

## “Generosity: The Overflow of Grace”

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

August 1, 2021

### Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 9

Money (and any discussion about money) is ultimately about God, who He is, what He does, and what place He occupies in our affections. For example, God is our Creator, our Provider and Sustainer who promises to meet our needs as we trust in Him. As the Creator He is never limited by earthly resources. His values inform what our values should be and how we should steward what God has entrusted to us for our needs and His purposes. Therefore, how we view and handle money is a window into our soul, and an indicator as to what we truly believe about God.

- If you view God as a ‘taker’ (infringing on your hard-earned money) then your perspective of giving will be focused on money (what you think is being taken) and you will ‘give’ grudgingly.
- If you view God as a ‘giver’ (the great Provider of all your needs) then your perspective on giving will focus on grace and your giving will be an act of faith.

Our focus will either be on what we give or on what God provides. So, in a very real sense we can say that generosity has little to do with money and everything to do with faith in God’s ever-sufficient grace. The focus of 2 Corinthians 9 is *God’s grace which overflows our lives in generosity*.

***We can give joyfully because God magnifies His grace and His glory through the generosity of His people as they trust in the provision of His sufficient grace.***

You’ll recall that 2 Cor 8-9 is about Paul taking up a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem and how the funds should be collected. But when we read what Paul says here carefully, we will quickly discover that the main focus is not money but God’s grace.

In essence, Paul lays out *a theology of grace-empowered generosity*. Let’s unpack Paul’s theology of generosity through 5 aspects of grace-giving:

### 1. The Proper Spirit of Giving (1-5)

Let me summarize the main point of vs. 1-5. The Corinthians had earlier expressed their desire and commitment to contribute to this relief ministry. In fact, they were so enthusiastic, it was inspiring for other churches to do the same. So, it was unnecessary for Paul to convince them of supporting this need, but Paul the Corinthians to have the funds collected *before* He arrives with some brothers from Macedonia. His reason is given in vs. 5: so that their gift will not be affected by covetousness, but rather be a “bountiful gift,” literally a “blessing” (*eulogia*). The proper spirit of giving is to give freely as a blessing. This preserves the integrity of their giving. If they wait until Paul shows up with the brothers from Macedonia, they may feel pressured to give or appear to be giving under compulsion and undermining the love and unity their gift is meant to portray. Notice here that Paul is not a high-pressure fund-raiser. He’s not the kind of guy who tries to squeeze money out of people (even for a good cause).

This is a relevant affirmation for us at Trinity. We have been careful to avoid high-pressure fund-raising tactics for our building project. For example, we have been unwilling to bring in a professional fundraiser to knock on your door. Why? Because we want to preserve the integrity of our giving as unto the Lord rather than being coerced. Paul was not focused on reaching a particular dollar amount at ‘all cost’ and using people to get there. Rather, he sought to protect the hearts of God’s people and build the church up in love while meeting essential needs through a call to generosity.

### 2. The Principle of Generosity (6)

Paul does not want them to be coerced or to give under compulsion, but he does want to teach them the principle of generosity, the principle of sowing and reaping [vs. 6]. The less you plant, the less you harvest. The more you plant, the more you harvest. Paul is pointing us to the reality that there are returns on generosity, at times financially and always spiritually. Stingy gets stingy returns, but generosity reaps generosity. Blessing reaps blessing. Grace reaps grace. Why? Because God loves generosity as a resemblance of Himself. God blesses the generous. Principle: *Generosity yields blessing*.

### 3. The Proper Motivation for Giving (7)

[vs. 7] There is a right and a wrong way to give and the difference is determined by the attitude of your heart regardless of the amount you give.

To ensure proper motivation, Paul urges us to *Give deliberately*: “as each one has purposed in his heart.” Notice that this is a personal decision. No one else is dictating what you give. And it's a very deliberate choice before God, making a resolute decision of the heart.

I would suggest that to make such a deliberate decision about the resources God has entrusted to you, it would be wise to pray, to ask God to lead your heart to give what would please Him. The Bible has a lot to say about money. On the one hand, as we see in 2 Cor, God blesses us with surplus (beyond our daily necessities) so that we can minister to the needs of others and advance the ministry of God's kingdom. On the other hand, we are also told there is wisdom in saving for future days of leanness. But how much should we live on, how much should we save, and how much should we give? Well, it requires discernment. And so, my question to you is, how much do you pray about your financial decisions? Making a deliberate decision about what you give can either be an act of the flesh or an act of faith. But when you make a deliberate decision before the Lord, it will guard you from two errors in vs. 7: giving grudgingly or under compulsion.

To give grudgingly is to give reluctantly. You give, but you really don't want to. It feels like a burden rather than a blessing. A grudging heart reveals that your heart is lacking the overflow of God's grace. If you give reluctantly as though it is a burden, the remedy is for you to rediscover the joy of God's abundant grace to meet *all* your needs.

In addition, Paul guards against giving under compulsion. That is, giving because you feel pressured or coerced to give by someone else. Our giving should not be a response to people but a response to God's gracious and generous heart.

So Paul calls us to give deliberately and to *give joyfully*: “for God loves a cheerful giver.”

When we give in response to God's gracious and generous heart, *our motivation is joy!* Like Paul, we should have greater concern for the joy of God's people than we do for the particular amount of money we raise. And to our surprise, when we give in joyful response to God's grace and goodness, we are free to give *more*, and God is delighted to bless us with greater capacity to be generous. God loves a cheerful giver because a cheerful giver resembles God's own heart. God does not provide for you with a reluctant or grudging heart. God is delighted to provide for you. Just think how joyful God must be. *He has a pure heart that gives out the overflow of abundant grace with unhindered joy.* Every day, he provides for billions of birds and wild animals. He waters the crops, meets the needs of His people and even provides for those who disregard Him. He gives with unhindered joy and loves it when we do the same.

#### 4. The Promise of Abundant Grace for Generosity (8-11)

This may be the most emphatic promise in the Bible (5 absolutes!). Vs. 8: “And God is able to make **all** grace abound to you, so that **always** having **all** sufficiency in **everything**, you may have an **abundance** for **every** good deed” (2Cor 9:8). [Memorize – multi-faceted sufficiency of God's grace] Let's unpack this promise.

God is able...! Pause right there and pray that God will help you to believe it. God is able! Able to meet your needs, able to provide, able to take care of you, especially when generosity calls you to joyful sacrifice.

But notice what God is promised to supply: Grace! “God is able to make all *grace* abound to you...” This promise is not limited to mere financial blessing. It's true, as we are about to see, that God blesses the generous with abundance for ongoing generosity. But he also blesses you with contentment. When we give sacrificially, God gives us the grace to live without what we give away.

The essence of this promise is that ***God is able to ensure that you will never lack the grace you need to be generous*** with the resources you have for the opportunities God provides. There is never a time when God will not meet your needs in response to your generosity in meeting other's needs. In other words, God will not short you because you are generous to others.

There is never a time when you can overdraft God’s grace by being generous to God’s kingdom work.

The intended response to this promise is *faith*. Faith expressed in joyful confidence in God’s goodness and grace that empowers us to be generous as He is. Do you believe that “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed?” Do you view trusting God as a risk or as a source of security?

To help us believe it, Paul goes on to supply some scriptural support for this promise in [vs. 9]. This is a quote from Psalm 112:9 where the righteous man gives freely (not grudgingly or compulsively) to the poor and his righteousness endures forever. The interesting thing about his quote is that Psalm 112 uses it in reference to the *righteous man*, while Paul clearly uses it in reference to *God* in 2Cor 9. The phrase “His righteousness endures forever” is also used in reference to God in the previous Psalm (111:3). Here’s the point: The righteous acts we do (like being generous to the poor) are an expression of God’s own righteousness working through us. So, generosity is not just about what *we* do, but what God is seeking to do *through* us. Generosity is not only an overflow of God’s grace but also the overflow of His righteousness.

By the way, we are tempted to not be generous either because 1) we are selfish and want to hoard, or because 2) we are *fearful* of not having enough for ourselves. Yet Psalm 112 says of this righteous man who is generous to the poor, “He will not *fear* evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, *trusting in the Lord*. His heart is *upheld*, he will not *fear*” (Ps 112:7). That’s the grace that God is able to supply!

Now Paul goes on in vs. 10-11 with further support for God’s promised provision. [vs. 10-11<sup>1</sup>] Here is what Paul is saying. God not only provides enough seed for your daily bread, He also multiplies your seed beyond your basic necessities so that you can have a harvest of righteousness by imitating God through generosity with those in need. As Paul clarifies in vs.

11, God will provide enough for you to be generous. Why? So that you can live like God and God will be honored with praise (thanksgiving).

Let me summarize vs. 8-11 this way: *God provides the grace and the resources for you to be like Him—a joyful, generous-hearted, giver—so that your life will be an overflow of God’s grace and righteousness as you trust in His promised provision.*

## 5. The Produce of Joyful, Grace-empowered, Generous Giving (12-15).

Paul highlights 4 fruits, 4 benefits, of Grace-empowered generosity:

- **Providing for real needs:** “*fully supplying the needs of the saints*” (vs. 12). Real needs are met through the generosity of God’s people.
- **Praise to God:** “*overflowing through many thanksgivings to God*” (vs. 12). Generosity fuels gratitude that glorifies God.
- **Proof of genuine faith:** “*Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality (generosity) of your contribution to them and to all*” (13). So, they are not only going to praise God for your generous gift, but also for the genuine heart of Christ they see in you—a heart changed by the gospel.
- **Prayers rebounding in love:** “*while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you*” (14). There is an affectionate response of prayer for those who gave. In other words, the Corinthians gift of blessing (generosity) rebounds back in blessing through the prayers of the saints.

And all of this as a testament to “the surpassing grace of God<sup>2</sup>” (14). No wonder Paul concludes by exclaiming: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.” What is that gift? Grace! The very epicenter of God’s grace is Jesus Himself. Remember how Paul so eloquently stated back in **8:9**: “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich,*

<sup>1</sup> 2Cor 9:10 uses the language of Isaiah 55:10 and Hosea 10:12. Just as God’s word will not return void, so our generosity (and righteousness) will not return void.

<sup>2</sup> Generosity in 2 Cor 8-9 is the application of Paul’s exposition of God’s grace (see 2 Cor 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 19; 9:8, 14).

*yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” ...so that His grace will overflow our lives to others.*

How is God speaking to you today? What first step would He have you take toward grace-empowered generosity? Beloved, *“God is able to make all grace abound to you so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed”* (8:9).

As we prepare for the Lord’s table, we celebrate God’s indescribable gift of grace in the Lord Jesus Himself. I invite you to take a moment to examine your heart before the Lord. Is God’s grace flowing freely through you or has your heart become clogged up with unrepented sin? It may be helpful to remember that God’s grace is not meant to terminate in your life. It’s not meant to get dammed up in your heart but to rather flow freely to others in mercy, love, forgiveness, compassion, even generosity. We know we love God supremely when we love one another sincerely. May the Spirit show us our hearts now as we pray.

Communion:

- **Bread:** *“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.”* (2 Cor 8:9)
- **Cup:** *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”* (2 Cor 9:15) In Jesus, we have everything we need because we have God as our Father.