

# Give

*June 18, 2023*

## Lesson Summary

### ***Main Passages***

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

### ***Session Outline***

1. An Example of Generous Giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)
2. Encouragement to Give (2 Corinthians 8:6-8)
3. Giving like Jesus (Acts 4:32; 2 Corinthians 8:9)

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### ***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.





## Leader Guide

### Give

#### Introduction

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

#### 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?

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.

### The Need to Follow Through

In 1 Corinthians 16:1–4 Paul had appealed for help in the Jerusalem relief fund. Jerusalem had been impoverished through the famines in Judea in the 40s. The collection was both an act of charity as well as a symbol of unity between the Gentiles and Jews in the church (see Acts 11:27–30; Gal. 2:10). The Corinthians had promised to give and had failed to participate. Paul now appealed for the Corinthians to complete what they said they would do.



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

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?

## 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?

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?

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?

### **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?

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?

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?

## 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?
- How can our group and our church cultivate an atmosphere where we seek to continually grow in generosity?
- How might a life of generosity give you opportunities for gospel conversations with others?

## Prayer of Response

*Thank God for the examples of giving in the early church and in the church today. Ask for wisdom and guidance to recognize where you need to change your giving habits. Commit to being obedient to whatever God directs you to do.*

## 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?

## Additional Resources

- *The Treasure Principle* by Randy Alcorn
- *A Disruptive Generosity* by Mac Pier
- *Be Encouraged* by Warren Wiersbe

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples



### Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

\*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC



## For Next Week

### Session Title

- 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

# Historical Context of 2 Corinthians

## Purpose

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians mainly to express his joy that the majority had been restored to him, to ask for an offering on behalf of the poor saints in Jerusalem, and to defend his ministry as an apostle to the minority of unrepentant Corinthian believers. His desire was to encourage the majority and to lead the minority to change its mind about the validity of his apostolic ministry.

## Author

All biblical scholars agree that Paul wrote this letter (1:1; 10:1). It contains more personal information about him than any other letter, and its Greek style is especially like that of Romans and 1 Corinthians. Proposed chronologies of Paul's life and ministry include a number of variations. Yet for 2 Corinthians, the consensus is that the letter was written about AD 56 (from Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey).

## Setting

Although Bible students have often disagreed about the sequence of events that led to the writing of 2 Corinthians, the following scenario seems likely.

First Corinthians was not well received by the church at Corinth. Timothy had returned to Paul in Ephesus (1Co 4:17; 16:10). He reported that the church was still greatly troubled. This was partly caused by the arrival in Corinth of "false apostles" (2Co 11:13–15). These were perhaps Judaizers, asking Corinthian believers of Gentile heritage to live according to Mosaic regulations (Gl 2:14). Paul visited Corinth a second time, the first time being his church-planting visit. He described this visit as sorrowful or "painful" (2:1; 13:2). Apparently the false apostles agitated the Corinthians to disown Paul. This second visit, not mentioned in Acts 19, occurred sometime during the apostle's long ministry in Ephesus.

Paul then wrote a (now lost) severe letter of stinging rebuke to Corinth from Ephesus (2:3–4, 9). He sent this letter by Titus.

Titus came to Paul with the news that most of the Corinthian church had repented. They now accepted Paul's authority (7:5–7).

Paul decided to write the Corinthians one more time, expressing his relief but still pleading with an unrepentant minority. He promised to come to Corinth a third time (12:14; 13:1). This was fulfilled when Paul stayed in Corinth while on his way to Jerusalem with the financial collection from many churches (Ac 20:2–3).

## Special Features

Of all Paul's letters, none is more personally revealing of his heart than 2 Corinthians. At the same time, it is also the most defensive of any New Testament letter. In it Paul mounts a strong argument ("apology" in the positive sense) for his authority and ministry. A number of important doctrines are taught in the epistle, yet its greatest value may be that it reveals the heart and spirit of one of the most effective ministers of all time. We are thus shown that genuine ministry—although it may have to be guarded from attack—is commissioned by Christ and empowered by the Spirit.

## Extended Commentary

### 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

8:1. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to move forward in their renewed commitment by following the example of the Macedonians (the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea). In a spirit of intimacy, he addressed the Corinthians as brothers. Paul and his company wanted the church at Corinth to be encouraged to action by the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

8:2. How did God's grace display itself in Macedonia? The churches in that region had demonstrated rich generosity by giving to the relief of poor believers in Jerusalem. This generosity was obviously an act of divine grace because it occurred during a time of severe trial. On several occasions we read about troubles suffered by the Macedonian churches (Acts 17:1-9; 2 Thess. 1:4). By comparison, the church at Corinth had probably not experienced much trouble. Even so, the Macedonians gave with overflowing joy even in their extreme poverty. Their example should motivate the Corinthians to give generously as well.

8:3-5. Paul supported his report of Macedonian generosity with his personal testimony about several details. He knew the Macedonians had given as much as they were able. In fact, they had given beyond their ability. More importantly, they had done this entirely on their own, without harsh rebuke or strong commands. They had even urgently pleaded for the privilege of giving. In exemplary behavior, the Macedonians not only gave themselves first to the Lord, but also to Paul and his company in keeping with God's will.

8:6-7. Paul was obviously pleased with the generosity of the Macedonian believers, but he mentioned these matters primarily to motivate the Corinthians to show the same generosity. For this reason, Paul urged Titus to return to Corinth to complete this act of grace on the Corinthians' part. The Corinthians had already experienced many blessings from God. Paul admitted that they excelled in faith, in speech, in knowledge. Yet, he wanted to see them go beyond these experiences of God's grace. Out of complete earnestness, or full sincerity and devotion, and love for Paul and his company, they were also to excel in this grace of giving.

Paul's strategy was plain. He first affirmed that through God's grace the Corinthians excelled in many areas of Christian living. Then he encouraged them to perform with the same excellence as they collected the donation for the church in Jerusalem. He spoke of giving in this way because he desired voluntary and generous contributions. It is easy for Christian financial responsibilities to be reduced to duty, but Paul chose his words carefully to portray this matter in a positive light. He hoped the Corinthians would see the opportunity to help the Jerusalem believers as a mercy from God.

8:8. Paul continued positively by denying that he was commanding the Corinthians to give. If they responded to an order or threat from him, then their giving would be from duty and not an "act of grace" (8:6). At the same time, he admitted that his encouragement was to test the sincerity of their love. It is difficult to determine the object of this love. Paul may have had in

mind their love for him, their love for the believers in Jerusalem, or their love for Christ. The last option seems best in light of the immediate connection in the next verse and the comparison with the Macedonians who “gave themselves first to the Lord” (8:5). Paul sought to test the depths of the Corinthians’ love and to encourage them to demonstrate that love by comparing it with the earnestness of others (the Macedonians).

8:9. Paul supported his call for demonstrating sincere love by reminding his readers of the sacrificial love of Christ. The Corinthians knew that Christ was rich in his preincarnate state. As the second person of the Trinity, Christ was exalted over all before the humiliation of his incarnation (cf. Phil. 2:5–8). Despite his eternal riches, Christ became poor when he came into the world so believers through his poverty might become rich. Christ’s humiliation culminated in his death on the cross, and through his death came the riches of salvation.

Believers do not become rich through the sacrifice of Christ in the sense that they receive physical wealth in this life. According to Paul, our true wealth is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is the “deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14). Yet, as Paul told the Corinthians, in Christ all believers will inherit all the riches of the new world when Christ returns in glory.

The Corinthians were to be motivated by the example of Christ’s love and generosity to give unselfishly to the poor in Jerusalem. Their response to this opportunity tested the sincerity of their love and appreciation for Christ.<sup>2</sup>

## Acts 4:32

4:32–35. As long as there was complete unanimity of purpose and intention among them, the early Christians shared their possessions freely, such that there was not a needy person among them. They were able to do this not because of their own strength, but because great grace was on all of them. Therefore the generosity was above all a work of God. Yet trouble was coming (5:1–11).<sup>3</sup>

## References

1. Tim Smith, “Crowdfunding: What It Is, How It Works, Popular Websites,” Investopedia (Investopedia, September 23, 2022), <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/crowdfunding.asp>.
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3. M. David Sills, “Opportunities and Challenges in Global Missions,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1724–1725.

## Author Bio

### **Randy Alcorn (The Treasure Principle)**

Randy Alcorn is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries, a nonprofit organization dedicated to teaching biblical truth and drawing attention to the needy and how to help them. Alcorn is the author of over 40 books, including *Heaven; Money, Possessions and Eternity*; *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*; and *The Treasure Principle*. His novels include *Deadline*; *Dominion*; *Deception*; and *Safely Home*. Alcorn resides in Oregon with his wife, Nanci.

### **Mac Pier (A Disruptive Generosity)**

Mac Pier is the founder and CEO of The New York City Leadership Center and was instrumental in founding the inaugural Movement Day conference. Pier also serves the Lausanne Movement as the City Catalyst. A resident of New York City since 1984, Mac lives in a diverse neighborhood with residents from more than 100 ethnic groups and attends church with people who speak 60 different languages. He is the author of *A Disruptive Gospel*, *Spiritual Leadership in the Global City*, and *Consequential Leadership*; coauthor of *The Power of a City at Prayer*; and a contributor to *Signs of Hope in the City*.

### **Warren Wiersbe (Be Encouraged)**

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of *Back to the Bible*, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

### **Richard Pratt (I & II Corinthians)**

Richard L. Pratt Jr. (MDiv, Union Theological Seminary; ThD, Harvard University) is president of Third Millennium Ministries. He was a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary for over twenty years and is the author of *Pray with Your Eyes Open*, *He Gave Us Stories*, and *Every Thought Captive*.