

# Session 3

## GIVE

*Acts 4:32; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9*

### Memory Verse

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*

– 2 CORINTHIANS 8:9, CSB



## Give

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** Giving has been an essential for the church since its inception. Jesus modeled a generous life and the early church carried on what they had seen in Him. Paul shared the example of how the Macedonian believers gave generously to encourage all Christians to do the same.

With several different platforms available to the masses, crowdfunding has become a very popular way to raise money. Someone shares an idea over the internet and people contribute money to help make it happen. Billions of dollars have been raised for all kinds of projects. While these causes typically include startups or raise money for a medical emergency, there is no limit to what people will ask others to give toward.

Some artists use these platforms to fund their living while they produce their art. One of the more unusual crowdfunded projects occurred when a person wanted to develop a new potato salad recipe. The fundraising goal was \$10, but he raised more than \$55,000 from almost 7,000 backers. Whatever the motivation behind the project, one thing crowdfunding proves is that there are people who will give toward just about anything and when many give even a small amount, large amounts of money can be raised.<sup>1</sup>



What type of crowd funding have you been involved in? What is the most unusual crowd funding effort you have seen?

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## Why do you think this type of fund raising is so popular?

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### Session Summary

One important aspect of worship is giving. As Christians, we should obey God's Word in how and what we give to the ministries of the church to further the kingdom of God. The early church demonstrated an example of how to give as well as the necessity of giving. Seeing their faithfulness to joyful giving should fuel our motivation to give freely and willingly.

"Giving is one of the fastest accelerators to spiritual growth for a Christ follower."

- Ken Schafer

Scripture makes it clear that every believer has a responsibility to obey in the realm of giving. Paul wrote about this subject to the church at Corinth and stressed how vital it is that Christians excel even more when it comes to what we offer to the Lord. If we are to become like Christ, then we need to be willing to give like Jesus gave and approach what we have from the same perspective that He did.

### 1. An Example of Generous Giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

The churches in Macedonia had been collecting an offering to help with the needs of the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem. The church at Corinth was to participate in this offering, but Paul needed to encourage them to follow through with their gift. He used the example of the Macedonian churches, who gave out of their poverty, to challenge the Corinthians to excel in the grace of giving.

Paul made it clear that both the opportunity and willingness to give should be considered as gifts of God's grace. It changes our perspective when we view the opportunity to give as a gift. Giving is not to be a duty or something we do grudgingly out of obligation, but rather, it is a gift that we have the opportunity and privilege to be involved in. Paul knew some might get the wrong idea about giving their money and resources, so he challenged that way of thinking from the start of chapter 8.



## How does viewing the opportunity to give as a gift and not a duty challenge your typical perspective?

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Sometimes it helps us grow in a specific area when we see other people do that same thing well. Paul offered the Corinthians examples of how other believers excelled at giving. He referred to the Macedonian Christians as those who experienced great trials of affliction as well as great poverty. Yet they did not let these things hold them back from the gift of giving and continued in generosity despite the troubles they faced. They did not let their circumstances hinder their commitment to giving. This is an excellent reminder for believers today: giving should not be dictated by our circumstances.

The giving discussed in this chapter was a special offering, not the regular church offering, and it was collected to meet a special need. Paul had hoped the Christians in Macedonia would support the offering. But because of their own deprived circumstances, he evidently did not expect they would give very much. Their giving was spontaneous and voluntary, fueled by grace, not by pressure.

As a witness to the generous spirit of the Macedonians, Paul noted two specific ways that they gave. First, he said that they gave according to their means. Because we know they were in poverty at the time, that meant this part of their gift may not have been great in monetary value, but they still gave. Secondly, Paul said they gave beyond their means. Some translations say they “were freely willing” to give (v. 3 NKJV). This kind of giving went beyond their ability. This type of above and beyond giving shows faith and trust in the Lord.



## How have you seen people give beyond their means in the way Paul described? What was the result? What did you think about that?

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Pay attention to the wording Paul used in verse four to describe how the Macedonians “begged . . . earnestly” for the privilege of giving to the ministry. There was no begging on Paul’s part. He didn’t twist any arms to get them to give. They were literally begging him for the privilege of giving what little they had to support the work of the ministry both there and abroad. They believed in the work

Paul and his team were doing to further God's kingdom and wanted to be part of that movement. True Christian generosity is not measured by the amount we have to give; it is about hearts that are freely willing to give because our lives have been so changed by Jesus.

Paul said the Macedonians giving was unexpected not because of the amount given but because of the way they gave. They first gave themselves to the Lord, then they gave their trust to Paul and the disciples. When we give ourselves over to the Lord first, we also can trust Him with every resource we have and recognize that our opportunity to give is a gift. This leads us to give with generous hearts just as the Macedonians did.

Amid severe trial and extreme poverty, the Macedonians welled up in overflowing joy and rich generosity. That's the fruit of the gospel! God joyfully and generously pours out His grace in our lives. In every circumstance, His love toward repentant sinners is abundant. The Macedonians lived out that reality, and so can we.



**Application: Have you viewed giving as a gift of grace in the past? How are givers blessed through their generosity toward others?**

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## 2. Encouragement to Give (2 Corinthians 8:6-8)

Titus brought the message to the Corinthians from Paul. In writing that Titus should complete this act among the church at Corinth, Paul again described giving as an act gift of grace from the Lord. He went on to make it clear he was not commanding them to give but encouraging them to do so as an expression of their love.

Paul's point about completing the act of giving is helpful for our application today. We might think about giving. We might believe it is good to give and agree with the principle that people should give. We can even vow to give and sincerely intend to give. But unless we follow through and complete the grace of giving, it is useless. Without action, our thoughts and intentions are for naught. Paul said the time to give was at hand, and Titus was the one sent to help them complete the grace. If you are alive, the time for completing the grace of giving is now. None of us are promised

tomorrow and as we read in James, our lives are but a mist that appear for a little while and then are gone (see James 4:14). We must take Paul's words to heart and put action to the beliefs we claim about giving to support the mission of God so that others can be reached with the gospel.

**?** What changes when we move from claiming to believe giving is good to actually giving? How does the cost of this action give evidence of what we truly believe?

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Look at the list of things Paul noted that the Corinthians abounded in—faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, and love. While Paul encouraged them that they abounded in these things, he told them not to stop short. Why would those seeking growth in their faith stop short in an area like giving? We can understand this struggle today. Many Christians seek to be like Jesus in some areas of their lives and grow in what they know about Him. Most Christians say they believe in the importance of giving. Yet, we might stop short of actually living as generous givers. Paul reminded us that we are to excel in this area.

**?** What obstacles are there to excelling in giving that may not exist in other areas of Christian growth?

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Paul was not commanding or requiring anyone to give. Giving to the Lord is not sanctified taxation. It is an act of worship. While Paul would not force anyone to give, he also did not want them to miss out on the importance of giving. He said he was testing the genuineness of their love because the way a person gives is often an indicator of what they value most. If we really love God, we will want to give back to Him because real love inspires action. We give not because God needs our money but because He gives us opportunity to join Him in His mission to seek and save the lost.

**?** Application: How can you practically focus on excelling in the gift of giving?

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### 3. Giving like Jesus (Acts 4:32; 2 Corinthians 8:9)

In case the example of the Macedonians didn't motivate the Corinthians, Paul pointed to the example Jesus displayed about giving. From His glorious riches, Jesus came to earth in human form and lived out what it means to be a generous giver—to the highest degree. Although He never accumulated human wealth in the form of money, He always demonstrated the grace of giving. Paul's use of riches in relation to Jesus points to His deity and how He loved us enough to pay our penalty as a man. Just as He added humanity to His deity, He also assumed poverty while being vastly rich.

Jesus lived His earthly life as a poor man regarding material possessions. He even said He had no place to rest His head (see Matthew 8:20). Consider the huge contrast between the riches of heaven with the poverty Jesus experienced as a human. It is inconceivable that anyone would be willing to trade the riches of heaven for life on earth, but that is exactly what Jesus did. Not only did Jesus willingly make this choice, but He did so for our sake. Out of Jesus's great love for us, He embraced a life of humanity and the horrible sacrifice on the cross. The reality is, no matter how much we give for the sake of Jesus, we will never out give Him.

**?** How does it impact you to reflect on the willingness of Jesus to give up everything for your sake? How does this encourage you to give for the sake of others?

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We may wonder why it was necessary for Jesus to give up His riches for our sake. Why did the Son of God have to come to earth and become poor for our benefit? For us to gain the riches of heaven, Jesus was required to take on the poverty of earth and the wrath of God. We gain a share in the eternal, heavenly wealth of Christ when we surrender our lives to Him. Recognizing what Jesus has given up for our sake, how could we not be motivated to give of ourselves for the sake of others?

**?** What are some ways Christians have been made rich because of the poverty of Jesus?

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Paul's words on giving to the Corinthians was also displayed by action in the early church. In Acts 4, we see the principles in 2 Corinthians 8 lived out. The first Christians give us a picture of what it looks like to be a body of believers who live and give like Jesus. Acts 4:32 tells us none of this group were selfish with their material possessions and they all gave from what they had freely. There was a unity that set them apart.

The difference in the church in Acts was a direct result of the Spirit of God working among them and changing lives. To keep all things in common, they had to have recognized that God was the owner of everything they had. They freely shared what they had because God had touched their lives so deeply. When people experience the power of God at work personally, they are more willing to offer themselves as instruments for God to bless others. When we have been impacted by the transforming work of God, we want to be part of that work in the lives of others. Think about people you know who give generously. Consider how their giving flows out of the deep well of blessing they have received in Jesus. That is the essence of the gospel, and the reason Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to live generously.



**Application:** How does holding tightly to the things of God enable us to loosen our grip on the things of the earth? How does this directly impact our giving?

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## Conclusion

There will always be potential hindrances to generosity. Paul challenged the Christians at Corinth to follow the example of the Macedonian believers who gave generously even though they experienced great trials and deep poverty. As believers, we need to learn from these examples and refuse to let our circumstances dictate our generosity. As a church, we have many opportunities to express the love of God to people through our giving. Each of us must evaluate how to be more involved in giving freely and generously regardless of our own personal circumstances. Just as Paul encouraged, we are to excel in the grace of giving.



❓ How have you been challenged about giving today?

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❓ How can our group and our church cultivate an atmosphere where we seek to continually grow in generosity?

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❓ How might a life of generosity give you opportunities for gospel conversations with others?

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## Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

*Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"*

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

## Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## Sing

### Main Passages

- Psalm 95:1-11; Acts 16:25-34; Ephesians 5:15-20

### Session Outline

1. Called to Sing (Ephesians 5:15-20)
2. Power in Singing (Acts 16:25-34)
3. A Heart That Sings (Psalm 95:1-11)

### Memorize

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*

- 2 Corinthians 8:9, CSB

### References

<sup>1</sup>Tim Smith, "Crowdfunding: What It Is, How It Works, Popular Websites," Investopedia (Investopedia, September 23, 2022), <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/crowdfunding.asp>.

### Prayer Prompts:

Reflect on these thoughts in your prayer time

- **What can you give in your church community to join in the work that God is doing? Ask God to reveal opportunities to give out of what He has blessed you with.**
- **Are you a free and generous giver? Ask God to lead you into the kind of giving that He desires for you.**
- **Who can you bless with the gift of giving?**