

Christian Generosity (Giving by Grace - God's Generous People)

Opening

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, everything we have is yours. Everything we have is a gracious gift from you. Your Son Jesus gave up his riches in heaven, so that through his poverty, we might become rich. You have promised that you will always give us enough to be generous at all times. Please help us by the power of your Holy Spirit to give you first priority, in our lives and in our budgets. Fill me with the joy of sharing in your grace – your generosity. Amen.

Share an experience you have had of sharing in the joy and grace of God's generosity (either when someone was generous with you or when you were able to be generous with someone else).

Wrestling with God's Word

2 Corinthians 8-9 contains a wonderful theology of Christian giving, and leads us into the liberating and joyful practice of Christian generosity.

Spend some time reading through this passage in its entirety before continuing with the study. You might like to read aloud in your group, paragraph by paragraph.

- *Discuss briefly and write down your responses to these chapters:*

These passages from Scripture show us that *generosity begins with God*. God is the source of all we have, and all that we call our own is a gift from him. Four aspects of Christian generosity emerge. The remainder of this Bible study helps us understand and practice these aspects of Christian generosity and giving.

1. Responsive.

Christian generosity is *responsive*. We give in response to God's grace, not in order to earn God's favour.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Discuss:

- What is the grace of God? How have you become rich? Why?
- From this verse what is the basis for Christian giving?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

- What was the Macedonians' situation? How did they feel about giving? Have you ever seen a similar situation of generosity?
- What was the grace of God that was given to the Macedonians? Is Paul talking about 'the forgiveness of sins,' or is 'grace' wider than that here? What else does God's grace include? What did the Macedonians do in response to this grace? Did they do this with fear or joy?

The Greek of 8:1 says, more literally,

'For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that was given to the Macedonian churches, that in many trials and testings, their joy overflowed and their deep poverty abounded in the richness of their generosity.'

- From 2 Corinthians 8:5, what does Paul say is *the most important aspect* of Christian giving? Why do you think this is so important?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:7.

- What is Paul's instruction to the Corinthians?

Christian giving is a grace-gift of God. Generosity is a gift of God's grace, just as forgiveness through Jesus is. God has made us rich – he has given his only Son for us. Christian giving is responsive. We give in response to God's grace, in order to share in God's generosity, not for any other reason.

As Christians, then, the basic question behind our giving will NOT be 'How much *should* I give to God?' but rather, 'How do I respond to God's grace?'

2. Proportional.

God wants us to acknowledge him as the Giver of all that we have. He helps us to acknowledge this reality with joy by inviting us to set aside a *proportion* of all that he gives us, as our first priority.

In doing this, God invites us to share in the joy of generosity, and the joy of discovering that he is more generous with us than we can ever be with others! To give back to God from our first and best is his plan for Christians.

This leads us to the second aspect of Christian giving.

It is *proportional*. *We give in proportion to what God has blessed us with.*

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

Now read 2 Corinthians 8:11-12.

- What does God's word teach about Christian giving in these two passages?

The New Testament never mentions *tithing* as law or requirement for Christians. God does not specify *what* proportion that we are to give. But God does consistently instruct Christians to return to him a *proportion* – a percentage of what he has given us.

Proportional giving leads us to ask:

- "Of all that God has given me by his grace, *what proportion* will I use in response, for his work *through the church* ?
- What proportion for generosity *towards others*?
- What proportion for my family's needs?
- What proportion for my needs?"

Proportional giving means that if your income goes down, the amount you give also goes down! If your income goes up, the amount goes up too. But the *proportion* does not change.

This brings us to the next aspect of Christian giving.

3. Planned.

Christian giving is *planned* – *not haphazard*.

Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7

- How do these passages teach us that giving is planned?
- Why is it important to plan your giving and generosity?

There are two complementary aspects of generosity with our possessions (not just our money). One is giving cheerfully to God's work of spreading the *gospel* through the *church*. The other is giving generously to God's *poor* through *charity*.

Read Hebrews 13:16, Romans 12:13, Matthew 25:40.

- What do these verses say about our responsibility to give to the poor out of what God has given us?
- What does Jesus say about such an act in Matthew 25:40?

This brings us to the fourth aspect of Christian giving and generosity.

4. Joyful.

Christian giving and generosity is *joyful and liberating* – *not coercive or guilt-inducing*.

Read the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-9.

- Did Jesus tell Zacchaeus what he 'should' do with his money or how much to give?
- Do you get the sense that Zacchaeus was grudging or joyful about his giving? Why do you think Zacchaeus decided to give so generously?
- What are God's *promises* associated with sharing the grace of generosity in the following verses? Write down or discuss in your small group.
- Luke 6:38
- Acts 20:35
- Matthew 6:31-33
- Proverbs 11:25
- 2 Corinthians 9:10-14

Putting it into practice

On the attached page you will a 'Proportional Giving Pledge' form. This is an ongoing, planned, personal, prayerful commitment to share in God's grace of giving. It's a tool designed to help you to be intentional about giving to God's work as your first priority. The pledge helps you to 'decide in your hearts' what to give, so that you can give cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7).

Please work through the attached pledge form in private (or with your partner) after completing the Bible study, and place it in a stamped, self-addressed envelope. **This envelope will not be opened.** It won't be used to coerce you to give, or to keep track on you. **It is just between yourself and God!** It will be returned to you in a few weeks'time.

Closing

What is the most important thing you have learned from this bible study?
How will what you have learned change your actions?

Close in prayer.

God bless you with the grace of giving and fill you with his joy!

Secret Proportional Giving Pledge

Please prayerfully fill in this slip after completing the Bible study. The secret pledge is a tool so that 'each person can give what they have decided in their hearts to give.'

Please place this piece of paper in a sealed, self-addressed envelope (not the offering envelope), and present it before God in the offering plate on Stewardship Sunday.

The envelope will not be opened. It will remain sealed, and will be returned to you soon.

The contents of this pledge are between you and God, by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Equal First priority: Giving to God's Work through the church

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please grant me the grace of generosity and the joy of sharing in your gracious giving. Please show me what proportion (percentage) of what you have given me, you want me to set aside for your work through the church, as the equal first priority in my budget. Amen.

I (my family) hereby pledge to set aside _____% of my (our) total income, for God's work through the church.

I (we) will do this through

- Offering envelopes/offering plate weekly (including Sundays I'm not able to be at worship)
- Regular Electronic Giving (you can ask your treasurer for details of how to use REG to give regularly and anonymously to God's work through the church)
- Giving to specific Christian mission projects

(At my/our current income level, this percentage works out to be \$_____per week/fortnight)

Equal First Priority: Giving to God's poor through charity

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have blessed me richly with material wealth, and many people in this world are in desperate need. Please show me what proportion (percentage) of what you have given me, you want me to set aside for giving to your poor through charity, as equal first priority in my budget. Amen.

I (my family) hereby pledge to set aside _____% of my (our) total income for God's poor through charity.

I (we) will give this proportion through the following charities.

(At my/our current income level, this proportion for charity works out to be \$_____ per fortnight/
\$_____ per year.)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please accept these pledges for Jesus' sake. By your Holy Spirit, lead me to carry them out, and grant that I may give cheerfully. Lead me deeper into the joy of giving by grace. Amen.

Signed:

Date: