



Gracious Generosity Series - Part One
The Marks of Generosity
2 Corinthians 8:1-15
Westport Christian Church
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Have you heard that story of the guy who died and was being given a tour of heaven and he saw a friend of his drive by in a beautiful Mercedes. He said, "Boy, this is great!" "Oh, yes," Peter said, "your friend was really generous on earth, we had a lot to work with. Your transportation up here depends on your generosity down there." Then Peter gave him his transportation: A Honda motor scooter. He said, "Wait a minute, he gets a Mercedes, I get a scooter?" "That's right, it's all we had to work with." The guy drove off in a huff. A week later Peter saw this guy all smiles and said, "You feeling better now?" The guy said, "Yea, I have ever since I saw my preacher go by on a skate board!"

For the next couple of weeks we are going to look at the subject of gracious generosity. Our text today comes from 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability,

they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.

But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. 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. I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.

But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality--at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK." (2 Cor 8:1-15 NASU)

As Christians, our lives are marked by the way we reflect Christ. One of the questions I often have to ask myself is this one, "Am I living my life such that if I meet someone new today they will be able to recognize that I am a Christian." You see, the way we live our lives reflects what we value, and this includes how we use our resources. I think it's fair to say that for the most part, the way we spend our time and resources does not reflect to those around us our identity as Christians. Despite the messages that are thrown at us each day through commercials and advertisements, we do not exist simply to consume as much as we can and get as much pleasure as we can while we are here on earth. We have a higher purpose. We need to know and understand our life purpose—our vision or mission or calling—and then spend our resources in ways that are consistent with this purpose or calling. As those who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of our lives, we are to follow the example that

He has set before us

In our text today, Paul wrote to encourage members of this congregation to share their material possessions with needy brothers. His whole approach and argument was a demonstration of the revolutionary approach to motivation. Paul held no rallies and called for no pledges. He sent no letters filled with underlined appeals. Paul set up no “buy a brick” campaigns; he put no red ribbon threaded through a giant thermometer to creep upward toward Paul’s campaign goal. There was not even an every-member canvass. In fact, Paul seems to have found an entirely different way.

If we keep in mind these two factors, that “giving” is really sharing to meet needs in the body of Christ, and that New Testament giving focuses on people needs, we will be able to better understand what Paul teaches us here.

It is a true statement to make that the character of generosity is lacking in our society today. We live in a time where so many ask or think, “what will I get out of it.” Now, sure parents are usually generous to their children, but not in all cases. Usually within the family most people are generous, but not always. Therefore, I feel safe to say that very few people will help someone in need whom they do not know.

There are marks of generosity that should be evident in the lives of believers. The first is the mark of . . .

I. Joy

Paul wrote that the church here in Corinth had inexpressible joy! He wrote, “begging us with much urging for the favor of participation.” The Today Living Bible puts it this way, “They begged us to take the money so they could share in the joy of helping the Christians in Jerusalem.” (TLB)

Have you ever given to a cause you thought worthy? How did you feel? Did you have a sense of joy? I want to dispel a myth before I go any farther. There are some who say that you shouldn’t have joy or feel good when you give or do something for others. They teach that if you feel

good then it's a sin because your being proud or boastful.

Right here in our text Paul wrote these Christian in Corinth had joy! They felt good about contributing to others. It's not a sin to feel good about helping others. It becomes a sin when all you want to do is brag about it, that's boastfulness, that arrogance.

The key to their joy is found in the fifth verse where we read, "but they first gave themselves to the Lord." They gave to others in need because they had first given themselves over to the Lord. "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:17-18 NIV)

I know many people including preachers who serve at church, yet they don't have joy. They see it as a job. They see it as they have too and anytime we have this mind set we have too, very seldom if ever, will there be any joy in serving.

These people didn't see this opportunity as they had to do it, they saw it as an opportunity to make a difference, to help someone, to reach out with the love of Jesus! And the reason they saw it that way is because they had first given themselves over to the Lord! Their joy, their love flowed out of their love for God. The love that a person has for God is seen in the actions they do. Remember, you can give without love, but you can't love without giving!

Our example of this is found in Jesus Himself. Jesus left the glories of heaven to come to this earth to bring you the gift of salvation. It says though He was rich, yet He became poor for your sake. Through Jesus' giving, we become rich beyond our understanding. Because we have become rich in Christ, we have two options. You can keep all that's been given to you and not experience this kind of joy or you can give it away because it has first been given to you!

The church, Christians should exemplify generosity.

II. Commitment

It's easy to start something, but many times hard to finish? I made the

decision I need to drop some weight so I made the choice that every day, I was going to exercise. This is only the 10th and I'm struggling to keep going!

The truth is, many of us are in the same boat. We start off strong with great intentions, but after we get into it a while it's tough to keep going.

Paul was encouraging the people here in Corinth to complete what they stated off to do. He says finish it out! One thing I think would help us to finish out is to understand who we are doing this work, this giving for. It is for God. It's not for the preacher, the elders, this church, it's totally for God.

In his autobiography, Col. Harland Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame says that he was always a God-fearing man. In every venture he gave God a tenth of the profits. Yet he knew that if he died, God probably wouldn't take him to heaven. Worried, he traveled to Australia to a special church convention for the answer. He didn't find it.

One day, Sanders was walking down a street in Louisville, Kentucky, when Rev. Waymon Rodgers of Louisville's Evangel Tabernacle invited him to some evangelistic services. Several days later, Sanders went. At age 79, he claimed the promises of God's word. "When I walked out of that church that night, I knew I was a different man. All my tithing and good deeds had never given me the sense of God's presence that I knew then," he says.

When we make a total commitment to God then completing what we have set out to do will not only be easier, but much more fulfilling!

It boils down to our willingness. Paul was pleased that the Corinthians had earlier expressed a strong desire to help. But the Corinthians needed to carry their intentions through to completion, "according to your means." This is an important factor in grace giving. Paul said it again. "If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have." God will use those who are willing no matter how large or how small the gift.

One need not be a millionaire for his or her contribution to be

significant. Even the gifts of those who have little and can give little are acceptable. What God is concerned with is the willingness: the love that motivates the believer to share.

In the book of Luke we read, "And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."
Luke 21:1-4 NASU

Conclusion: As Christian we are to be the most generous people in the world, but some time I feel we fall short because we don't understand that our giving is a reflection of our faith in Christ. We fall short because we don't understand that everything we have belongs to God in the first place.

Marks of gracious generosity are seen in the joy of giving and the commitment to follow through.

A little boy visiting his grandparents was given his first slingshot. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit his target. As he came back to Grandma's back yard, he spied her pet duck. On an impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit, and the duck fell. The boy panicked. Desperately he hid the duck in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you, Johnny?" And she whispered to him, "Remember the duck" So Johnny did the dishes. Later Grandpa asked if the children wanted to go fishing. Grandma said, "I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally smiled and said, "That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it." Again she whispered, "Remember the duck." Johnny stayed while Sally went fishing. After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and his sisters, he couldn't stand it any longer. He confessed to Grandma that he'd killed the duck. "I know, Johnny," she said, giving him a hug. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave of you."

So many times we don't surrender our self over to God because satan is standing beside us saying "remember . . . " Don't allow your self to be a slave to him. Don't allow him to take away the joy that available to you. Don't allow him and the world to hold you back from being a gracious giver.

Amen.