts, yet they were lax in keeping their promise and sharing in giving. The contrast between the giving of the Macedonians and the Corinthians brings to mind a parable of Jesus.

Read Matthew 21:28-31 (ESV) ²⁸ "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

This is a reminder that Jesus does not count what people say with our lips as obedience. It is what we **do** that matters. When believers think of grace – we naturally think of the wonderful grace of Jesus. The song says, "wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin." When we contemplate the scope of our transgressions and the forgiveness and love of Christ, a natural result of that contemplation should be a heartfelt desire to give. The Corinthians began with the grace of giving. They were the first to respond to the call for the need in the Jerusalem church but somehow during the year, they forget the grace of giving and did not excel in it.

God gives us wealth that we might share it with others.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:10-15 (ESV) ¹⁰ *And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.* ¹¹ *So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.* ¹² *For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.* ¹³ *For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness* ¹⁴ *your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.* ¹⁵ *As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."*

Wondering about guidelines for giving? Here they are: (1) follow through on previous promises; (2) give as much as you are able; (3) make up your own mind about how much to give and (4) give in proportion to what God has given you. God gives to us so that we can give to others – a gift is not a gift until we give it away.

Sacrificial giving must be responsible. Paul wanted believers to give generously, but not to the extent that their families went without having their basic needs met. Some say we should give until it hurts. That is not biblical. This is biblical giving: **Luke 6:38 (ESV)** ³⁸ *give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*” When we limit what we give, we limit the ways for God to bless us. (**Malachi 3:10**)

By the way, some like to convince themselves that since they ‘give’ time to the Lord, they do not need to give money on top of that! Giving our time is important but it should never replace our financial giving. As far as I know, the Bible does not address ‘tithing our time.’ However, the Bible does say this concerning our time: **Ephesians 5:15-16 (ESV)** ¹⁵ *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,* ¹⁶ *making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* Always remember that God wants 100% of us not just 10 or 20%! Giving 100% of ourselves to God does not necessarily mean participating in every church activity. Although we are commanded to not give up meeting together. (**Heb. 10:25**)

Paul’s message regarding giving relates how we are to give through the local church to support the kingdom of God. Giving to other ‘good causes’ should not replace our gifts to the local church. We are to give for the same reason that God gave His only Son – that the world might be saved! If our gift opens a door for someone to know Christ in a personal way, it will be a gift that money cannot buy. Practically speaking, our church doors cannot remain open if we do not have enough money to keep the lights on.

Verse 15 is a reference to the gathering of the manna in the wilderness. Each was to gather enough for one day. Some man might go out with several baskets and say, "Let's just fill them up. I'll gather bushel baskets of manna while I can." He would go out and greedily gather up much more than he needed. What would happen? After he had eaten what he needed for that day, he would find that all the rest had spoiled by the next morning. It was God's plan that each one should have just enough and no more.

God calls us to give cheerfully out of gratitude.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (ESV) ⁶ *The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* ⁷ *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

If you want a lot of tomatoes in the summer, you set out more than one tomato plant. Or, you might be like me – depending on ‘friends with gardens’! Once again, we see that it is up to each individual as to how much we give. We are not to give just because everyone else is giving and we are afraid of what they will think of us. However, we might take into consideration what God’s thinks of us.

The word translated "cheerful" is the Greek *hilaros*, and means pretty much the same—cheerful, joyous. But it also has a sense of readiness. It means to be ready to act at a moment's notice, to be prepared. Our spontaneous giving just might be the answer to someone’s prayer. **James 1:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

Read 2 Corinthians 9:8-9 (ESV) 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.* ⁹ *As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”*

Our greatest motivation to give should come from a heart that desires to be involved in what God is doing. There is joy in ministry. We personally experience the blessings of God’s grace when we share in grace giving to others. Paul in verse 9 was quoting **Psalm 112:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.*

Read 2 Corinthians 9:10-11 (ESV) ¹⁰ *He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.* ¹¹ *You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.*

When we give – whatever we give – let’s never forget that it is God who provides for our needs and the needs of others. **Philippians 4:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

Read 2 Corinthians 9:12-15 (ESV) ¹² *For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God...* ¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

Giving is a grace. We are not commanded to give a tithe. It is not to be something done under the law. God asks us to give as a grace according to our circumstances. Some Christians should be giving much more than a tithe. In certain circumstances, other Christians may not be able to give anything. I know that when our church member, Ruble Bailey, went to the nursing home it bothered her that she was no longer able to give to the Lord’s work. God gave His Son so that we might be ushered through heaven’s gate. *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*