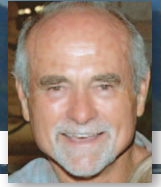


The Grace of Giving

BY PASTOR BILL STONEBRAKER



Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Acts 20:35b

When we hear those words, we may think, “How can I give? We’re in a recession!” or, “I need to focus on taking care of myself and my family. I can’t help others right now.”

During the apostle Paul’s time, persecution had caused the church in Jerusalem to fall on hard times. So Paul wanted to bring a financial gift to help relieve their suffering. Because the church in Jerusalem was the “mother church” from which other surrounding fellowships had sprung, he appealed to those daughter churches. One group, the Macedonians, responded quickly and eagerly. Another group, the Corinthians, expressed a desire to give—as we learn from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church—but procrastinated in sending their offering. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul taught that true giving is an act of God’s grace.

Using the Macedonian believers as an example, Paul reveals a sevenfold work of God’s grace found in obedient giving. In verses 1-5, we see the supernatural way God’s grace enables believers to give.

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

2 Corinthians 8:1-2

#1: In Hard Times

God’s grace enabled the Macedonians to give “in a great trial of affliction.” Suffering often causes us to turn inward, focusing more on ourselves than others. It takes God’s supernatural work to empower us to help others when we ourselves are hurting. It’s not normal to have joy during trials, but

God gave the Macedonians “abundance” of joy in giving.

#2: In Lean Times

The Macedonian believers were characterized by “deep poverty”—they were rock-bottom destitute. Yet that didn’t hinder their generosity; their giving “abounded in ... liberality.”

God measures giving not by the amount, but by the sacrifice. It’s easy to give when we have plenty; when we have little, it takes God’s grace at work. Jesus esteemed the poor widow’s gift greater than those of the wealthy, for “she out of her poverty put in all that she had” (Mark 12:44b).

Paul continued:

For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

2 Corinthians 8:3-4

#3: Beyond Our Comfort Zones

The Macedonians gave “beyond their ability”—beyond what was comfortable. It has been said, “The poor help others; the rich help themselves.” By God’s grace, the people gave more than they really could spare. They gave till it hurt.

#4: With a Willing Heart

No one forced the Macedonians to give; “they were freely willing.” They gave of their own accord, demonstrating Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 9:7: **Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**

Exodus 35-36 describes Israel’s collection for the Tabernacle and its articles. Through Moses, God had said, “Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the LORD” (35:5b). The people brought so much that finally Moses commanded them to stop—the need was met (36:5-6). Can you imagine hearing, “Stop giving; we have

enough”? Willingness that gives to the point of plenty is a work of God’s grace.

#5: With Enthusiasm

Paul said the Macedonians were “imploring us with much urgency” to accept their gift. These believers simply heard that their brethren in Jerusalem were struggling financially, and they immediately responded with enthusiastic giving. Paul didn’t beg them; they begged Paul for the privilege of helping.

And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

2 Corinthians 8:5

#6: As an Offering to God

The Macedonians did not do this for Paul. They “first gave themselves to the Lord”—they gave as a sacrifice and offering to God. They dedicated themselves to God. Earlier in this letter, Paul told the Corinthians they “should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (5:15b). He wrote in Romans 12:1b: **Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.** By God’s grace, we do not have to live for ourselves any longer; we can live for God, yielding ourselves and our resources to Him.

#7: Honoring Spiritual Authorities

Paul said that they “gave themselves ... to us by the will of God.” The Macedonians not only submitted to God, but to the spiritual authorities He had placed over them. Hebrews 13:17b tells us to obey our leaders and submit to them, “for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.” Contrary to our mutinous nature, surrender to godly authority is grace in action.

May the grace of God work abundantly in all our hearts as we honor Him in giving. 🙏

Bill Stonebraker pastors CC Honolulu, HI. He has authored several books, including *Spiritual Warfare in Marriage*, and teaches a daily radio and television program called *As We Gather*.