

Cheerful Givers
2 Corinthians 8-9
By David Feddes

2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is one of the greatest Bible passages about generosity with the resources God has given in order to bless others. The background of this is that Paul was arranging a collection from a whole variety of churches—Gentile churches mostly. There were Jewish people in them, but they were churches scattered around the Mediterranean world. The offering was being taken for the people in Jerusalem and its vicinity because there was a great deal of economic hardship there. There had been a famine, and the persecutions at this particular point in history were rougher around the area of Jerusalem than elsewhere. So Christians sometimes weren't able to get jobs as easily, and they faced other challenges.

The church in Jerusalem was in need, and the apostle Paul wanted the churches that he had planted to help them out. He wrote to the church in Rome—that's known as a great doctrinal epistle, but it's actually a fundraising letter with tremendous doctrine for 15 chapters before he gets to the fundraising part of it. You'll find in many of his letters something about this offering that he's asking for—the needy people in Jerusalem, who were mostly Jewish people. As I said, most of the churches that are receiving his letters about giving are Gentile people.

What he says is very particular. As with all letters in the New Testament, it's a very particular point in time, focused on a very particular matter, and yet it has tremendous application for us for the rest of the church age until Jesus comes again. So if we want to know what it means to be cheerful givers, there's really no better passage in the Bible than the one we're going to look at right now.

Let's read some of the verses from it and then reflect on it. The apostle says, "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches" (2 Corinthians 8:1). Macedonia is one province to the north of Greece. Corinth is in Achaia, which is in the southern part of Greece. Paul is writing to Corinth, but he's talking about other churches now. "We want you to know about the grace of God that's been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (2 Corinthians 8:1–2). What a way to say it. There's this tremendous combination of extreme poverty in Macedonia with abundance of joy, and so they're so full of joy that even though they really don't have much to give, they give a lot anyway.

"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" (2 Corinthians 8:3–4). They're begging, "Oh please let us give. Please, please, please may we give?" They begged earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

"And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us" (2 Corinthians 8:5). So it's not just a matter of money. They're giving themselves to the Lord, they're giving themselves and their hearts to the apostle Paul and his colleagues, and in the giving of themselves, they're also generous with their money.

"So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part" (2 Corinthians 8:6). There's a book of the Bible titled *Titus*, and this is the man. He's one of Paul's right-hand men. Timothy and Titus and a few others were always working with the apostle.

"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" (2 Corinthians 8:7).

"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 Corinthians 8:9).

Then he says: "For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have" (2 Corinthians 8:12). If you don't have much in your account, you can't write a very big check. That's what Paul's saying, basically. If you don't have much, you can't give that much—but it's acceptable according to how much you're able to give.

"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" (2 Corinthians 8:13–14). That's part of Christian giving. Right now I've got more, and I've got extra, so I can give. There may come a time when I'm in need and others will have the opportunity to help me.

Then he goes on to talk about the finance team. He talks about Titus, "my partner and co-worker among you" (2 Corinthians 8:23)—my right-hand guy, you can really count on him. Then he talks about two brothers that he doesn't name, but everybody in Corinth knew who he was talking about. One of them is described as "praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel" (2 Corinthians 8:18), and "he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering" (2 Corinthians 8:19).

Then he talks about the other brother and says, "We have tested him in many ways and found him zealous" (2 Corinthians 8:22). He's not a rookie. He's been around the block, we've seen how he acts, and we know he can be relied on. Whenever somebody wants to take an offering, you want to make sure that it's being administered wisely and well by trustworthy people. So that's why Paul goes into that kind of detail about the people who are actually going to be his advance men in getting that collection.

"We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man" (2 Corinthians 8:20–21).

"So show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it" (2 Corinthians 8:24).

^{9:5} So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

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. 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." 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. 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. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (2 Corinthians 9:5-15)

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). What does it take to be cheerful when you give? I want to highlight four things from this passage that indicate what goes into making someone a cheerful and generous giver.

First of all is the fact that you've been gifted by grace. You have received enormous gifts from God. As Jesus once put it, "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

Another reason for being cheerful and glad in giving is you are really excited about the opportunity to help because you are linked to other people by love. So if you can help fellow believers, you're happy about that. If you can help people who don't yet know Jesus to hear the gospel, you're delighted about that because you love other people and you want to make a difference. You are happy when you get a chance.

Another thing that goes into being a cheerful giver is I'm walking by wisdom. You can count on the wisdom and integrity of those to whom you're giving and the causes for which you're giving, and you yourself follow wise practices when you plan and organize your giving. That sounds a little bit boring and administrative. Well, give a pile of money to some rip-off artist, and I assure you you're not going to be real cheerful about it when you find out. Part of happy, cheerful giving is: I'm doing the homework and walking in wisdom.

Then a fourth reason for cheerful giving is: there are some tremendous rewards that come from God in giving.

So we'll look at each of those in a little more detail as we find it in this passage. First of all, people who are cheerful givers know that they have been given a lot. The verse that stands right at the heart of it in this passage is: "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 Corinthians 8:9).

Jesus was the greatest giver of all. The Father gave his only Son. Jesus gave himself. You know the grace, you know the gift. He was rich. He had all the wealth of heaven, all the splendor and comfort of glory, and he let it all go and made himself poor—so poor that he was born in a manger, that he had no home address to call his own, that he hung on a cross and was mocked and died. He became poor so that you, by his poverty, might become rich—that you might live forever, that you might have all the wealth that God has pleased to give his people; that, as the Bible says, you might inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5), that "all things are yours" (1 Corinthians 3:21), as Paul says in his letters to the Corinthians.

So he says the first reason why anybody would be a cheerful giver is just realizing and accepting past grace from God—what Jesus has already done. And by faith, you receive that and you say, "Thank you, Jesus, for leaving all of that and coming to be one of the lowliest among us and dying that terrible death so that I could be enriched with all of your glory, with all of your eternal life, with the blessings you've given now and the blessings that are awaiting us in the future."

Another element of being gifted by grace is that God is at work right now, blessing and pouring out more grace. Sometimes we focus on God's past grace, and we certainly should pay very close attention to God's past grace. Some of you know the acronym G-R-A-C-E: Grace stands for "God's riches at Christ's expense." God's riches at Christ's expense—God's free gift that we don't earn, a gift freely given, and gives us forgiveness and eternal life.

But the Bible doesn't restrict the word *grace* to just that great act that God completed in Jesus Christ, but to God's continued blessing and favor that he keeps giving right now. Paul says: "The grace of God has been given among the churches of Macedonia. Their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part... See that you excel in this act of grace" (2 Corinthians 8:1–2,7). So he says Macedonia was generous because God is pouring out grace in them right now, making them the kind of people who are people of grace. And you too, like them, should excel in this grace that God's pouring out right now.

"They gave according to their means, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor" (2 Corinthians 8:3–4). Here you see the word "favor"—but in Greek it's *charis*, the same word as grace. Grace is a very flexible word. Sometimes it stands for "God's riches at Christ's expense," his free forgiveness and salvation to undeserving sinners. But it can also mean God's favor and ongoing blessing. It can even mean being thankful for something. When you read the word translated "thanks" in this passage, it might also be *charis*—grace. "They begged earnestly for the favor/grace of taking part in the relief of the saints. They gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us" (2 Corinthians 8:4–5).

Then he speaks of "the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you" (2 Corinthians 9:13–14).

"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Everything you are and everything you have that's worthwhile is grace. It is God pouring out. Your health is God's grace. Your energy is God's grace. Your drive and ability to make money is God's grace. Your sense of willingness to share is God's grace. Anything that is worthwhile or

noble about you is not first of all something you manufactured. It's the work of God's grace in you. And when you're doing something for somebody else, you're expressing the ongoing flow of God's grace into your life and through you to other people.

Then of course there's also future grace: "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" (2 Corinthians 9:8). Does that almost cover it? *All* grace, *all* sufficiency, for *all* things, at *all* times. God's grace.

Paul, a few chapters later, is going to write about something hard in his life, about something he called "a messenger from Satan, a thorn in the flesh," that he prayed to be rid of. But eventually God said, "It's not going away, but my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:7–9). So the apostle knew that this didn't always mean just getting whatever you want or ask for all the time. And yet, even in such circumstances, he experienced grace that was more than enough for all of his needs.

Sometimes if you're going to be a cheerful giver, you've got to know that anything I give is going to be pretty small compared to what God gave me and what God is giving me and what God intends to give me. And when you know that kind of grace, then you can give cheerfully.

If you say, "But I'm not sure that I could give very generously because you never know what's going to happen in the future. I better make sure that I have an enormous store of treasure before I think about giving," the apostle says: "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" (2 Corinthians 9:8). Don't worry. Don't let worries about the future make you stingy or make you overly cautious. That doesn't mean you should be stupid and just throw everything away all the time. But it does mean that if you want to be a cheerful giver, you've got to know that God's got it taken care of. He's been very generous, and he's not going to stop pouring out his grace in the future.

So cheerful givers are people who have received the grace of God by faith. You've received salvation in Jesus by faith. You know that everything you are and have comes from him, and by faith you know that he's going to give sufficiency and more than sufficient grace for the future.

Another thing that can make us joyful in giving is to be linked with others by love. Paul talks about "taking part in the relief of the saints" (2 Corinthians 8:4), "supplying the needs of the saints" (2 Corinthians 9:12), "the generosity of your contribution for them and for others" (2 Corinthians 9:13), and "they long for you and pray for you" (2 Corinthians 9:14).

When you're giving for them, then they are praying for you. Oftentimes, I've seen that even with small gifts. You make a meal for somebody, and the meal helps them out some—and that's wonderful—but they also are so happy that somebody cared about them. It's the expression of love as much as the actual meal that matters. So there is this link that develops when people are praying for each other, when they're helping each other out. This link of love is there and brings joy to both sides of it.

And he says, "I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness" (2 Corinthians 8:13–14).

In these bonds of love that exist within a congregation, you know that you're not going to be left high and dry. If a need arises and you express it, it's going to be met by God's people. And you know that when you give, you don't have to panic—"Oh no! If I gave a little too much here, I might be left without anything in the future." No. He says if you give when somebody else is in need, guess what happens when you're in need? There are these links and bonds of love where people are looking out for each other.

You read about that in the early church. In the book of Acts, the apostles were leading the church, and it says that people who had property would sometimes sell it and entrust it to the apostles and then to the deacons, so that those who had a lot could help out those who didn't have enough (Acts 4:34–35).

He says, "Give proof before all the churches of your love" (2 Corinthians 8:24). Love is sometimes expressed with your generosity.

"As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the family of faith" (Galatians 6:10). Don't you like those last three words? That's a verse that has the phrase "family of faith," or sometimes it's translated "household of faith" or "family of believers." As we have opportunity, let's do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the family of faith.

We're talking in this passage and in its original context about financial gifts, but there is more to giving than just finance. Some people who don't have very much financially are able to be very generous in other ways. So I want to think for a moment about these links of love and about generous living.

You remember earlier we read that "they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us" (2 Corinthians 8:5). Even before they gave any money, they committed themselves to God and to other people.

Another element of being generous is: if you've received the good news of the gospel, you want to share the good news of the gospel. That's something in your own life. If there are people who don't know the Lord, you can be one who shares what God has given you. You can share the love of Jesus. You can share the truth about how to be saved.

And more widely, you can look at causes that are spreading the gospel—missionaries who are carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth. When you're linked by love with the whole church of Jesus Christ, and with those whom God is planning to add to the church of Jesus Christ and just hasn't yet—but you love them and you want them to come to Christ—then you give of yourself, and you give of the riches of Christ in spreading the gospel.

Another way to give is simply to offer your own wisdom and life experiences. That doesn't mean going around with your nose in the air saying, "I'm smarter than you. Now let me give you a

lecture." But part of genuine giving and being linked by love is that people share with each other what's going on and a few of the things we've learned.

In fact, some of the greatest wisdom you can share is: "I learned this by being really, really stupid and making a bunch of mistakes. I would like to spare you some of those." A lot of the wisdom we should seek to share was not gained just from our reading of the Scriptures and our great decision-making, but from learning through our blunders.

So sharing life—sharing our successes, sharing our failures—sometimes it's a tremendous blessing to somebody else to tell them how you blew it. Not just so that they can gain wisdom from that, but also so that they know you're not going around as some sort of superior species that they are totally different from. When people know that others are going through or have gone through some of the same challenges and difficulties, there is just a sense of strength that comes from togetherness. So just being willing to be transparent, to share what's going on, is so valuable—because then people aren't going through life alone.

Then there's the sharing, obviously, of money, of meals, of talents. Some people may have less money, but you have a musical talent to share. If you have that talent, you might want to share it, because having gained it is not a great blessing to the rest of the people unless you're actually using it so that others can benefit from it.

You may have a talent for teaching. You may have a talent for mercy, in helping others. You may have spiritual gifts in a whole variety of ways. The apostle says in his first letter to the Corinthians, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'... On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (1 Corinthians 12:21–22). The body has a lot of different parts, so nobody should say, "What I'm good at doesn't matter. What I have to offer is useless." If you have it, God gave it to be shared.

Sometimes it's the gift of time. There are some very wealthy people, and it is hard for a rich person to be saved, but God can do the impossible (Matthew 19:23–26). And so there are very wealthy people who are very devoted to the Lord and very generous in their giving. Some of them are also very busy. They are not going to be as generous sometimes with their time as other people are.

And a lot of people in our world need time more than they need cash. They need attention. They need to know somebody cares. When you aren't always in a rush, when you're willing to hang out just a little extra time with somebody, when you're willing to pay some attention and listen, you are giving a tremendous gift—the gift of time and attention and empathy and caring.

So as we think about being linked by love, gifts of money are one wonderful way to show love. And it is also a good way to show your devotion to the Lord, because when the Lord gets into your pocketbook, then it's an indication that some wonderful things are happening.

But I do want to emphasize that for some of us, our resources are not so much financial—though we all have some finance—but there's a lot else that each one of us has to give. By generous living—not just sticking to ourselves and our own interests—we can be a blessing to others.

You're gifted by grace, and you're glad for all God has done for you. You love helping other people and being a blessing to them. And so, when you can do something or give something, it brings you joy.

And then, walk by wisdom.

The apostle says, when he's talking about the arrangements he's made with a reliable team of three—just think about it. He's got a team of three people traveling from city to city. All the travel expenses, all the bother of doing that—you might ask, isn't that wasted money? No, because you need to have that kind of honesty and integrity and accountability. People need to know that good care is being taken.

“We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us. For we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man” (2 Corinthians 8:20–21).

It matters what people think. If you're not conducting your financial affairs in a transparent way, people aren't going to trust you. There are going to be rumors circulating, and it's just a bad deal. So we need to be very careful about that.

In those days, of course, there was also the added security concern. You don't want one person carrying a whole pile of money. If you have three, they're a lot less likely to get attacked by bandits on their way to the church in Jerusalem. There's just a lot of good sense: let's make sure it's not just one person who's easily attacked, and let's make sure it's not just one person handling all the money.

We've just appointed two more deacons. One of our standards in our churches is that nobody counts the money alone. That's not because we don't trust the deacons—they wouldn't be deacons if we didn't trust them. But you never have somebody count the money alone. You have to have multiple people involved in that whole process so that it's administered in a wise way.

So, walking by wisdom—what's that involve? I think in your own giving, you can do it a lot more joyfully if you're confident that your money is actually going to a good cause and for the purposes it's supposed to go toward. You want causes with good goals. You want causes that have a real impact. And you want causes that have multiple leaders—not just one person who's handling all the money—and vetted leaders: people where some of the research has been done, and you can be confident in how those gifts are being handled.

A cause with iffy goals—why would you want to give to that? A cause that may have some noble idea but zero impact—why give to that? And a cause where the people handling the money are very shifty—don't give to that either.

I would encourage you: if you ever see me flying in a private jet, cease giving to Family of Faith. That's just a good general rule on your giving. When you're giving to ministries where the guys have private jets—look into a different cause.

In your cheerful giving, you want to make sure you're doing that wisely. In our own church, we try to be honest and above board. We make budgets available so that people know where the money at the local level is going. We have our deacons—multiple ones—counting. Even two of our elders happen to be the chief financial officers of Christian charities, so we're happy that we have people who know how to handle money and are people of integrity.

In your own giving, walking by wisdom can also mean: follow a plan, not just an impulse. Sometimes there may be a moment where the Holy Spirit really moves you, and you just know right on the spot you need to give. But most of the time, plan.

It's very easy to show a picture of a starving child and have some cause with the word "children" in it and say, "Give lots of money to us," and people do—because your heartstrings should be tugged by the picture of a hungry child. But anybody can put out a picture of a hungry child. Anybody can stand on the edge of the street and say, "Hey, give me money." Some panhandlers make a pretty good living at it. You need to do more than just give on impulse.

When you read the Bible, it gets into the nitty-gritty. "Each one should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up" (1 Corinthians 16:2). You choose the amount. You give what you decide in your heart to give (2 Corinthians 9:7). You choose the amount. You prioritize: "Here's where I'm going to start giving, and if I have enough, I'll move on to the next thing," and so on. Or you allocate—you decide where you want to give.

We do that as a congregation. There are a lot of good causes we'd love to support, but we've chosen ten that we are going to support in a very special way with a designated amount from our budget. Then, we take one as a "mission of the month," taking all the offerings that are given for that cause. We've tried to do our homework on what some of those good causes are and have a kind of diversity of causes—whether it's prison ministry, ministry to the homeless, spreading the gospel in Africa, theological education in Ukraine. There's a variety of causes.

In your personal giving, you may have other causes that you know of that our church doesn't support, and you know they're a great cause. That can be part of your generous giving. But the point is: prioritize. How much am I going to be able to give this year? You may turn out to be able to give a little more than that. But how much am I going to be able to give this week or this year?

You read 1 Corinthians 16—right after that great chapter on the resurrection, the next thing Paul says is: "Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income" (1 Corinthians 16:1–2). So there's scheduling: "I've got income coming this week, and here's how much I'm giving this week." There's planning that goes into that.

Now in this passage, it's interesting that one word you don't read from Paul is *tithe*. Tithing isn't bad, but Paul doesn't mention it. Tithing was a standard of giving in Old Testament law, where you gave 10 percent of your income. You might say, "Yikes! That's a lot." Well, as with many things in the law, that's your baseline. That's where you start, not where you stop.

But Paul here isn't talking about tithing. He's saying you give as you plan and as you determine in your heart to give. For some people, the tithe might be a little too much. For other people, the tithe might be much less than you could cheerfully afford to give.

I've mentioned before that John Wesley, as a preacher, when he was making 30 pounds a month, gave two pounds back to the work of the Lord. You say, "Boy, he was a cheapskate! He gave less than 10 percent, because 10 percent of 30 pounds would be three pounds—not two." What a cheapskate! But when he was making 50 pounds a month, Wesley was giving 32 pounds and keeping 18. When he was making 100 pounds, then he was giving 72 pounds and keeping 28—because he knew he needed 28 to live on. He knew what he needed, and then he was generous beyond what he needed. At one point, he was giving barely beyond what he needed, but later he was able to give much more.

So tithing isn't this automatic legal requirement of all believers. In this passage, the apostle doesn't mention it. Jesus does say something good about tithing in passing. He says to the Pharisees, "You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former" (Matthew 23:23). Tithing was a good thing, but it was far more important to have a heart for people.

The advantage here of walking by wisdom—choosing your causes as causes that conduct their financial affairs well, and planning your own giving—is that you can enjoy giving what you're able to give, and you don't feel bad about what you can't give.

You say, "Well, I decided that this was what the Lord laid on our hearts. This is what my financial resources allow for. These are some causes worth giving to. I've given to them. I enjoy it. It's a lot of fun. And I'm not going to feel guilty every time I see another appeal about giving or get another mailing or email about some worthy cause. I planned it. I gave what I could to causes I know are sound and doing the Lord's work. And now I'm just happy about it. I'm not going to have regret about what I couldn't give."

The gift is there according to what you can give, not what you can't. And you're not going to have the regret of paying for some guy's private jet and his four palaces that he lives in. Do your homework, and you can avoid those regrets and just have joy in supporting the Lord's work. "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have" (2 Corinthians 8:12).

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). So you decide according to what you have. You decide it in your heart. And God loves it when people give from the heart and give wisely.

And finally, the matter of *rewards*. This is the one that is probably more distorted and twisted in some preaching than any other topic—and why some of us are very reluctant to preach about giving. Because of these lavish promises of how rich you're going to get if you give to "my cause."

Proverbs says: "A man who is kind benefits himself. One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who refreshes others will himself be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:17,24–25). These are some of the great generalizations of Proverbs: that in general, a generous person somehow seems to get richer, and very often a stingy person seems to have less.

I remember a couple in a church I served long ago where they never had the ability to give anything—in their minds, at least. They kind of frittered along, and then when they got their tax refund, it would always go to some big luxury they really didn't need. But they never managed to have anything to give for God's work. And years later, they still had almost nothing. They had a lot of difficulty and strife in their relationship as well.

I've also talked to people who, I think, are only half-serious, but they say, "Do you know how much money we would save if we didn't tithe? Do you know how much money goes out when we tithe?" I said, "Well, as far as I know, you've got a pile of money. Are you sure you would have that much if you didn't tithe?" It can seem a little transactional, but the Bible does seem to indicate that very often God is going to bless pretty lavishly people who are generous with him.

So you get unscrupulous people who turn this into a health-and-wealth gospel and say, "You want to get really rich? Write an even bigger check, and then God's really going to send more." Well, let's put it this way: if your motive in giving is, "I'm actually at heart a selfish pig, but I know if I write out some checks, then I'm going to get more and more and more," that is the exact opposite of what the apostle's talking about.

Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38).

He also said, "Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in heaven that does not fail" (Luke 12:33). He didn't say, "Sell all your possessions," but he did say, "Sell some and give." That is, be generous with what you've got. Inflation will not devalue treasure stored in heaven. Stock market crashes will not decrease the value of treasures in heaven.

Jesus says, "Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9). There is this investment of treasure in heaven that Jesus promises.

"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6).

"God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7), 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" (2 Corinthians 9:8). See that last phrase? God's going to give you a whole bunch so that you can abound even more in your good works. You give in order to get in order to give even more. You

want God's grace and his gifts to keep increasing so that a greater flow from you can bring even greater blessing to others.

And notice the talk about sowing and reaping. Let's say there was a farmer last spring, and he had a thousand bushels of corn. And he said, "You know what? I need to sell all thousand bushels. I need to take that money in. Well, okay, okay—I'll plant one bushel and sell the other 999." Would that be a brilliant farming decision? He's got hundreds of acres, and he's going to keep one bushel and sell the other 999? If he had planted all thousand bushels, he would have a tremendous crop coming right now. You get according to what you plant.

Or take our own case at a much more miniature level. Maria got really carried away last spring. She found some plants on sale—and of course, we can't pass up a good sale—so she bought 40 tomato plants. "We'll just throw them all into the garden. Yeah, some are going to die anyway." None of them died. It was a jungle. And so we have 100 quarts of tomatoes, another 100 quarts of spaghetti sauce, we've got salsa and barbecue sauce running out of our ears—because we planted a lot of tomatoes.

If you sow a lot, you're likely to reap a lot. But as I said, the reaping is not just so I can be a selfish pig and pile up my money, but so that I can "abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8). You give to get more in order to give more.

"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" (2 Corinthians 9:10). You see that? It doesn't just say multiply your bank account—but it's going to give you more seed, your seed *for sowing*, and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

"You will be enriched in every way"—why?—"to be generous in every way" (2 Corinthians 9:11). That is one of the great rewards that you reap: if you're generous, you get to be even more generous. That's what makes someone a cheerful giver. "I love being generous, and I would love to be even more generous if God gave me more resources."

And then what is another reward? Well, if you care about God and love him, the ultimate reward is to see God honored and glorified—for the glory of the Lord himself. "It produces thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:11). "Overflowing in many thanksgivings to God" (2 Corinthians 9:12). "They will glorify God" (2 Corinthians 9:13). "They will long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you" (2 Corinthians 9:14). "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

When you're a miser or a selfish pig, does God get a lot of glory out of that? Do people say, "Oh thank you, God, that she is a miser and he is selfish"?

They praise God when they see evidence of God's grace in you.

"So each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

I love these two chapters of the Bible, and I love the opportunity to preach on them. I really have to preach on giving once in a while, not because the church needs money, but so that *you* can be blessed, and so that *you* can have joy in giving, and so that *your* joy and cheer may increase. I don't preach on giving so that *I* will get my salary, or so the church budget is met. It's dangerous to say this, but the church budget is already taking in more than we planned. You say, "Okay, well, there's never too much." Right—next year, we make the budget, and we allocate more for mission causes. That's how we've got to handle it. But I've never had to preach a sermon pleading, "Finances are tough, folks. I hope you'll come through soon." I've never had to preach that kind of sermon in 21 years here, and I'm so thankful to God that he has given his people not only the resources but also the heart to give.

But I want you to be able to enjoy even more. So think again on the grace. Think of the ties that develop among Christians when you work and bless other churches and bless fellow Christians in your own church. Walk by wisdom. Use your head. And then you can count on God giving you more so that you can give him more.

Prayer

Dear Father, thank you for the unspeakable gift of Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, that though you were rich, yet for our sakes you became poor, that we through your poverty might become rich. Lord, give us the heart of the Savior, that we may have a heart of grace, of generosity, of giving. Give us also the love of the Savior, that we may delight in bringing blessing to others. Give us the wisdom of the Savior—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding—so that our giving may be wise and well administered. And Lord, may we bring glory to you in all our giving. May we increase in our ability to make an impact in our church, in our neighborhood, in our community, and in our world. And may we have joy in all of it. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Cheerful Givers
2 Corinthians 8-9
By David Feddes
Slide Contents

^{8:1} 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. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ ... see that you excel in this act of grace... 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...

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.

Finance team (2 Corinthians 8:16-34)

- **Titus:** “my partner and fellow worker”
- **Brother #1:** “famous among all the churches... appointed by the churches”
- **Brother #2:** “whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters”

²⁰ We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man... ²⁴ So give proof before the churches of your love.

^{9:5} So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

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. 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.” 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. 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. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel

of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others,¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Cheerful Givers

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (9:7)

- Gifted by grace
- Linked by love
- Walk by wisdom
- Reap rewards

Gifted by grace

- **Accepting past grace**
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. (8:9)
- **Expressing present grace**
The grace of God has been given among the churches of Macedonia... their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part... See that you excel in this act of grace. (8:1-2, 7)
They gave ... beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor [χάρις = grace] of taking part in the relief of the saints... they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. (8:3-5)
... the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others... because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (9:14-15)
- **Expecting future grace**
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. (8:8)

Cheerful Givers

- Gifted by grace
- **Linked by love**
- Walk by wisdom
- Reap rewards

Linked by love

...taking part in the relief of the saints (8:4) supplying the needs of the saints... the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you (9:12-14)

I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. (8:13-14)

So give proof before the churches of your love. (8:24)

As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the family of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

Linked by love: Generous living

- Devote self to God and others
- Give riches of Christ, eternal life
- Offer wisdom, life experiences
- Share money, meals, talents, time, attention, empathy

Cheerful Givers

- Gifted by grace
- Linked by love
- **Walk by wisdom**
- Reap rewards

Walk by wisdom

We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. (8:20-21)

Walk by wisdom

- Support causes with good goals, real impact, and multiple, vetted leaders.
- Follow a plan, not just an impulse: choose amount, priorities, schedule.
- Enjoy giving what you can; don't feel bad about what you can't give.

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable **according to what a person has**, not according to what he does not have. (8:12) Each one must give as he has **decided** in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (9:7)

Cheerful Givers

- Gifted by grace
- Linked by love
- Walk by wisdom
- **Reap rewards**

Reap rewards

A man who is kind benefits himself... One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. (Proverbs 11:17, 24-25)

Give, and it will be given to you... For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you. (Luke 6:38)

Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail. (Luke 12:33)

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully... God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make ^[11]_{SEP}all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, **you may abound in every good work.** (9:6-8)

Give → get more → give more

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. **You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way.** (9:10-11)

... for the glory of the Lord himself (8:19) produce thanksgiving to God... overflowing in many thanksgivings to God... they will glorify God... while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (9:11-14)

Cheerful Givers

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (9:7)

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