

ZOOM

"THE GIFT FLOWS FROM GRACE" 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-24

This Week's Core Competency

Giving Away My Money – I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes. 2 Corinthians 8:7, *But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

So what is money and what is it for? The question no doubt has plenty of good answers. In their book intended to help couples talk about money matters, Ron and Judy Blue give three of them. First, money is a *tool*. "Scripture tells us in Job 41:11 that everything belongs to God. And, as King David put it in 1 Chronicles 29:14, everything we have comes from God's hand. Therefore, since our money ultimately belongs to God, every spending decision we make has spiritual implications. It doesn't matter whether we buy a bigger home, pay for sports camps and piano lessons, or make a financial contribution to our church or another charitable organization. All we are really doing is using money to accomplish or achieve a broader objective. Money is a tool."

Second, money is a *test*. "In Luke 16:10-11, Jesus tells his disciples that 'whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?' How we handle money, then, is a test of our faithfulness. Far more than a

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– Ron and Judy Blue

question of statistics or numbers, our financial management style reveals our true priorities. And as Jesus goes on to say, 'No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.'

Third, money is a *testimony*. "Matthew 5:13-16 points to our responsibility to be 'salt' and 'light' to those around us, letting our light shine so that 'they may see our good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.' Our spending habits are a direct reflection of our values and beliefs, and the way we use money sends a message to the world. People can see, at least to some extent, how we spend our money: it is evident in such things as the homes we live in, the entertainment we choose, the cars we drive, the clothes we wear, and the hobbies we pursue." If money is a tool, a test, and a testimony, the Blues recommend that we ask ourselves three questions. First, "Am I using my money—my tool—the way God wants me to?" Second, "Am I serving God or money?" Third, "Do my spending or giving habits bring glory to God?" (*Money Talks and So Can We*, 12-13). In other words, do my spending habits reflect what I believe about time and eternity?

On the other side of the cross, God gave Israel a mission. In Old Testament times God's people were obligated by the law to support the religious practices handed down to them from Moses; otherwise, they could not accomplish their national mission. The prophet Malachi condemned them for shirking their responsibility and challenged them to see what God would do if they would step up and give for the service of the house of their God (3:6-12). Paraphrasing verses 9-10, he told them, "stop robbing God; instead, bring the whole tithe to support the service of the temple as God commanded so that he can bless you" (vv. 9-10).

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On this side of the cross, God commanded the church to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). That command entails "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (evangelism) and "teaching them to obey" everything he commanded (spiritual formation). Moreover, it comes with a responsibility to do whatever obedience requires. In other words, it comes with a responsibility to support financially whatever the church does to see people become fully developing followers of Jesus Christ. Too bad we do not know exactly how churches in the first century did this. As much as we might like to review the operating budgets of the churches in Antioch and in Corinth, regrettably the New Testament does not contain the minutes of either congregation's finance committee. It does not tell us exactly how the earliest Christian congregations collected and disbursed their resources.

It does, however, describe various ways in which Christ's disciples responded to one of his commands. Jesus told his followers, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you. So you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:34). Acts 4:34, 35 tells us there were no needy persons among the first Christians because from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Acts 6:1-7 tells us that the first Christ followers provided for the material needs of widows in their midst. And Acts 11:27-29 tells us that Gentile Christians in Antioch sent aid to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem when severe famine spread over the entire Roman world in c. 47 A.D. 2 Corinthians 8-9 contains what Paul had to say nearly a decade later about Macedonian believers and to Corinthian believers regarding giving to meet the needs of their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ who were again doing without in Jerusalem.

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

2 Corinthians 8:1–24

1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most 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, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. 6 So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7 But just as you excel in everything-- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us-- see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

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 sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

10 And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. 11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. 12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to

what he 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. Then there will be equality, 15 as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

16 I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. 17 For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. 18 And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. 19 What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. 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 men.

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 fellow 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.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "brothers" in v. 1.
- * Circle "grace" in vv. 1, 6.
- * Underline "trial" and "poverty" in v. 2.
- * Bracket "service to the saints" in v. 4.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 7, 8.
- * Box "yet" indicating *contrast* in v. 9.
- * Circle "advice" in v.10.
- * Underline "finish the work" in v. 11.
- * Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 11.
- * Highlight v. 12.
- * Circle "equality" in vv. 13, 14.
- * Circle "the brother" in v. 18.
- * Circle "our brother" in v. 22.

day **2** **EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Paul tells his readers a lot in these verses, but what does he actually tell them to do? What two commands does he give them? (See vv. 7, 11.)

2. Paul uses the example of the Macedonian churches to challenge and inspire his readers. What makes the example set by the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea a good one to use?

3. What does their example suggest about income and the ability to give—the relationship of poverty or wealth to a person's willingness or ability to give?

4. Identify some traits of good giving from the example of the Macedonians.

5. He also uses the example of Jesus to motivate them. What makes Jesus' example a good one to use?

6. What two things make a gift acceptable to God? (See vv. 11, 12.)

7. Describe what Paul considered the "desired outcome" of Christian benevolence. (See vv. 13-15.)

8. Describe Paul's strategy to avoid criticism regarding the administration of the gift.

9. **Discussion:** Talk about the fact that the Macedonians "pleaded" with Paul for the opportunity to give.

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Chapters 8 and 9 of Paul's second canonical letter to the Corinthians concern a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem (on reasons for their poverty see Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on 2 Corinthians," 2017 ed., 82, www.soniclight.com). At the outset of his ministry to the Gentiles Peter, James, and John, those reputed to be pillars in the mother church, approved of what he was doing. They agreed that he and Barnabas should go to the Gentiles while they would go to the Jews. The only thing they asked Paul to do was to remember the poor, which he actually continued to do (Gal 2:9, 10). On his final trip to Jerusalem recorded in Acts 19:21-21:17 he sent a letter to the church at Rome. In it he told his readers, whom he apparently did not know personally, that he planned to stop and visit them on his future trip to Spain to make their acquaintance and secure their support for his ministry. He also wrote that he was on his way to Jerusalem with money for the poor that he himself intended to present to the Judean saints. "I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there," he said. "For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Ro 15:25).

When the Christians in Achaia first learned about "the collection," they asked Paul what part they might have in it. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 he answered their question: "Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem." Apparently they responded by making a modest donation, but a year later Paul was still waiting on them to finish the work they had been so eager to begin (2Co 8:6, 10-12). No one today knows exactly why they aborted their original plans, but Paul probably did, and so he sent Titus to Corinth to help them keep their promise (2Co 8:16-24). As a result of his visit and Paul's exhortation, the Corinthians ultimately finished by God's grace what they had started.

On the business of promise and performance Warren W. Wiersbe writes, "We must be careful here not to confuse willing with doing, because the two must go together. If the willing is sincere and in the will of God, then there must be a 'performance also' (2Co 8:11; Php 2:12, 13). Paul did not say that willing

was a substitute for doing, because it is not. But if our giving is motivated by grace, we will give willingly, and not because we have been forced to give" (*The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, 656-57).

2 Corinthians 8:1-24 lends itself to a three-part division. In the first part (vv.1-9), Paul inspires his readers to "excel in this grace of giving" (v.7). In the second part (vv. 10-15), he advises them "to finish the work" (v. 11) they were so eager to do the previous year. And finally, in the third part (vv. 16-24), he explains, "he is taking pains to do what is right" (21), as far as receiving and delivering the collection is concerned.

In the first part, Paul praises the Macedonian churches for their generosity, magnified by fact that it emerged from "the most severe trial" and "extreme poverty," being prompted by "overflowing joy" (v. 2). Three characteristics marked their giving. First, they gave *sacrificially*, "beyond their ability" (v. 3). Second, they gave *freely*, "entirely on their own" (v. 3). In fact, they "pleaded with us [Paul] for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints" (v. 4). Third, they gave *themselves* before they gave their money, "first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will" (v. 5). The little word "so" (indicating *result*) is important at this point. As a result of the example set by the Macedonian churches, Paul urges Titus to see to it that the Corinthians finish what they had started a year earlier. Using *comparison*, Paul tells them, "*just as you excel in everything . . . see that you also excel in this grace of giving*" (v. 7). Then he goes on to clarify that he is not commanding them but is wanting to test the sincerity of their love. Explaining Paul's motives, one commentator writes: "Spontaneity and warmth would be absent from the Corinthians' giving if coercion were present. But he did see in the enthusiastic generosity of the Macedonian churches a convenient standard for assessing the genuineness of the Corinthians' professed love for him and for all believers, as well as a compelling incentive to arouse them to action" (Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10: 368). To the example of the Macedonians, Paul adds the example of Christ, who became poor, a reference to the incarnation, so that through his poverty those who believe might become rich.

In the second part, he gets right to the point, "Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means" (v. 11), adding, "the gift is

acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have" (v. 12), suggesting that "the smallest gift is greater than the grandest intention that goes unfulfilled" (David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC, 381). Then in verses 13-15, to prevent any misunderstanding, the apostle explains that the reciprocity of giving and receiving is meant to promote *equality*. It is not intended to burden some so that others might live in ease at their expense, nor is it intended to impoverish some for the sake of others. Equality here refers to equality with respect to needs met, as the quotation of Exodus 16:18 regarding manna shows. As one

commentator explains: "The relative affluence of the Corinthians at the present time should provide the needs of the poor Judean believers. And in like fashion, if at some future time the positions should be reversed, then their abundance may supply your want" (Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, TNTC, 157).

In the third part, he assures them he intends to avoid criticism, "in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men," with regard to how their gift is administered. To that end, he delegates to Titus and to two unnamed representatives of the churches the responsibility of delivering the gift to Jerusalem.

The Message of the Passage

Excel in the grace of giving by giving willingly according to what you have, providing relief to the saints, so that the needs of all might be met equally.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 *living questions* to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living questions*:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **brothers** Cf., "brothers and sisters" (NIV(c)2011).
- v. 1 **grace** "Grace' is a key word that appears ten times throughout these two chapters [8-9] with differing nuances. Here it refers to human generosity, which Paul understands to be something given by God. Grace is God's unconditional benevolence toward us. When people are spontaneously generous toward others, Paul takes it as clear evidence that God's grace is working in and through them" (Garland, 365).
- v. 1 **Macedonian** Cities visited by Paul include: Philippi (Acts 16:12-40), Thessalonica (17:1-9), and Berea (17:10-15). "The Roman province of Macedonia comprised the northern part of Greece wherein were found the Pauline churches at Philippi and Thessalonica, and also possibly a church at Beroea (cf. Acts 20:4)" (Kruse, 150). To the south was Achaia, "the Roman province in which Gallio was deputy, or proconsul, in the time of Paul the apostle (Acts 18:12). It consisted roughly of the southern half of ancient Greece, including the Peloponnesus. Major cities in Achaia included Sparta, Athens, and Corinth, which was the administrative center" (*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Achaia").
- v. 2 **trial . . . poverty** Cf., "in a severe test of affliction" (ESV). "The New Testament evidence suggests that they were no strangers to persecution (see Acts 16:20; 17:50; Phil 1:29-30; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4). The word translated 'test' (*dokime*) has a different nuance than the word for testing (*peirasmos*) that is related to temptation. It 'points more to the positive outcome of such a test than to the test itself.' The test proved their Christian character" (Garland, 366). "The Macedonians also suffered from extreme poverty that Paul vividly expresses as 'down to depths poverty.' Persecution and social ostracism probably caused this rock bottom poverty" (366-67).
- v. 3 **able/ability** Cf., "For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord" (ESV). "The expression according to their means (*kata dynamin*) is very common in the papyri, especially in marriage contracts where a husband promises to provide food and clothing for his wife 'according to his means'. . . 'Beyond one's means' (*para dynamin*) is found in the context of a man's complaint against his wife for whom he has provided beyond what his means really allowed. So Paul says of the Macedonians that they have contributed to the collection for the poor in a way that was over and above anything that could be expected, given their situation" (Kruse, 151).
- v. 4 **service** Or "relief" (ESV). Lit., "the grace [*charin*] and the fellowship [*koinonian*] of the service [*diakonias*]." "Relief [service] renders the Greek word *diakonia*, and its use here reflects the fact that contributing to the collection was viewed as Christian 'ministry.' This was a ministry in which the Philippian church at least was involved over a long period of time (Phil. 4:14-20)" (152). Here "Paul creates a new meaning for the word, *koinonia* ('partnership,' 'fellowship'). This is the first use of the word for monetary collections" (Garland, 369).
- v. 5 gave themselves "They appear to have recognized Paul's own God-given authority, and their response to his appeal on behalf of the Judean Christians was a recognition of that authority as well as an expression of compassion for those in need" (Kruse, 152). "In giving themselves to the Lord, in response to Paul's ministry, the Macedonians effectively reaffirmed Paul's authority as an apostle to the Gentile churches, as 'through the will of God' (cf. 10:8; 13:10). Given the ambiguity of the Achaian believers' attitude to Paul in recent times, in regard to the collection (v. 6) as well as in their welcome to the false apostles (11:4, 13), *Paul's comment here for the benefit of the Corinthians may be quite pointed*" (Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 399, italics added).
- v. 8 **test** Paul wants them to prove or demonstrate the sincerity of their love (cf. "proved" v. 22).
- v. 9 **became poor** "Becoming poor refers to his 'emptying himself' (Phil 2:6; see also Rom 15:3; Heb 12:2) and suggests that this is something he did voluntarily. Schelkle comments: 'Christ renounced the divine fullness of power in which he dwelt with the Father, abandoned the heavenly glory which was his as the Son of God. He chose the poverty of human existence so that through his poverty he could impart the eternal riches of redemption to the poverty of all for whose sake he became poor'" (Garland, 377).
- v. 10 **last year** A general reference to the time between Paul's two canonical letters.
- vv. 13, 14 **equality** I.e., all have needs met equally.
- v. 15 **much . . . little** An allusion to the Israelites gathering manna in the desert. Some gathered more and others less, but when it was distributed, the excess of some made up for the deficiency of others.
- vv. 18, 22 **brother** Paul mentions two unnamed brothers sent with Titus to Jerusalem with the collection. Perhaps "the brother" (v. 18) was chosen by the churches in Macedonia to act as their representative and "our brother" (v. 22) by Paul to act as the representative of the churches in Achaia.

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Our core competency this week is Giving Away my Money - I give away my money to help with God's work. This is an important yet difficult concept to teach our kids. Outside of receiving a small weekly allowance or birthday money from time to time, kids don't have money. The important thing to remember is to start small and teach generosity as a lifestyle. Many families have decided to contribute to the church on a regular basis. Additionally, some families decide to give to other mission initiatives. Talk about those things with your children. When opportunities arrive to give to a particular cause, talk and pray about it as a family. In our home, we have a scrapbook on the coffee table with letters and pictures from our Compassion International child. It's a constant reminder that a little bit of money is making a big difference in someone's life. In addition to giving money, there are other ways to be generous. Kids can be generous with their friendship by befriending someone. They can be generous with kindness as they help others. They can be generous with their smiles and make someone's day better. They can be generous with their skills by teaching someone how to throw a baseball or draw a beautiful sunset. Generosity is one of those character traits that grows over time. If you begin to plant it in your children when they are young it will grow and bloom the rest of their lives.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read 2Co 8:1-15

1. What does Paul say about the Macedonian churches in verse 1?
2. What advice does Paul give the Corinthians in verse 10?
3. What is Paul's desire for all the churches? (v. 13)

What Do You Think

The people of the Corinthian church were among the first to give to the believers in Jerusalem when they heard they had needs. Why do you think they did that? Why do you think they stopped? Have you ever started something good and then stopped?

What R U Going To Do

Get your parents help and make a list of seven generous acts you can perform every day. Write them on slips of paper and put them in a cup. Draw one out every day this week and do it - a week of generosity!

Core Comp

Giving Away my Money - I give away my money to help with God's work.

Memory Verse

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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