

Turn to 2 Corinthians 8 in your Bible. As you do that, let me tell you a story I heard of a mom who took her son to McDonald's and ordered him some fries. You know how good McDonald's fries smell. The mom sat down and watched her son eat them, and then she reached over and grabbed one. Her son slapped her hand and said, "Mom, you can't have one. Those aren't your fries." At that point, the mother had several thoughts go through her mind. She realized her son forgot who the source of his fries was. She thought, "I'm the one who brought him to McDonald's. I paid for the fries. Without me, he'd have no fries!" She also knew her son forgot she could take them away from him at any time and say, "No more fries for you!"

On the other hand, if she wanted to, she could buy him a truckload of fries as she had the means to do that. Finally, she realized she didn't even need his fries. She could just go and buy her own fries. And then she realized she didn't really care about any of that. What she wanted was for her son to learn to be unselfish, to learn to the joy of sharing not only his fries but everything he had.

I wonder if it's the same way with God. He doesn't need us to give him anything. But what he wants is for us to know the joy and freedom of sharing. Did you know giving is the most talked-about value in the entire Bible? I'm told the word faith is used 246 times in the Bible. The word hope is used 185 times in the Bible. The word love, which is considered the greatest virtue of all, is used 733 times. But do you know how many times the verb to give is used in the Bible? It is used 2,285 times!

Perhaps the Bible talks more about giving than faith, hope, or love because giving is the ultimate expression of faith, hope, and love. Giving is also a characteristic of healthy people. Karl Menninger, a distinguished psychiatrist, said "Giving is a very good criterion, in a way, of a person's mental health. Generous people are rarely mentally ill people."

CPC has a wonderful history of giving. But in the interest of the mental health of all of you and in the interest of reminding us again of what God considers so important, I want to give you the biblical motives for giving. Some of you tease me for my three-point sermons. Well, today, you're getting a six-point sermon!

In 2 Corinthians 8, the Apostle Paul is trying to motivate the Corinthian church to give to a project he cared a great deal about. Christians in Jerusalem were going through a hard time; many were on the brink of starvation. It was Paul's desire to go to places like Corinth and take up a collection for these hurting people. Corinth was much like the Bay Area—known for its wealth. A year earlier, the Corinthians had given to this fund through Paul's co-worker, Titus. They also told Titus they intended to give more. Here, Paul tells them he's sending Titus back to them and asks them to follow through on their commitment to give.

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 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. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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. And 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. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At 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, as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little." 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Give Because it is an Expression of God's Grace

Notice Paul tries to motivate the Corinthians to give by pointing out how others gave. Paul refers to their generosity as "*the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.*" The Macedonian churches were in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. These churches were an example of what I'd call the grace of giving. Giving is an expression of God's grace.

In fact, the word grace is all over this passage! In verse 4, he says they begged for "*the privilege (grace) of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.*" In verse 6, Paul calls giving "*an act of grace.*" In verse 7, he speaks

of *"the grace of giving."* To cap it all off, in verse 9, Paul directs our attention to *"the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

This message isn't about how much we ought to give; it's about what God has given to us in his lavish grace. We give because it's an expression of the grace of God. Grace refers to all God has given to us through Christ. We don't give so we can score points with God or buy our way into heaven. When we're focused on all God has given to us, then giving to others is the most natural thing in the world to do. Have you ever noticed how thankful people are giving people, while bitter people tend to be stingy? That's because full hearts want to give.

A few years ago, Harvard University received the largest cash gift it ever received—13 million dollars! The donors were Gustave and Rita Hauser. Do you know what inspired their generosity? It was gratitude. Thirty years earlier, they were students at Harvard. The day after their final exams, they got married. When they gave the gift, they simply said, "We're giving this gift because it was the school which brought us together." That's giving out of a grateful heart. It's the same with us. By sending his Son, God brought us together—with himself! That is the grace of God. When our hearts are full of his grace, giving is natural.

Notice how grace causes us to give joyfully, even amidst difficult circumstances. Paul says of the Macedonians, *"In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity"* (v. 2). These people weren't well-off. They'd been persecuted; they were impoverished. The word used here for extreme is the word *bathos*. Bathymetric is the measurement of the bottom of the ocean. The idea is the Macedonians were at the bottom. They were dirt poor. Yet, they had "overflowing joy" because they were recipients of God's grace. And this grace overflowed in "rich generosity."

This joyful, rich generosity reminds me of a trip I made to Rwanda. As I was sitting in church, it came time for the offering. But it was different from any offering I ever saw. One by one, the people literally danced and sang with joy all the way down the aisle to present their offering to God in worship! Like the Macedonians, they gave joyfully, not out of their wealth but their poverty.

We can't wait until everything is just right to give. We don't wait to give until we're out of school, or the kids are out of college, or mortgage is paid, or the promotion is received. If anyone could have put giving off, it was the Macedonians. They might have said, "Listen, you don't know our situation here. If we give now, we might starve to death ourselves." But they'd been touched by the grace of God, and when his grace touches us, we give with joy, even in the midst of adversity.

Notice because grace was at the root of the Macedonian's giving, no one had to pressure them. In fact, they begged for the privilege to give! Paul says, *"Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege (grace) of sharing (giving) in this service to the Lord's people."* (vv. 3b-4). Usually, it's the preacher doing the begging! But they begged him! They saw giving as a God-given grace they couldn't miss out on. That's why Paul said later, *"I'm not commanding you."* That's because when the heart is right, no pressure is necessary.

Don't let anyone pressure you to give. Yes, there's pressure the Holy Spirit might give, but let it be the Spirit. Give because you want to. Give because you can't imagine being robbed of that privilege. Give with a smile on your face rather than a moan in your gut. Have you ever received a gift reluctantly because the giver felt obligated to give? How'd that feel? Why would God feel any different?

Give because You're Eager to Serve the Lord's People

The second motive for giving is found in verse 4. Paul continues to hold the Macedonian churches up as an example. He says they were all about *"sharing in this service to the Lord's people."* Here we see that we're motivated to give because we're eager to serve the Lord's people. They were begging for the privilege of supporting fellow believers in Jerusalem. They saw giving as a way to serve or minister to Jerusalem believers. They didn't give out of obligation; they gave because their hearts were stirred by the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The word translated sharing is *koinonia*. It means fellowship, having a deep connection. When Christ-followers share their resources to build up needy brothers and sisters in Christ, this both expresses and builds *koinonia*. And our *koinonia* is with believers all over the world. As a church pastor, it's easy for me to use a passage like this to stir you up to give to CPC. But this passage challenges us to care as much about believers in other churches who are far more needy than us. In an affluent area like ours, we should constantly be looking for opportunities to share what we have with dear brothers and sisters around the world, who don't always know where their next meal will come from.

One of the things I'm most grateful for is how CPC has a tradition of taking a Christmas offering and given 100 percent of it away. In fact, we've given almost a million dollars in the last 12 years. We've helped build a fistula hospital in Niger, an orphanage in Honduras, and a playground for Greece refugees. We bought a home in Thailand for victims of sex trafficking, and we've planted Moringa Trees in Cameroon, which have all kinds of health benefits. That's the kind of giving Paul is talking about.

Give Because All That You Have Belongs to Him

The third motive for giving is you see all you have as belonging to God. Look at verse 5. He says of the Macedonians, *"They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us."* In Greek, the word themselves is first for emphasis. It's like, "Themselves they gave first to the Lord!" Paul was delighted by that. He knew if God has a person's heart, he'll have their possessions as well. We don't start with the needs around us; we start with God. We give ourselves to him. We offer all we are and all we have to him. We know we don't have the right to live life for ourselves.

I remember being a new Christian and walking into Peninsula Bible Church for the first time. It wasn't a very impressive building. But as you entered, your eyes were immediately drawn to the words engraved across the back wall: *"You are not your own, you are bought with a price"* (1 Cor. 6:19b-20a). Those words are foundational to a life of giving. I'm not my own. I don't have the right to decide what to give my time to. I don't

have the right to choose my career path. I don't have the right to eat all the fries I want. You see, it's not my time; it's his. It's not my career; it's his. It's not my money; it's his. You've heard the cliché: "The issue is not how much of my money I'm going to give to God; it's how much of his money I'm going to keep for myself." It's true. We're not owners; we're managers. Yes, we make decisions; he gives us that freedom, but we're to manage these things, knowing it came from him and it belongs to him.

Give Because it Proves Your Love

The fourth motive is giving proves your love. Look at verse 8, *"I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others."* Giving proves the sincerity of our love for God and others. Let me ask: How do you know God loves you? How did God prove his love for you? *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..."* (John 3:16).

Today is Valentine's Day. There are a lot of opinions out there about Valentine's Day. But I like it. I like it because it's an opportunity to show love and give something to the woman I love. Have you ever noticed how hard it is to keep any money in your pocket when you're in love with someone? Love is never cheap; it's always a little bit extravagant. It spends too much. You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving.

And the preeminent example of this love is Jesus. In verse 9, he says, *"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."* Jesus was rich in heaven. Philippians says before he came to earth, *"he existed in the form of God."* That means he was God. But Jesus became poor for us. Philippians goes on and says Jesus,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Phil. 2:6b-8

What was his purpose in doing this? His purpose was to make us rich. If you know Christ today, do you know you're rich?

Paul says this about Jesus because he wants us to love like Jesus. We can never give to others what Jesus gave to us, but we can grow to be more like Jesus. As we do that, we'll be more and more willing to give sacrificially as he did. In fact, we can test our maturity and our Christlikeness by our giving. You can know the Bible from cover to cover, you can pray for hours on end, you can preach with the best, you can lead your neighbors to Christ, you can avoid sinful lusts, but if you're not lovingly generous, you're not a mature believer. Maturity means being like Jesus, and being like Jesus means being a lover and a giver.

Give Because God has Given You the Ability

The fifth motive is found in verses 10-12. In verse 10, he reminds them they made a previous commitment to give. And then he says in verses 11-12,

Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

The previous year, the Corinthians said they wanted to give more, but Paul said to follow through insofar as you have the means. We can only give if God has given us the ability to give. God only holds us accountable for what we have, not what we don't have. We should give because God has given us the ability to give.

This whole issue of our ability to give is a sticky one. It's important to realize Paul was dealing with the basic necessities of life here. In his mind, if you had more than you needed for food, clothing, and shelter, then you could give. Today, we don't tend to measure things that way. We all have different definitions of "enough." What does that mean for the roof over my head, the clothes I wear, the cars I drive, and the vacations I take? Those are personal decisions. But, most of us really do have the ability to give more than we think. We have to begin to see whatever surplus we have above the basic necessities of life is fair game for giving away.

This brings up the whole issue of how much we should give. In the Old Testament, this was legislated for the Jews as they were obligated to give a tithe or a tenth of all they had. Many Christians see ten percent as a hard and fast rule for giving, but the New Testament never tells us that. It simply tells us to give freely from what we've been given. And grace will always motivate us to dig deeply. The amount isn't the issue; the level of sacrifice is. For some, ten percent is a deep sacrifice, but for others, it's not enough because it has little impact on their lives. The rule is to give freely and sacrificially from what we've been given.

Give Because God Cares About Equality

This is directly tied to the sixth motive: Give because God cares about equality. Paul goes on, and in verse 14, he tells us how we should view our surplus, *"At 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."* That word equality means fairness or balance. Paul says if we have a surplus, and our brother is starving, doesn't it make sense to use our surplus to feed him? After all, someday the tables may be turned, and we will need their help. He even quotes from Exodus 16:18. The Israelites in the wilderness were only to gather enough manna for one day; everyone had the same amount. This was a matter of survival. Paul isn't saying everyone ought to have exactly the same resources, but there should be equality when it comes to the basic needs for survival. The question is, do we view our surplus as the opportunity to buy more stuff? Or do we view it as God's provision to meet real needs?

We live in a very expensive area, but wouldn't you agree that the assumptions we make about what is normal are just a bit off from the rest of the world? We all have our weaknesses when it comes to accumulating stuff. Mine is books. I love books. I keep Amazon in business. For you, it might be clothes, shoes, golf clubs, or the latest tech gadget. It's never-ending, isn't it? And it's hard when it seems like everyone else has

the latest stuff, and we're being left behind. The only antidote to that is to give. Our society says, "Buy! You NEED this to be relevant!" God says, "I'll tell you what's relevant—give!" Every time we give, we break the grip of materialism. We protest against the myth that my life consists in what I accumulate. We affirm our net worth isn't our self-worth.

So there you have it—six motives for giving. It's hard for me to come on too strong in this message because, as I said before, CPC has a great history of giving. But wherever you're at in this grace of giving, I want to encourage you to take just one more step.

For some of you, the next step is to become a first-time giver. An old Chinese proverb says, "The longest journey begins with the first step." If you've never given a significant gift to God's work, start today. For others, your next step is to become a regular giver. Commit to giving not when your heart is tugged by some emotional need but as regularly as you get paid. Make it a habit. For still others, the next step is to become a proportionate giver, committing a percentage of your income to God. If you've never done this before, you might want to just start at five percent. For others, ten percent is a good place to start.

Finally, for some of you, the next step is to become an extravagant giver. For you, ten percent is like riding a bike with training wheels. It's time to take those training wheels off and fly. I had a conversation this week with a guy who has an opportunity to make an immense amount of money in the next three years. He doesn't need the money, so he told me he's decided to give 100 percent of it away. That's extravagant giving, and that's the kind of giving that matches the extravagant grace of our God!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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