

2 Cor 8:1-7 A Picture of Rich Generosity

We have now come to the next major section in 2 Corinthians. Let me remind you about how the book is arranged.

- A. Chapters 1-7 focus on the relationship Paul has with the church. In these chapters, Paul explains what he's been doing and why he's been doing it.
- B. Chapters 8-9 focus on generous and sacrificial giving toward Christian ministry.
- C. The final four chapters include a defense/vindication of Paul's ministry and a denunciation of those who opposed him.

So as we begin our consideration of chapter 8, we are a bit more than half way through the book. My plan is to continue working our way through the book, but we'll take a break in June for our regular Summer Sermon Series.

The first few verses of chapter 8 introduce an offering that Paul is collecting for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul thought it was appropriate for the Gentile churches to help the Jewish churches in Israel. Such sharing of needs would draw these churches together in unity. The church at Corinth had agreed to participate in this offering (1 Cor 16:1-4) but had not yet come through with their contribution. In fact, it had been a year since they had agreed to help out with this offering, and yet they had not contributed as of yet. In this passage, Paul is urging the people there to go ahead and collect that offering.

What we see here is a picture of rich generosity. One of the results of God's gracious work in our hearts is that it makes us generous. A church's generosity is a measure of its spirituality. Spiritually vibrant churches are generous churches.

Vs. 1 "we make known to you" – the churches of Macedonia are an example of rich generosity (vs. 2 "riches of their liberality")—"liberality" simply means "sincere generosity." In spite of their dire poverty, the churches of Macedonia were rich in their generosity.

What does rich generosity look like? Let's consider how we can be richly generous.

I. Rich generosity is a result of the grace of God. .1

- A. Paul begins by citing the example of the generosity of the churches of Macedonia. Macedonia is a region of Greece about 200 miles north of Corinth. The churches there—probably at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea—had been very generous in contributing to this offering Paul was collecting.
- B. Their generosity was an expression of “the grace of God.”
 - 1. Paul uses the word “grace” ten times in chapters 8-9, and he uses the word in several (6) different ways. In fact, he uses the word at the beginning of chapter 8 and the end of chapter 9. So these two chapters are all about gracious generosity.
 - 2. In this verse, he’s not talking about saving grace, but God’s goodness and kindness toward them. Because the Macedonian believers had experienced God’s goodness, they wanted to be kind to others. Their desire to give was a result of God’s rich blessing toward them.
- C. Grace, of course, is a free gift; that’s the basic meaning of the word. Those who appreciate God’s free gift of grace want to extend that gift to others. They had experienced God’s free grace, and now they wanted to give a gift to others.

App: Likewise, if we have experienced God’s grace—God’s free gift—we should be willing to be gracious to others. God’s free gift of grace to us drives us to be gracious and generous to others.

Matthew 10:8 ... *Freely you have received, freely give.*

Those *lacking* generosity either have not experienced the grace of God or don’t appreciate the grace of God. If God’s grace is operating in your life, the result is that you will be richly generous.

II. Rich generosity is possible in spite of trials and afflictions. .2

- A. The churches of Macedonia had experienced “a great trial of affliction.” The word “trial” here refers to a testing, and this was a trial/testing “of affliction.”
 - 1. The Christians in Macedonia had experienced persecution because of their faith—literally “much testing” or “continual ordeals.” This persecution was a severe test of faith.

2. Historically, this region had been ravaged by many wars and even then was being plundered by Roman authority.¹ Wars, barbarian invasions, Roman settlement, and the restructuring of the province had contributed to a dismal financial status.²
- B. This had led to their “poverty.” And this was not just normal hardship but “deep/extreme” poverty. Scholars have translated the words as “the very depths of destitution” or “poverty at the deepest,” “rock-bottom poverty,” “extreme/profound poverty.”³

People in deep poverty were often beggars. Because of their afflictions, they had virtually no financial resources. So these churches were not affluent and prosperous; just the opposite; these people were financially destitute.

- C. In spite of their trials and poverty, they were abundantly joyful and rich in their generosity. “Liberality” (.2end) refers to open-hearted generosity. And they were “rich” in this generosity—i.e., lavish, liberal. Their adversity did not prevent them from being generous.

So they were deeply in *poverty* but also *rich* in their liberality/generosity.

App: Generosity does not depend on how much money we have. It’s an attitude that pertains no matter where you are economically.

People who are *not* generous when they are poor will probably not be generous when they are rich. You might think that rich people would be the most generous, but often they are not—at least not as a proportion of their income. E.g., charitable giving rates among the wealthy are often lower than giving among middle class or poor.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 2 Co 8:1.

² Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 273.

³ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 562.

Info: A [recent] report... found people who make between \$50,000 and \$75,000 give an average of 7.6% of their discretionary income to charity, compared to an average of 4.2% for those making \$100,000 or more.⁴ Oddly enough, the more people make, the less generous they are, on average. Obviously, there are some exception.

The people of Macedonia had little, but they gave much.

- D. In fact, their joy “abounded” in their rich generosity. The word “abound” means “to overflow, to have surplus.” You could say, “their exuberant joy and extreme poverty combined to overflow in lavish generosity.”⁵ Although they were poverty-stricken, they were overflowing in the joy of their salvation, and that led to abundant giving.
- E. How can we be joyful and generous in adversity? Vs. 1—the grace of God bestowed upon them. If we have experienced God’s grace, then we can rejoice through our afflictions and give generously in spite of our financial shortcomings.

Difficult circumstances are not an excuse for lack of generosity. When we are giving by grace, we don’t allow afflictions to hinder our generosity.

Illus.: I’ve found it true that the people who often seem least able to give are the ones who are the most generous.

Trans: Most of us are *not* experiencing the kind of trials that these people were. If *they* could be generous and joyful in the midst of their adversities and poverty, *we* can strive to do the same. If we are not experiencing poverty and adversity, we should be even more inclined to be generous.

III. .3 Rich generosity is voluntary. “freely willing.” .3end

The people at Corinth needed a little prompting and encouragement to contribute to this offering. The churches of Macedonia, in contrast, needed no reminding or prodding; they were excited about participation in this offering.

- A. .3a Their giving was according to their ability. Their ability to give would have been very small. But...

⁴ <https://www.foxbusiness.com/features/poor-middle-class-and-rich-who-gives-and-who-doesnt>

⁵ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 564.

B. .3b Their giving was beyond their ability.

The sense of this is that they gave to their limits and even beyond their limits. Somehow, these people gave beyond their capacity to give; they gave more than they could afford. I.e., their generosity surpassed all Paul's expectations; they outdid themselves in their generous giving.

App: Some people give beyond what is reasonable, beyond what we would ever expect.

Obviously, we need to be reasonable or rational in our giving. But there may be occasions when we give above and beyond what is reasonable. In certain circumstances, we give beyond what would be a reasonable amount to give.

Illus.: Do you know what most people think of as a reasonable amount to give? I'm told that the average among typical evangelical is around 4%. Only about 5% of church-goers tithe. The average church-goer contributes about \$17 each week. If all those people gave 10%, churches would have an extra \$139 billion each year (Health Research Funding).

Maybe we don't always give beyond what we normally would be able to give, but on rare occasions, for the right purposes, we might give more than we are typically able to give. That's sacrificial giving.

C. .3end Their giving was voluntary.

They gave "freely." The word (αὐθαιρετοί) means "of their own choice, on their own initiative, voluntarily." This was *not* the result of high pressure tactics; no one was forcing them into this.

They had originally volunteered to participate. They took on this obligation freely/voluntarily.

App: We believe in free-will giving. God wants us to give freely and joyfully. 9:7 "God loves a cheerful giver."

One of the constant criticisms of the church by outsiders is that it is continually asking for money. Some churches do that; almost every Sunday, someone is making an appeal for more money. They prod and coerce people into giving. But if God's grace is operating in the church, coercive appeals are not usually necessary. The people will want to give out of appreciation for what God is doing. If we appreciate God's grace towards us, then rich generosity is not a problem.

Thankfully, in my experience here, we have not had to urge and prod people to support the work of the ministry. I don't feel like I have to mention money matters very often because the people of the church give generously. I'm thankful for that.

App: The Bible teaches grace giving. That means that we give willingly and freely, not under compulsion. We give because we appreciate God's grace in our lives.

On special occasions and for special needs, we might actually give beyond what would be reasonable to give. That's what the Macedonians did, and Paul commends them for it.

IV. Rich generosity is a ministry to the saints. .4

A. Paul was reluctant to receive this generous gift from the churches in Macedonia. He didn't really expect them to contribute to this offering because they were poor and afflicted.

B. But the people of these churches urgently pleaded with Paul and his colleagues to accept their offering. They saw contributing to this offering as a privilege. They demanded the right to participate; they begged to contribute to this offering; they did not want to be left out.

App: When was the last time you heard of someone begging for the privilege of contributing to an offering? That's very unusual. Most people try to find excuses for *not* giving to the offering. These people were urgently begging to be included in this offering. That's an evidence of abundant grace.

C. Paul describes this offering as "the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."

1. It's a *fellowship* in that those giving to this offering were in partnership with one another. This was a collective effort to help those who were suffering.

App: When we contribute to an offering, we are partnering together with everyone else who contributes.

Quote: Sharing material and spiritual blessings is a mark of the true church and a vivid demonstration of living Christianity.⁶

Many projects are possible only when God's people share their resources.

2. It's a *ministry* to the saints. Ministry is service; we serve others by helping them in their time of need. It's a great privilege to serve God's people. A practical way to help needy fellow believers is to give them some money.

Trans: All of us ought to be involved in this ministry to the saints. When we contribute to the offerings of the church, that's exactly what we are doing—partnering together to serve one another.

V. Rich generosity is self-giving. .5

This rich generosity is not what Paul expected—"not as we had hoped" (i.e., expected). This was way beyond what he had expected. He had rather low hopes for these people because of their adversities and poverty. They far exceeded Paul's expectations. How?

- A. First, they gave themselves to the Lord. They wanted to give of their money, but more than that, they wanted to give of themselves—both their *persons* and their *possessions*.

App: This attitude of self-giving is the primary basis of generosity. We give generously to others because we surrender ourselves to God. When we put ourselves at God's disposal, we put our money in God's hands as well. Everything we have belongs to God; he is the ultimate owner of all things, including ourselves.

The Christian life is, in a sense, giving ourselves more and more to the Lord. We do that at conversion/salvation, and we do that continually throughout our lives. The most important giving that we do is giving ourselves to God.

- B. .5b Then they gave themselves "to us." In other words, they entrusted themselves to Paul and his colleagues.

⁶ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 275.

Giving is an act of devotion to Christ and to his servants. Our financial gifts provide resources for those who serve God.

- C. .5end “by the will of God” – the Macedonians wanted to do God’s will, and they recognized that participation in this offering was the will of God. Devotion to God, to God’s servants, and to the work of God is always God’s will.

Quote: If we give *ourselves* to God, we will have little problem giving our *substance* to God. [i.e., our *persons* and our *possessions*].⁷

Trans: Rich generosity comes from dedication to the Lord and dedication to those who serve the Lord.

VI. .6 Rich generosity is an expression of God’s grace in us.

- A. If the Corinthian church had experienced the same work of God’s grace among them as what the Macedonians had experienced, then they should also be generous; i.e., they should get going with this offering.
- B. Titus was Paul’s representative in Corinth, and it was his responsibility to collect this offering. The people at Corinth had volunteered to contribute to this offering about a year before this, but they had not done anything about it; they had not yet collected their funds.
- C. Paul urged Titus to “complete this grace in you,” i.e., he expected Titus to collect this offering. They had begun the process but not finished it. The next time Titus shows up, they should be ready to give him the money they had collected.

App: It’s one thing to say that you’ll contribute to an offering; it’s another thing to open your wallet, to write a check, to send the funds. Paul is saying here, “Write the check.” Complete your generosity by making the contribution.

VII. .7 Rich generosity comes from abundant grace.

- A. Paul lists several things the Corinthian church had an abundance of—faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, and love. They were overflowing in these areas, but they lacked the grace of generosity.

⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 656.

And the Corinthians could have been generous. In contrast to the poverty in Macedonia, the city of Corinth was flourishing financially at this time in history. The city of Corinth was a great trade center, and many of the citizens were prosperous. They were not experiencing persecution for their faith, and they were not in dire poverty. So there was no excuse for them to neglect their part in this offering.

- B. .7end Paul urges them to abound in the grace of giving as well. Again he calls the offering “this grace” or “this gracious act.” If they had enjoyed God’s abundant grace in these other areas, they ought also to be gracious in their giving.

App: I suppose some people think that, because they have other spiritual virtues, they don’t need to be financially generous. Because they excel in things like faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, and love, that means that they don’t have to give generously.

But we can’t use our strengths to excuse our weaknesses. Really, these spiritual gifts ought to motivate us to be richly generous. They should not provide excuses for not giving.

- C. So now Paul is exhorting them to follow through on their promise to help out with this offering. He’s expecting them to “abound” in their giving because they’ve experienced God’s grace.
- D. One last time, Paul refers to participation in this offering as a “grace”—“abound in this grace also.” When we have received grace, we must give graciously. *Grace received prompts grace given.*
- E. And note that this is a command—“*see that you* abound in this grace also.” They had neglected this responsibility, and now they needed to fulfill their obligation.

App: All of us ought to be abounding in the grace of giving. One of the results of experiencing God’s grace in our lives is rich generosity toward others. If God’s grace has been abundant in our lives, we ought to be willing to share abundantly with others. If God has gifted us in various ways, then we should be generous.

I’m thankful that many in our church are generous givers. Many give generously, sacrificially, regularly, and cheerfully. Our church and other churches and agencies benefit greatly from the generosity of the people of our church.

But perhaps Paul would say to some of us the same thing he had to say to the Corinthians—“see that you abound in this grace also.” Participate in the grace of giving. If you’ve received rich grace, then be richly gracious in generosity.

Perhaps some here today need to be encouraged toward gracious generosity. Perhaps the example of the Macedonian believers and their amazing generosity in spite of their poverty and persecution can spur us on to more gracious and generous giving.

Paul says nothing here about the amount anyone gave. He’s not really concerned about the size of the gift; he’s concerned about the attitude of giving. Those who have experienced the grace of God are joyfully generous in their giving. They give voluntarily, without having to be prodded, coerced, or reminded. They give sacrificially at times, even beyond what would be a reasonable amount, beyond what they can normally afford. They give because they want to participate in serving God’s people. Richly generous people appreciate the grace that they have received, and they want to give richly to support those in need and those serving God.

I hope that all of us abound in rich generosity.