

Generous God, Generous People
2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Prayer: *Father, we read the Scripture when we gather Sunday, and talk about it, because we want to hear from you, and listen to you. We know the Bible is your words to us. What we really want is you. So may your words be spoken, in the way that you would say them. May your Holy Spirit give us ears to hear, and minds to understand, and hearts to love you. Amen.*

Turn to 2 Corinthians 8. This letter from the apostle says much about the generosity of God. God is always giving something to his people, God is showing kindness to his people.

2 Cor 1:3-4 *Praise be to God, the Father of compassions and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.*

2 Cor 2:14 *Thanks be to God, who always leads us in Christ's triumphal procession.*

3:6 *God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.*

4:1 *Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.*

4:15 *This is all for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.*

5:14-15 *Christ's love compels us; One died for all, that those who live should live for him.*

5:18 *All of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself, and gave us this ministry.*

7:6 *God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.*

This is the third of three sermons on giving, from 2 Cor 8-9. And how does this long section on giving begin? 8:1 *And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.*

These two chapters are written to persuade reluctant givers, make no mistake. But also to educate reluctant givers. Giving to the collection begins with the grace of God not people, the generosity of God not people. God's grace made the Macedonian churches remarkably generous.

In the middle, in 8:16, we read this: *Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you.* Titus was concerned for the Corinthians, that's good, but this line is about God's heart more than Titus's heart. *Thanks be to God.* God put concern into the heart of Titus. Collections depend on God's help in ways like that.

Now let's look at the end of this giving section, 9:14-15. *And in their prayers for you (you Corinthians, and assuming you give), their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.* ¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

If the Corinthians respond to these chapters and give generously, and it seems in Romans 15 written later that they did, who exactly generous?

The Corinthians believers will have given *because of the surpassing grace God has given* them. *Thanks be to God, for his indescribable gift!* If there is a collection, God has been generous.

I am not beginning this sermon with the generosity and kindness of God just because it is a happy truth. It is a happy truth, but there is more in this Scripture than that. If God's people will give to God's collections in the way God has in mind, God's people need to understand solidly that God is generous and God gives freely.

God is faithful, and that is important, but God's faithfulness is not what this Scripture keeps repeating to us. God gives, and he gives, and he keeps giving, and that is what this Scripture keeps repeating to us. He gives grace, he gives concern, he gives so that we can give.

2 Cor 9:6 How Much would you like to harvest? *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows blessings will also reap blessings.* Putting our offering in the collection is planting seed, it is sowing. That's the picture here.

It is possible to put too much seed in the ground, so that not all the plants can grow, no room. Other than that, however, if you plant twice as much seed, you'll get about twice as much crop.

This is us deciding how much we will put in the offering. How much should we give? When we are asking ourselves that, says God to us, *remember this: Whoever sows sparingly, will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows blessings will also reap blessings.*

When we decide how much to give, says God, don't think planting. Think harvesting. Don't think, "how much should I plant?" Think, "how much would I like to harvest?" There is a direct cause and effect between how much we give and how much we harvest. The issue is not the percentage of income, or the number of dollars; the issue is generosity.

Some kind of real harvest ties directly to our giving. I do not know the currency, but it is real. If we are not generous with our planting, God won't be generous with the harvest of blessing; if we are generous with our planting, he will be generous with the blessing that comes in response. Jesus called it laying up treasure in heaven. When you plant, i.e. give, think "harvest."

9:7 Let's enjoy giving *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* In your own heart, with what amount would you like to bless others? How much seems good to you? Give that much.

Let's not give because we feel guilty, or wishing we were giving less. God is nothing like that with us. He's not interested in us worshipping him that way. He's does not want us taking care of each other that way. Give this way: "God has blessed me, God's been gracious to me, and now I can pass God's goodness to someone else."

But this Scripture is NOT asking for anything heroic. This is NOT Jesus saying to the wealthy young ruler, “Sell all you have, give it to the poor, and come follow me.” This is not that. Rather, given your income, and your needs, and keeping your harvest in mind, what seems good to you? Give that much. Don’t stress this.

9:8 God will make sure we can keep giving *And God is able to grace you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

God’s grace to us, 2 parts: we will always have what we need, and have enough to serve him. When we write out the cheque, God is saying to us, “I will take care of you, and make sure you can keep doing lots of this.” When we put money in the offering plate, or walk to the offering box, God is saying to us, “I will take care of you, and make sure you can keep doing lots of this.”

Are we going to get rich? No. At least a little bit? No, not in this Scripture. *Having all you need, you will abound in every good work.* We will have all we need, and we’ll be like the Macedonians, we will be rich in generosity, and God will make sure we can keep giving.

9:9 Eternal Righteousness *As it is written: “They scattered, they gave to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”* This line is from Psalm 112, and it describes righteous people.

“Scattering” is how they planted seed in the ancient world. God’s people scatter blessings, which means we give to the poor, we are planting so we can harvest. As a result, our righteousness endures forever. People, we can’t take the money with us. We brought none into the world, and we leave with none.

But if, while we’re here, we scatter it, we give to the poor, then we get righteousness that lasts for eternity. I do not know what enduring righteousness looks like exactly. But the point of the Scripture is this: the money won’t last, regardless, but the righteousness will. If we are generous now, then we get a righteousness that lasts forever.

9:10 God will make sure we can keep giving *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.*

9:8 said we would have all we need, and have enough to share. That was God’s 2 part grace to us. Verse 10 mostly says the same thing again. Remember that in this paragraph, what we give is planting seed so that we get a harvest. Putting money in the offering is planting seed, and the harvest is eternal righteousness.

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. We have food at home. And we have seed to spare to put in the offering. Both of those are God’s grace. We have bread for food, we have food to eat. God supplies that. *He supplies bread for food.*

We also have enough to put some in the offering. In this Scripture, that is our seed, we are planting. That seed came from God. God wants us to plant generously, so God gives enough to spare, seed to plant, as well as giving us food to eat.

God will supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. In this Scripture, God has no interest whatsoever in making us rich. However poor or rich you are now, in this Scripture it will stay that way.

But, if you want to give more, God will make sure you stay fed and have enough to give more. If you want to give enough so that you have a respectable harvest of righteousness, God will supply your seed and will increase your store of seed and in that way enlarge the harvest of your eternal righteousness.

In my teens and early 20s I gave faithfully, then for a few years I stopped. At this time of year I got an income tax receipt back from the church. I was startled at how little I had given. I was living alone, not making much, paying off two different loans. I was getting by, but did not have any extra. But I was embarrassed by how little I had given, so I upped it a little bit.

After 3 months or so I realized that this has not made any difference to the rest of cash flow, so I increased my giving a bit more. I will still not giving 10%, but I was past 5% by now. After a few more months, again I did not feel like I had less, so I increased again.

I got interested. I kept doing this for several years, until I was giving noticeably more than 10% of my income. I was giving an amount that would have seemed ludicrous to me at the start of this process. And I still didn't feel any increase in money pressure. It was tight, same as always.

I don't know what your story will be. I did not know this Scripture at the time, but this Scripture seems to me to be saying something pretty close to that.

Vv8,10 God is able to grace you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. Why don't you experiment with God a little bit?

9:11 What happens if we decide to give? *You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

We will be enriched so we can be generous. That equals "abounding in every good work," v8. It is the same as being supplied with seed to plant, so our harvest of righteousness will be enlarged.

There is no interest in this Scripture in believers giving so that their lifestyles can be easier because they have more money. No interest in that.

We give so we can be generous like God is, and he makes sure we'll have enough to be generous. This Scripture promises us that we'll have all we need, we'll have bread to eat, not more than that for ourselves. But lots of seed to plant!!

Now let's jump to v13: *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience of your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.*

Confessing the gospel of Christ, that Jesus is Lord and Saviour, has obedience tied to it. If we say "Jesus is Lord and Saviour," then we have things to obey. In this verse, "obedience" and "generosity" are tied together.

Others will praise God for our obedience to the gospel and our generosity in sharing. That is, our obedience to the gospel of Christ IS our generosity in sharing with the Lord's people. If we are not sharing generously with the Lord's people, we are not obeying the gospel of Christ. If we are not sharing generously, our confession of the gospel of Christ is a bit hollow, empty.

9:11-15 Thanks to God for his generosity This call to give to the collection, 2 Cor 8-9, ends with a solid emphasis of thanksgiving to God. It is in every verse.

V11 - *You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

¹² *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.* ¹³ *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.* ¹⁴ *And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.* ¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

Paul is fighting something here. In Greek-Roman society in the 1st century, when a person with money shared with a poorer person, the one who got the money became a "client," it was called, and the client was obligated to thank and honour the "patron," that was the person who gave the money. The wealthy gave to get that public thanks and honour. They only gave to people who could give honour and thanks back to them.

In 2 Cor 8-9, Paul is saying, "not so in the church, not so in the kingdom of God." God and no one else is the Giver, all the thanks and praise goes to Him. No believer is ever the patron and another believer the client. Not ever. No believer is every *anyone's* patron.

That is why 8:1 began with the grace God gave, and 8:16 thanked God for putting concern in the heart of Titus, and that's why we've heard so much about the graces of God in these two chapters. God gives to us because he is generous, and in return we thank and praise him. It shall all produce thanks and honour toward God.

Last week I spoke of the three graces of God. I will close today by listing those again.

First grace: God puts in our lives who are eager to encourage us about giving. This comes from 8:16. “Thanks be to God who put the same concern in the heart of Titus that I have for you.” God put that in Titus’ heart, and God puts people like that in our lives.

Second grace: God makes us generous This comes from 8:1-2, which described the grace that God gave the Macedonian churches. They were financially poor, but they had a wealth of generosity. That’s a grace God gives.

Third grace: Seed to plant 9:10 God supplies seed to the sower, he will supply and increase your store of seed so that you can be generous on every occasion. Every penny that goes into our offering is this seed that God supplies to the planter.

When we put money in the offering plate, or when we walk to the offering box, God is saying to us, “I will take care of you, and I will make sure you can keep doing lots of this.”

And this is what the Scripture tells us after we gave, on the way back from the offering box: V11 - Your ... generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 12 This service that you perform is ... overflowing in expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of this service of yours, the proof of your obedience ... others will praise God ... 14 And ... their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! Amen.