

Week 1: A Journey of Grace and Generosity

Getting Started Questions:

- What was the most valuable thing you owned as a kid?
- Are you a saver or a spender?

Big Question:

- “What happens if our hearts are set on what God’s heart is set on?”

Overview:

There are two passages in 2 Corinthians that help answer this question. Paul worked with the church at Corinth on his first and second missionary journey. On his second journey he was taking a collection for the impoverished church in Jerusalem. He was requesting money from young churches, most of them with little resources, to help the mother church in Jerusalem. But the Corinthian church was not giving and it was better off than most of the new churches. So Paul uses the church in Macedonia as an example for the Corinthians.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 for an account of this story.

We want you to know, brothers,^[a] about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor^[b] of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you^[c]—see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 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 by his poverty might become rich.

Paul further amplifies the idea of generous giving. **Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.**

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully^[a] will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency^[b] in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they^[c] will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

There are at least 6 aspects of generosity in God’s economy that these passages call for.

Discuss:

Ask: How do you see each of these calls for generosity in the passages we read?

1. gives out of an abundance of grace.
2. gives willingly.
3. gives at least according to its ability.
4. gives generously.
5. gives cheerfully.
6. gives to promote thanksgiving to God.

Leader Notes:

1. gives out of an abundance of grace.

In the verses from 2 Corinthians 8 Paul uses the word grace four times. Paul is very clear that giving is not motivated by guilt but by grace. True giving flows from grace. But when we give because we feel bad, our motivation only lasts a little while. No habit is developed. Note this difference – these Macedonian churches were impoverished churches. They were located in war torn areas with high taxes and severe persecution. They had nothing. Read verse 2 again. How does this work?

Here's a formula:

Macedonian churches + severe trials + extreme poverty = overflowing joy + rich generosity.

The result of that formula can only be the outcome of grace. This is the picture Paul is painting for the Corinthians. Compared to the Macedonian churches, the church at Corinth was in pretty good shape financially. Yet they had not learned about grace.

2. gives willingly.

In verses 3-4 we hear the Macedonian churches urgently pleading for the privilege of giving. They had already learned the lesson that when we give according to how God has blessed us His grace is multiplied toward us.

3. gives at least according to its ability.

According to chapter 8 verse 12, the Macedonians gave beyond their ability. We are reminded of Jesus' story of the widow who gave out of poverty while others gave out of their wealth. God values differently than we do, doesn't He? Paul tells them to give as much as they can. We tend to think what can we spare to give rather than what it will take.

4. gives generously.

Sounds redundant! In 8:2 the giving of the Macedonians overflowed with generosity and in 9:6 we read of the farmer who understood that sowing sparingly reaps a small harvest. Generous giving to God results in greater giving from God. Now this is not prosperity gospel of health and wealth. The Macedonians debunk that idea. They gave out of poverty and did not get rich financially because of it.

The fact is that God provides enough for us. That's what 9:8 says. *There is sufficiency in all things.* But 9:11 says that *God often gives more than we need* – why – so we can be generous. **God's blessings to us are not to increase our standard of living but to increase our standard of giving.**

5. gives cheerfully.

2 Corinthians 9:7 can actually be translated “hilarious” giver. Notice that in 2 Corinthians 8:8 Paul makes it clear he is not commanding the churches to give. There is no command here to give in these chapters. And actually there is no command in the New Testament. It is more like there is the assumption that God's people are givers. And God certainly doesn't force us to give. It's at this point that people usually start debating tithing. You will hear things like, “Jesus doesn't talk about tithing, that's Old Testament stuff.” Or “that's legalism and we're freed from that.” Or, “Well, are we talking about tithing from the net or the gross?” But then we have to remind ourselves that Jesus didn't free us from the Ten Commandments when He said He came to “fulfill” the Law. But what did Jesus mean when He said he fulfilled the law? He took us beyond the law. He equated hate with murder and lust with adultery. So where do you suppose He would take us beyond the tithe?

New Testament giving is giving abundantly, cheerfully, and sacrificially. Each believer is to decide or purpose in his own heart what he should give. The standard is no longer a formula but the cross of Christ. What a difference that should make.

6. gives to promote thanksgiving to God.

Who gets the glory when we give generously? God gives grace, His people give generously, and God gets glory. The one who gives the grace always get the glory. We can celebrate this.

Recap:

Consider the fact that, in our Bible study today, Paul was addressing a church, the one at Corinth, and challenging it to be generous. He was able to remind them of the Macedonian church because it had a reputation of being a “generous” church. The Macedonian church was generous because the people who comprised the church recognized generosity as a major discipline for their personal journey of spiritual growth. Their individual generosity resulted in a generous church.

Get Personal:

- Share your own story of generosity or stewardship with the group. Where is it easy for you to live as God instructs, and where is it difficult?

Challenge:

- What happens when you and I, who are incredibly wealthy, compared to the rest of the world – define enough? What if we decide anything above enough goes away to others. What happens when that begins to take over our thinking? Now we can ask God for lots of money. The more we can make, the more we can give. Crazy, isn't it? But Biblical!

Prayer Requests and Prayers:

- Lord, make me more aware of your presence in my life.
- Lord, help me see clearly what it would mean for my life to be poured out in response to your grace to benefit your Kingdom.
- Lord, help me see what generosity would look like as my new life-style.

Week 2: A Journey of Grace and Generosity

Getting Started Question:

1. Think of the wealthiest person you've ever met (sharing names is optional). What are some of the ways you could tell that he or she was materially blessed? How did being around them make you feel?

Leader Setup:

The term "affluenza" defined from the Merriam-Webster dictionary is, "The unhealthy and unwelcome psychological and social effects of affluence, causing such problems as lack of motivation and social isolation; extreme materialism and consumerism experienced by wealthy people, resulting in a life of chronic dissatisfaction, stress, and impaired relationships."

In his book, *How to Be Rich*, Andy Stanley said, "Affluenza runs rampant. It causes bouts of arrogance and chronic dislocated hope. The symptoms aren't always obvious either. They sneak up on you like an invisible growth that goes undetected while it eats away your insides."

Discuss:

2. As you think about the definition of affluenza and the quote above, do you relate to the idea that having an overabundance of money, possessions, and convenience can "eat away your insides"? Why or why not?

Read the following verses together and then answer this question for each one of them: What does this passage tell us about God's perspective concerning wealth and possessions?

- **1 Chronicles 29:11-13**

¹¹ Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹² Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³ And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.

- **Job 42:10**

¹⁰ And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

- **Matthew 6:19-21**

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^a destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- **Matthew 19:23-26**

²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

- **Luke 6:21, 24, 27, 30-31**

24 “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

²⁷ “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

- **Luke 12:15**

¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

- **1 Timothy 6:9-10**

⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Read **Matthew 19:16-22**.

- As you read that passage together, take the time to picture yourself having that conversation with Jesus.

¹⁶ And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” ¹⁷ And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸ He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁰ The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” ²¹ Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

3. What does it look like to place ourselves into the story of the rich young ruler?

Their exchange opens up with the young man getting Jesus’ attention by asking what good thing he needed to do to have eternal life. Jesus initially responds with the question, “Why are you asking me?” Other translations of the Bible have Jesus replying with variations of, “Why are you calling me good?” What do you think Jesus saw in his young questioner’s demeanor or his manner of approach that deserved such push back? (Leader Tip: If anyone in your group has a study Bible, take a look at the scholarly commentary for this verse.)

Jesus tells the man that if he wants to be perfect, he must sell all of his possessions, give everything to the poor, and follow after Him. Do you think that means all Christians are supposed to sell everything they have? In this man’s particular case, why was a sacrifice of all of his wealth necessary?

The interaction ends with the rich young man walking away very sorrowful, which would seem to indicate that he truly wanted to follow after Jesus. Even though he desired what Jesus taught, what was missing in the young ruler's heart and that subsequently prevented him from following through?

4. What kind of opportunities do you think the rich young ruler might have missed out on because of his decision?

5. If you were the rich young ruler, what fears, attachments and obligations would have held you back from doing as Jesus suggested?

Share these quotes with your group:

- “The better way to be rich, is to be rich in good deeds.”
- “It’s really difficult to be arrogant, narcissistic, egocentric, or to put my hope in what I have if I spend all my time thinking about how to do good.”
- Read **Acts 4:32-35** and **1 Timothy 6:17-18**.

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (**Acts 4:32-35**)

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, (**1 Timothy 6:17-18**)

6. What are some examples of good deeds or lavish generosity that you’ve recently seen or heard about? What impression did it make on you? It can be examples of individuals, organizations, or corporations. Imagine if churches of all denominations across the world lived according to the two passages you just read together. What kind of immediate and long-term impact would it have, both tangibly and spiritually on the world?

7. How do you distinguish between wants and needs?

8. We need to continually wrestle with the difference between wants and needs and work to become lavishly generous. What does this kind of “wrestling” look like for you? Does it happen in prayer? When you go shopping? When you have conversations with friends?

9. How do we challenge each other with how we can pursue God’s definition of richness and not the world’s. Since how much money a person has and how they choose to spend it is generally a taboo subject in our modern culture, what are some ways that your group can create an environment of accountability and encouragement surrounding this often uncomfortable subject?

Prayer Requests and Prayers:

Week 3: A Journey of Grace and Generosity

Getting Started Question:

1. Tell the group about a time that you were faced with a task that felt way too big for you to accomplish. Don't forget to tell them how it worked out!

Read: Isaiah 49:6

he says:

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Discuss:

Speaking of the Messiah in Isaiah 49:6, God says, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

2. How does God affirm His covenant with Israel here while also showing us that His covenant will reach far beyond the nation of Israel? Considering that God's heart reaches the whole world, why do you think some churches are content to focus on their own turf?

In **Acts 13:44-49**, Paul and Barnabas quote Isaiah 49:6 as the basis for their ministry with the Gentiles. Take a moment and have someone read these verses out loud for the group.

⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews^[a] saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.””

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

3. How do Paul's words in verses 46-47 show that God desires for both the Jews and the Gentiles to find salvation? How does this show God to be both faithful to His promise and even more gracious than the Jews imagined?

4. Seeing that the Gentiles were so eager to accept Paul's message of Jesus (verse 48), what does this tell us about the value of taking the gospel to those that seem furthest from Jesus? How do you see this dynamic echoed in First Orlando's desire to reach the darkest parts of our world?

While most of us will not travel across the world to take the gospel to the darkest places, we can all be part of that mission through our giving. In Philippians 4:10-20, we see that the church in Philippi practiced this kind of giving for Paul's ministry.

Read **Philippians 4:10-20**

God's Provision

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share^[a] my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.^[b] ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

5. In verse 10, Paul says that the Philippians' support gave him much joy. What emotional impact do you think our support through giving has on those that work to take the gospel to the "ends of the earth"? How might that encouragement be a catalyzing boost in the work they do there?

In verses 14-19, we see how our giving to missions is part of being rich in God.

6. When Paul says it was "good" of them to share in his troubles (verse 14), it carries a meaning of them doing the right thing in supporting him. Do you think giving to missions is a noble option or something a Christian should feel compelled to do in their heart? How might our own experience of receiving God's grace factor into our giving towards missions?

7. We know the value of giving to missions for those that need Jesus, but they are not the only ones who benefit. Looking at verses 17-18, what does Paul say are the results for us and what it means to God? What do you think it means that it will be "credited to our account"? Why do you think our giving towards missions is pleasing to God? At this point, would you say your giving towards missions has built up a large or small credit in your account?

8. When we give towards missions lost people find salvation in Jesus, we build up riches in God's Kingdom, and God is pleased with us. There is no other investment with a higher rate of return! Are you investing much in God's mission to reach the world? What will you start doing or do more of to invest your life in reaching the world with Jesus?

Prayer Requests and Prayers:

Week 4: A Journey of Grace and Generosity

Getting Started Question:

1. What is your most favorite gift you've received? What is your most favorite gift you've given?

Read: **Malachi 3:6-12**

⁶“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ ⁸Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. ¹¹I will rebuke the devourer^[a] for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. ¹²Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

Background:

Malachi served as a prophet to Israel around 460 BC. This was a time of relative calm as a nation. The people had returned from exile and the Temple had been rebuilt, but Israel had not returned to the greatness that they envisioned. This disappointment led the people to drift from God in a number of ways. Regarding their tithes and offerings to God, the Israelites had developed a wrong perspective of their material belongings as well as a wrong attitude toward God.

Discuss:

2. Have you ever stolen anything in your past (either by actively taking or by not giving/returning something to someone)? How did you feel about it after the fact? Did you ever come clean?

3. Would you say that not giving or returning something to someone feels less like stealing than actively taking from someone? Why is that?

4. In verses 8-9, Malachi tells the people that they are robbing God by withholding their tithes and offerings. To what degree do you see not giving to God as an act of robbery? Considering that so many Christians do not regularly tithe, why do you think it is so easy for people to ignore this charge of robbery against God?

5. The Hebrew word used here for robbery implies a false sense of ownership and therefore an improper use of the goods. How does this explain the charge of robbery for not giving a tithe to God? How should our perspective change if we are not truly the owners of the resources we have? How would you know that someone sees themselves as a steward rather than an owner?

In verses 10-11, God tells His people that He will provide for their needs and increase the fruitfulness of their work when they are faithful to give Him the tithe He deserves. These promised blessings give us insight into why the Israelites (and us) are afraid to give God His tithe.

6. How does not tithing indicate that we have a low level of trust in God's ability to provide for us? Why do you think people believe they can do more with 100% of their income without God's blessing than they can do with 90% of their income with God's blessings?

7. Has there been a time in your life that God provided when you didn't know how things would work out? What did that experience do for your trust in God? Do you think we will see more of that in our lives if when we are faithful to tithe to God? What positive results might we experience if we take the risk to give God His tithe even when we're not sure that we can afford it?

8. In verse 7, God says, "return to me, and I will return to you." Do you need to "return to God's way" in your giving?

- What can you begin doing to develop a stronger perspective of a steward rather than an owner of your resources? What step can you take in this, this coming week?
- Ask God to give you a more generous heart toward Him and greater faith that He will provide for you.

Application:

9. How would you describe your own spending plans? Do you give, save, spend certain amounts? How do you budget and track your expenses?

10. When it comes to your spending plans:

- What will you need to start doing?
- What will you need to stop doing?
- Why does sharing these decisions with the group help? Does it encourage or discourage you?

Prayer Requests and Prayers: