

**Freedom - Week 3**  
**2 Corinthians 8-9**  
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So I heard a story this week about three guys who were on a sailing trip on the open ocean when all of a sudden a storm hit, capsized the boat, and washed them up on a remote island. They assessed their situation and the first guy said, “The storm blew us way off course. There are no shipping lanes anywhere near us. This is an uncharted island; we have no hope of being rescued.” He began to cry. The second guy looked around said, “This is going to be a long, slow death, we’re not going to be able to find any food on this island. We are going to starve.” He began to cry. The third guy wasn’t fazed and said, “I’m not worried at all. They’re going to find us.” The other two men rubbed their eyes and said, “How can you be so confident?” He responded, “I give a lot of money to my church.” The other two were just confused and said, “What do you mean? You don’t really think God is going to save you because you give to the church, do you?” He said, “Oh no, I don’t think God is going to do anything special. But I can promise you this - if my tithe check isn’t in the offering plate for two consecutive weeks, my pastor *is going to come find me.*”

We have been talking about finances and generosity the last few weeks. There is no doubt that people are prompted to give for different reasons. Sometimes people give because it’s how they were raised; sometimes people give out of guilt and obligation; other times people give out of great joy and delight – just excited for the opportunity to be a part of what God is doing. The Bible tells us “**God loves a cheerful giver**” 2 Corinthians 9:7. Today, I want to talk about the heart of giving. Because ultimately giving is not so much about the needs of a church or the needs of a nonprofit organization. It’s about your own heart before the Lord. There is a family in our life-group who has a three-year-old son. Little Gavin came to his mom this last week and said, “Uh-Oh!” His mom asked, “What happened, honey?” Gavin said, “I ate my quarter.” They took him in for an **x-ray**...and sure enough, **this is what they saw**. Some people will go to great lengths to hold on to their money.

In the passage we are going to be studying today, we are going to see some people who went to great lengths to give! If you have your Bibles, will you turn to 2 Corinthians 8 with me? As you are turning there, let me set the stage. Paul planted this church several years prior to writing this letter. So there are a lot of newer Christians in this congregation. And they got word that there was a famine in Jerusalem and a lot of Christians were in great need. So Paul is writing to talk to them about giving above and beyond their normal giving in order to help support this special project. As we read, we are going to see five truths about giving:

- Generosity is a privilege.**
- Generosity makes us more like Jesus.**
- Generosity invites God’s blessing.**
- Generosity is the reason for God’s blessing.**
- Generosity leads to people praising God.**

2 Corinthians 8:1-4 **And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 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.** Paul is saying, "It's not like all of these Christians are millionaires and are giving out of their excess. In actuality, they are impoverished and they gave even though they have so little." And they didn't have to be forced or prodded or begged to give, **they urgently pleaded for the privilege** of giving. They had a contrarian and counterintuitive approach. They truly believed that **Generosity is a privilege**. Giving wasn't a burden, but a blessing. There was a time in the Old Testament where the people really caught this spirit, too. Take a look at what we read in Exodus 36, when the people were making contributions to help build the tabernacle. **"The leaders told Moses, 'The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done.' Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: 'No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.' And so the people were restrained from bringing more."** Exodus 36:5-6 Now that is a true miracle. Have you ever heard of a preacher say, **"Restrain the people from bringing more."** I have colleagues in ministry who pastor churches, and when they preach on finances, a lot of their people just don't show up for those weeks. They don't want to hear about it; they don't want to give. *These people* were so eager to give that they had to be restrained from giving. I've sensed the same heart around here. After the first week of preaching I had a wonderful woman in our congregation who is a widow come up to me and say that it was hard for her to tithe when she lost her husband, because their income was 1/3 of what it was when he was alive. But she said, "I put God first, and he has provided." Then she said, "I'm excited about giving extra to this vision." That is literally the widow's mite. So incredible. I had a family with 12 people in their household say they were committed to giving to this vision. I had a family say, "This is our first time back at this church in over a year. We're excited about this. We are going to give." Such an incredible heart and spirit. I am so humbled and honored to be a part of it. First we see that giving is a privilege.

Next: **2 Corinthians 8:9 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.** Paul is saying, "Take a moment and remember what Jesus did for you." Spiritually speaking, every one of us was bankrupt and destitute. And Jesus, who had all the wealth in the universe, saw our condition, laid aside his wealth, glory, majesty and power, and became poor. And it is through his sacrifice and generosity that we can become rich. Jesus is the most generous man to ever live. Therefore **Generosity makes us more like Jesus**. In fact, it would not be a stretch to conclude that if we are not yet truly generous, we are not yet like Jesus.

I have a friend named Joy who was worshipping at church on a Sunday a few years ago. And she noticed a family in front of her who looked like they might have some needs. She introduced herself, talked with them, prayed with them, got their contact, and then said, "I'll see if I can help you out a little bit." She thought, "I'll contribute part of what they need." She looked me in the eye and said, "I felt like God spoke to me that very moment and said, 'Joy, what if I found out about your needs I said to you, *'I'll see if I can help you out a little bit.'*" Because God had been generous to take care of all of her needs, she went ahead and took care of all of their needs.

Not long ago, Harvard Sociologist **Juliet Schor** published a book entitled *The Overspent American*. Her fascinating research showed that in the 1950's and 60's, American consumers measured their standard of living by that of their neighbors. This is where we got the popular saying, "keeping up with the Jones." But we don't do that anymore. Do you know who she concluded we compare ourselves to today? People we see on TV, fictional people who live in gorgeous houses and make unrealistic amounts of money. That's who we compare ourselves to. That's a recipe for disaster.

The Bible says we should only compare ourselves to one person. We should only have one ultimate standard: Jesus! Because he was generous, we should be generous. I have a friend who, instead of keeping a cross around his neck, takes a small cross and puts it in his wallet, to remind himself every time he pulls out his credit card that his bank account should look like sacrificial .....love of Christ. Isn't that inspiring?! Generosity makes us more like Jesus. Let's keep reading to learn more.

2 Corinthians 9:6 **Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.** He's talking like an expert farmer. If a farmer puts one kernel of corn in the ground, how many ears of corn should he expect? One. If he puts 100 seeds in the ground, he should expect 100 ears of corn. If he puts 1,000 seeds in the ground, he should expect 1,000 ears of corn. What you sow is what you reap. And Paul is saying ... that's not just how it works in the field, that's how it works in the kingdom. So often, when we think about giving, we give because we see a need and want to meet the need. Paul is saying that we ought to give not just because other people have needs, but because we have needs! **Generosity invites God's blessing.** God blesses people who honor him with their finances by giving to the kingdom.

It says this in Proverbs 3:9-10 **Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.** This is not health, wealth and prosperity gospel, it's simply the way God works. These are God's words, not mine. Think about what he says in Malachi 3:8, 10 **8 "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings** (I've heard someone say, "Tithing isn't considered generosity; tithing is called not stealing from God!) Generosity is only above what is required. God says, **10 "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."**

I'm going to be honest with you. I kind of struggle with this passage because I am so opposed to the way of thinking that is transactional and rules-oriented with God. I run away from that. But I also can't avoid what I see here. God is saying, in no uncertain terms, that those who put him first with their finances will be blessed. And people I've known who have begun putting God first in their finances (even when they didn't know how they were going to make it happen) have a testimony of seeing God's outrageous and undeniable favor on their lives.

Keren and I have always given above a 10% tithe...and I don't know how to explain it, but we feel like God's favor and blessing is literally chasing us down. That's one of the reasons, over the next couple of years, Keren and I are committed to giving more than ever before. Yes of course we believe in what God is doing in this place, but we want to be challenged to new levels of giving and sacrifice and faith. Every time we've taken a step, he has been faithful beyond description. And we are excited to see how he's going to do that again.

I'll tell you a fun story: I remember about eight years ago when the iPad came out. I really wanted one. They cost \$699. And I had just enough discretionary money in my bank account to afford it. But I also knew of some missionaries who were planting a church in Japan, to share the love of Jesus with people who had never heard about it. And I thought to myself, "what matters more here - me having a new toy, or people hearing the gospel for the first time." Honestly, it was such an easy decision. I gave \$750 to support that mission work. I didn't tell anyone about it. And I am not kidding when I tell you the next day, I walked into my office, and there is a brand new iPad – the very one I wanted – sitting on my desk. A gift from a friend. \$699, plus sales tax – basically the exact amount that I gave. And I totally understand that someone could say: "Dan, that's just anecdotal; that's just coincidence. I get that." Maybe once. Maybe twice. I have dozens and dozens and dozens of stories just like this. Generosity invites God's blessing.

Take a look at 2 Corinthians 9:10-11 **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. 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.** God will not only supply what we need, he says that we will be **enriched in every way**, and he says this is all for a reason! He is going to supply our needs and enrich us **so that you can be generous on every occasion**. Why does God bless us? Why does God give us so much? Not simply so that we can be comfortable and live with margin and excess! He gives us so much so that we can in turn be generous on every occasion. Giving not only invites blessing, **Generosity is the reason for God's blessing!** That's an easy lesson to forget.

Dr. Peter Marshall was the chaplain to the U.S. Senate. He was a remarkable man. In fact, a film about his life was nominated for an Academy Award. He once had a man come to him and say, "I have a problem. I have been tithing for some time now. It wasn't too bad when I was making \$20,000 a year. I could afford to give \$2,000 away. But, now I make \$500,000, and there is just no way I can afford to give away \$50,000 a year." Dr. Marshall nodded and said, "I understand, let's pray." He prayed, "Dear Lord, this man has a problem, and I pray that you will help him. Please, reduce his salary back to the place where he can afford to tithe."

Friends, for many of us, God has given us abundance. We have margin and excess. And God's word reminds us that one of the reasons God has entrusted us with these resources is so that we would be a blessing to him and others! Remember what Deuteronomy 8:17-18 says "**You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.**" What we have we have because God has given it to us. And he has blessed us not so that we can indulge ourselves, but so that we can be a blessing to others!

Let's go back to 2 Corinthians one more time. There is one more important lesson that we see here. 9:12-13 **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. 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.** Did you see that, Paul is saying, because of your generosity, **others will praise God.** So the last take away from the passage is pretty straight forward: **Generosity leads to people praising God.** This is why we give. We already know how good God is, we know how much he has done for us. We are grateful and our hearts are full of thanks. We want others to come to that same discovery and be able to worship God from the depths of their heart. This is the greatest return on investment in the world. People invest their resources in CDs and hope to get 2-3% return. Or they put their money in the stock market and hope to get 8-10% return. That's nice. But what about making an investment that actually results in other people coming into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ? What about an investment that changes lives? What about an investment that alters eternity? My own conviction is that there is nothing more worthy or compelling to invest into. Generosity leads to people praising God.

This is our heart behind the vision that we have been sharing here at the Creek the last two weeks. We said a few weeks ago that every once in a while we have to stop and ask this question, "What kind of Church does God want?" We want to be the sort of church that, knowing that Jesus is in our midst and sees everything and knows everything, is able to say, "Yes, that is exactly the kind of church I want." For us, we believe that a step to take to get there is **freedom**. We want to experience freedom from debt and freedom for impact.

We've been talking about this the last two weeks. If you've missed it, please get online and listen to the messages. But for the vision in a nutshell, here's what we've been sharing: First, for our guests, we are just glad you are here! We are not asking anything from you! For those who call this church home, who are actively a part of our ministry, would you prayerfully consider what it might look like to increase your generosity to this church for the next two years so that we can experience freedom from debt and freedom for impact. Here are the numbers:

**\$3,500,000 Debt Elimination.**

**\$3,000,000 building and technology upgrades.**

**\$500,000 mission partnerships.**

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**\$7,000,000** (in addition to our normal giving)

I know this is a big goal. But from my experience, God does not typically look at a person or a family or a church and say, "How much is in your budget? Let me give you a dream that matches your bank account." Instead he says, "Let me give you a dream that stretches your faith and requires new levels of faith and sacrifice ... and as you trust me, I'll take care of the resources." This goal will stretch us! But as we see this vision become a reality, we will be healthy financially and more poised for impact than we have ever been as a church family!

At a practical level, everything that is given above the normal offering will go first to debt elimination. That's our top priority. No one has to give any special designation. All giving will

go first to meeting our normal budget's needs. And then everything additional will go to accomplishing this freedom vision. Finally, some people are hearing about this goal for the church to become debt free and are saying, "I want that as a family." We are starting Financial Peace University in just a few weeks. Please sign up!

We began today by looking at this verse: "**God loves a cheerful giver**" 2 Corinthians 9:7. No one should give out of obligation. No one should give out of pressure or guilt. But to the extent we feel led to give, it's our way of saying to God: "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! I owe you everything. I am excited to honor you and trust you in this small way with my resources. And as I give, break the power that materialism has on my life, as I give, make me more like Jesus, as I give, I'm asking for your blessing on the rest of what I have, and as I give, I am asking for this investment to bring people into a saving relationship with you. And it's in that moment that we discover for ourselves the truths of Jesus' words when he said, "**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**" Acts 20:35.