

How to Become a Generous Giver

Rich Nathan

April 6 & 7, 2019

The Story Continues

2 Corinthians 8-9

Do you know anyone in your family or among your really close relations that you would consider to be really generous? My dad was a generous guy. There was almost nothing that he had that he wouldn't share with someone else. He and my stepmother had a series of young people living in their home while the young person went to school. These kids never paid rent.

My dad's approach was "what's mine is yours". Do you want to use the condo I have in Florida? Here are the keys. Do you want to use my car? Go ahead. You don't like the dessert that I made? Don't worry. I've got a pie coming out of the oven.

My son and daughter-in-law celebrated their honeymoon at my father's condo in Florida. They broke my dad's TV. Do you know what my dad's reaction was to his grandson breaking his TV? Forget about it.

Do you know anyone in your family or among your close friends who you would say is really generous? How did they make you feel? Welcome? Certainly. At ease? Comfortable? Encouraged? Probably really thankful.

Do you know anyone in your family or among your close relations who you would say is really tight-fisted? Withholding? Every gift comes with strings attached. How did that stingy person make you feel? If you're like me, you probably wanted to say, "Just leave me alone. The last thing in the world I want to do is ever be beholden to you."

You know, the term "generosity" has an interesting origin.

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Generosity

The prefix *gen* in generosity is the same prefix we find in genetics or generation or the book of Genesis – and up until the 17th century, it referred to a person's origin or birth or ancestry. Generosity, up until the 17th century, meant "of noble birth". If you were well born or of an aristocratic heritage, you were called generous.

After the 17th century, generosity was not so much linked to your family of origin, but instead, generosity meant that you had the traits associated with nobility. You might not be of noble birth, but if you displayed a noble spirit by your open-handedness, by

your liberality in giving, by your willingness to share your possessions and help others who are in need.

Next week, we're going to have a celebration service for Palm Sunday weekend. I ask all of you who are regular attendees at Vineyard Columbus, all of you who are members of the church, come prepared to be generous – to have the spirit of nobility – fill out a three year pledge commitment card. As we've been urging you to pray and determine before the Lord what you will give over the next six or so years to accomplish four goals.

Slide [words in brackets are Rich's notes]

- [Start] New Campuses [we want to start 5 new campuses in the next 6 years throughout Central Ohio]
- [Build] New Buildings [the campuses need to be housed. Likely in renovated or rented space]
- [Raise up] New Leaders [we're going to start a Pastors' Residency Program to raise up the next generation of leaders in a focused, intentional way]
- [Finally, to send out] New Missionaries

So, come next week prepared to make a three year pledge that goes beyond your normal giving here at the church. I've called today's talk "How to Become a Generous Giver." Let's pray.

Let me give you a bit of background to 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. The Apostle Paul was taking up a collection from Gentile churches for the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem and in Judea. The collection for poor believers in Jerusalem has been called one of the great enterprises of Paul's missionary career.

Paul begins his discussion of the collection by sharing:

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One myth of generous giving

Here's what we read in verse 1:

Slide 2 Corinthians 8:1

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

Grace is a key word that runs through 2 Corinthians 8-9. It's used 10 times in these two chapters. Grace means God's unmerited favor to us. When people are generous toward others, Paul takes it as clear evidence that these people have experienced the grace of God in their lives. Ten times when Paul discusses giving with the Corinthian church, he uses the word "grace". He wants to direct our attention to God who produces generosity in us.

What we see in these two chapters is the difference between a Christian perspective of people who do good and a non-Christian perspective of people who do good. Very often, someone who doesn't know Jesus will look at a Christian or watch a group of Christians relating and they'll say, "You know, these people are so nice." My mom always says, "Your friends are so nice. Where did you find such a nice group of people? They're all so polite. They're all so friendly."

But a Christian perspective is not that these people are naturally nice or that people are naturally generous. A Christian perspective is that the reason they are that way is because God's grace is at work in their lives.

Paul says, "I want to call your attention not to people, but to God. I want to call your attention not just to people's generosity, but to God's grace. The grace God has given that produces generosity."

Grace is the main spring for Christian giving. God's grace is like a fountain welling up in someone's soul. Back in verse 2 we read this:

Slide 2 Corinthians 8:2

² In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

When a person is touched by the grace of God, one of the clearest signs that God's grace is at work in someone's life is that a naturally stingy person suddenly becomes generous. A tight-fisted person suddenly becomes open-handed. You can tell, friend, when you've been touched by the grace of God by how open-handed you are with your stuff and your money.

One myth of generous giving is that people give because they're nice, because they are naturally that way. No. Generous people become generous because they were first touched by the grace of God.

Then Paul offers:

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Two examples of generous giving

Paul is trying to spur the Corinthians on toward generosity. Here before 2 Corinthians was written, Paul had talked with the Corinthians about this collection he was taking up for the Jews in Judea. He had heard a report from one of his emissaries, Titus, that the Corinthian church even though they promised to be generous hadn't done anything to turn the collection into a reality.

So, Paul wants to spur the Corinthians on. He's saying, "Come on, guys, let's get it in gear. I told you about the need. You said you wanted to do something about it, now let's do it!" In order to spur the Corinthians on, he offers two examples of generous giving. First, he offers:

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The example of the Macedonians: unexpected giving

This is what it says about these Macedonian believers.

Slide 2 Corinthians 8:2-3

² In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

Paul uses really strong language to describe the unexpected giving of the Macedonians. First of all, they gave out of extreme poverty. Literally, the Greek means "down to the depths" poverty. He's saying that the Macedonians, those Christians in the churches in Thessalonica, were much poorer than the Christians living in Corinth. They were scraping bottom. And what they gave was beyond their ability and again, the Greek here is really strong. Literally, the Macedonian churches in Thessalonica and Philippi gave contrary to their ability. What does it mean to give "contrary to your ability"? Contrary to your ability means that the proportion of a person's giving is out of sync with typical considerations people make as they decide to give. The Macedonians gave beyond common sense, in other words. Beyond what you would expect.

They didn't just give out of their fat. We expect to give out of our excess, out of our fat. When Christians are touched by the grace of God, they start cutting into muscle and bone.

I want to share with you a testimony of a woman who has now become a pastor on our staff, Amanda Nash. She talks of her experience of giving as a college student during our giving campaign to build the auditorium at Cooper Road.

Amanda's video

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The example of Jesus: unlimited giving

Here's what we read:

Slide 2 Corinthians 8:8-9

⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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 through his poverty might become rich.

Certainly, a part of what Paul was referring to by saying Jesus Christ was rich had to do with his eternal pre-existence with the Father. When he says that he became poor, he's talking about the Son stepping out of Heaven, taking on human flesh at a certain point in history, being born of a virgin.

When we think about Jesus becoming poor, we should think about God the Son growing up as an economically poor man. He grew up in poverty. We should also think about his rejection. He suffered a poverty of reputation, betrayal. He suffered poverty in his personal relationships. Suffering and agony – he suffered pain and poverty in his body. It all culminated with his death on the cross.

Paul holds up two examples of generous giving – generous giving by other Christians, generous giving by Jesus Christ – to spur the Corinthians and us on to generous giving. So we have

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- One myth of generous giving
- Two examples of generous giving

Paul gives us

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Three principles of giving

Are you familiar with the national motto of France? Liberty, equality, fraternity. The Apostle Paul gives us a similar motto regarding generous giving. Paul's motto would have been equality, integrity and generosity.

Let's look at these. When we're thinking about giving, Paul says the first principle is equality.

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The principle of equality

Slide 2 Corinthians 8:12-15

¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ 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, ¹⁵ as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

Paul speaks about equality here. He clearly doesn't mean financial equality – that is that every person ought to give exactly the same amount of money. Paul's talking about an equality of willingness. Every single Christian ought to be equally ready to give, equally willing to give, equally open-handed. What I have, I'm willing to share. Not only an equality of willingness, but an equality of sacrifice.

We all have different abilities to give. Some of us are wealthy. Some of us are like the Macedonians, “down in the depths” poor. Most of us are in the middle somewhere. Equality in the Christian church is not a matter of equal giving, but equal sacrifice. Those of us who make more ought to give more. That doesn't mean that smaller gift given by a poorer person is not as precious in the sight of Jesus as a large gift given by a wealthier member of our church.

Your child's gift of \$10 a year or a single mom's gift of \$10 a month is precious to the Lord. Equality is not that you all have to give the same amount in this giving campaign, but there's an equal willingness to give and an equal sacrifice in giving.

The second principle of generous giving is:

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The principle of integrity

Slide 2 Corinthians 8:20-24

²⁰ We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. ²¹ 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.

²² In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. ²⁴ Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

The Apostle Paul is really concerned that in giving instructions about the collection, talking to people about money, he's laying himself open to the accusation that this money is just going to his pocket. “We know, preacher, why you're talking to us about money. You can get a new Jag. You can live in a huge house. You can drive a fancy car

and wear a Rolex on your wrist.” Paul says, “I just want to make sure you understand that none of this money is going in my pocket.” Christian giving ought to be accompanied by absolute integrity in the handling of financial gifts.

Along with Titus who is coming for the collection, he’s sending along a brother who is praised by all the churches. Some people think that brother was the gospel writer, Luke. He says the Macedonian churches had chosen him. In the book of Acts, we find that there were seven other people chosen by various churches to accompany the money to Jerusalem. Integrity is fundamental to your Christian giving. You should always check out an organization and see what the financial controls are before you write a check.

Here at Vineyard Columbus we began to have our books audited more than a quarter of a century ago by outside auditors. And we made a promise to our members. Every year, if you come to our congregational business meeting, we’ll give you a copy of our audited financial statements. By the grace of God, we have received unqualified (clean) opinions for a quarter of a century.

The point is if we tell you that your pledge is going for these four targets – new campuses, new buildings, new leaders and new missionaries we’re not going to use it for other purposes.

So, the three principles of generous giving.

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- The principle of equality
- The principle of integrity

And finally,

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The principle of generosity

Slide 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ 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. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰ 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. The Apostle Paul speaks here about the generosity of God.

I looked up the phrase “God gave” and “God gives” and the “Lord gives” in a concordance recently. A concordance is a book that enables you to find every single Bible verse just using a particular word. So, you can look up every single Bible verse on your favorite subject, like dogs or wine or friends or having a glass of wine with your friend’s dog. Of course, this is all online now. But I found the phrase “God gave”, “God gives” and “the Lord gives” several hundred times in my concordance. There are hundreds of individual references in the Bible to God giving. You could say that the characteristic, perhaps the chief characteristic, of God in the Bible is that God is a giver. The God who reveals himself to us in the Scripture and in Jesus Christ is a generous giver.

We read that God gave the Promised Land to the Children of Israel. God gave the Children of Israel freedom from slavery in Egypt. God gave them manna in the wilderness to feed them. God gave the Children of Israel the Law on Mount Sinai. God gave women suffering with infertility like Sarah and Rachel and Hannah the gift of children. God gave David victory over Goliath. God gave Solomon wisdom. God gave Daniel knowledge and understanding. God gave Nehemiah favor in the eyes of the king. God gave Paul the gospel. God gave John the apostle a prophetic revelation that we read in the book of Revelation. God gave us his one and only Son. Through Jesus, the Son of God, God gave us the forgiveness of sins. God gives us peace. God gives eternal life to all who believe in Jesus. God gives us the right to be called a child of God. God gives us the church so we don’t have to do the Christian life alone. God gives through the church the knowledge and the good news of salvation to all who will receive it. God gives and gives and gives.

As a result of us experiencing God’s generosity, we ought to be generous.

Slide 2 Corinthians 9:7

⁷ 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.

God approves of, heartily supports the person who gives, not out of compulsion or begrudgingly, but generously and cheerfully because they've been the recipients of God's generosity.

Here's what I've observed over and over again about generous people. Generous people are happy people. You don't meet many grumpy givers. Grumpy people always find excuses and expenses that make it impossible for them to give. People who make giving a regular part of their lives are happy people.

Why is that? If you've got a closet full of clothes, will another sweater or another dress or pair of shoes make you happy? If you've got a jewelry box full of jewelry, will one more piece of jewelry make you happy? If you have a cell phone, will the latest upgrade for \$1000 make you happy? Making a difference in people's lives – that's what will make us happy.

Paul shared with us

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- One myth of generous giving
- Two examples of generous giving
- Three principles of generous giving

And finally

Slide

Four results of generous giving

The first result of generous giving is found in verses 10 and 11.

Slide 2 Corinthians 9:10-11

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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.

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You will be enriched

Paul tells us that when we give generously, we don't necessarily reap materially. Paul is not a TV evangelist promising that if you give a dollar, you'll get ten dollars back. Paul says if you give you'll reap a harvest of righteousness. What does that mean? I think Paul is perhaps thinking about the promises of Psalm 112 where we read this:

Slide Psalm 112:5-7

⁵ Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

⁶ Surely the righteous will never be shaken;
they will be remembered forever.

⁷ They will have no fear of bad news;
their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD.

A righteous person is a person in sync with God. They are living a submitted life to God. And a person who lives like that, it's not that they will never hear bad news. But they are not destroyed by bad news. They know that God is with them. They know they have God's approval on their lives. They keep short accounts with the Lord so the righteous person lives with a peaceful conscience and a calm heart.

One result of generous giving is you will be enriched and experience the harvest of a righteous person. And second,

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Needs will be met

Slide 2 Corinthians 9:12

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.

You know, brothers and sisters, if the result of this campaign is that we really are able to start five new campuses, Vineyard Columbus will have 10 campuses by 2025 or thereabouts. People's needs will be met all over the city. The result of a campus being planted where we currently don't have a presence, is that people will find Jesus. Christians will be discipled. Children will be raised in a Christian family. Marriages will get reconciled. Divorces will be prevented. Hungry people will be fed. Lonely people will be befriended. Depressed people will be encouraged. Guilty people will be liberated. Our city will be blessed.

The third result of generous giving:

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Prayers will be offered

Slide 2 Corinthians 9:14

¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

Paul sees this as a continual loop. We give to others and they pray for us. How many prayers have been offered to bless Vineyard Columbus by new people who have come to the church as a result of an older member's prior giving? But here's the most wonderful result of your generous giving.

Best of all,

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God will be praised

Slide 2 Corinthians 9:12

¹²This 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.

I think about all the people who will find Jesus as these new campuses. They will be worshipping him. I think about all the people who will find Jesus as a result of new missionaries being sent out and they'll worship Jesus. I think about generations of people who will praise the Lord and worship the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Can there be anything better than that people who are far from Jesus right now will become worshipers of Jesus because of our giving? Come next week prepared to make a generous three year pledge!

Let's pray.

How to Become a Generous Giver

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The Story Continues
2 Corinthians 8-9

- I. One myth of generous giving
- II. Two examples of generous giving
 - a. The example of the Macedonians: unexpected giving
 - b. The example of Jesus: unlimited giving
- III. Three principles of generous giving
 - a. The principle of equality
 - b. The principle of integrity
 - c. The principle of generosity
- IV. Four results of generous giving
 - a. You will be enriched
 - b. Needs will be met
 - c. Prayers will be offered
 - d. God will be praised