

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE for EMBRACE TOMORROW

GIVING
SACRIFICIALLY
2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

MAIN POINT

God calls His people to give beyond their understanding and comfort to show their trust of God and love for man.

INTRODUCTION

What are some factors that make it difficult to talk about money and financial giving?

What are some ways that money can cause harm?

How does the gospel of Jesus free us from the love of money?

Have you ever flipped through the channels on the TV and stumbled upon a prosperity preacher? Although on the surface it appears genuine, the message often turns to be about what God has given them and what He will give you, if only you invest in their ministry. In reality, this karma approach to giving is only fanning the flame of sinful desire to get more and more. We need to be careful not to let money gain our heart, though. It's possible to not even know we have a problem with money. After all, our excesses are at times excused as "blessings," right? We need to be aware that it's possible to hide from our idolatry simply by calling our over-indulgence "blessings." The gospel of Jesus finally loosens our grip on money and frees us to give wisely and cheerfully.

UNDERSTANDING

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-2.

What did God give to the churches in Macedonia? How does this relate to the actions of the churches in verse 2?

What difficult circumstances are these churches having to face?

In spite of their circumstances, what was revealed about their character?

These two verses help us understand the power of the grace of God. How else could a group of people have a wealth of generosity and abundant joy in the midst of affliction and extreme poverty? It was only by the grace of God. This group of churches become our example of how the grace of God leads us to an open-handed view of money.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:3-7.

What were the churches in Macedonia eager to do?

Have you ever been in a place, like the people of Macedonia, where you longed to give even more? What do you think was driving this deep motivation to give?

Have you ever been so convinced of a mission that you just had to give to it?

As Christians, we have been saved by God and given a mission. Our mission is to advance the glory of our King through gospel proclamation. We joyfully give our lives and our resources to see this goal accomplished.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:8-10.

Notice how the work of Jesus is used as our example and our fuel to give. How does a proper understanding of the gospel actually loosen our grip on money?

When the gospel is properly understood, how does it give us the desire to give joyfully?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:11-12.

Each person has greater or lesser means to contribute. The key point is not how much we have, but the motive of our hearts and our willingness to give.

Do you struggle with a willingness to give joyfully? What hesitations enter your mind when you are called by God to give?

After consideration of the great lengths Jesus went to give, how does this affect our generosity?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:13-15.

When one person is in need, the others are there to help—this is how kingdom living operates. The church body is a family created by the grace of Jesus who get to help each other through genuine acts of love and support. How amazing is this plan? Not only has God created and adopted us into this family, but He has given us one another. Isn't it wonderful to belong to such a family as this?

Think about a time when you were in need and God sent a Christian brother or sister to your aid.

What would it look like to create an environment where someone in need did not have to be ashamed to ask for help?

What would it look like for verse 15 to become a reality in your Sunday School Class?

APPLICATION

Identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to your life.

How should God's ultimate gift to us compel us to give? What can you do to keep this truth in your thoughts this week?

How do you know if your giving is truly generous? What steps would be required for you to start giving generously or to increase your giving?

With whom specifically can you share the generosity of God this week?

PRAY

God, free me from the misuse of money. Help me to understand the resources you give me are not for me, but for your purposes.

COMMENTARY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

8:1-5. When Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans, he indicated that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had "been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" and that he would take the contribution to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-27). Paul mentioned the offering also in Acts 24:17. Paul had assigned Titus the task of collecting the offering in Corinth. The problems in the church there had delayed the process. Paul, however, wanted Titus to complete the task (2 Cor. 8:6).

Why were the Jerusalem Christians in such dire straits at this time? Perhaps the primary reason was that the unbelieving Jews persecuted Jewish Christians. These Christians must have been socially and economically ostracized. Their businesses in many cases were ruined. Moreover, when large numbers of Jewish pilgrims were converted at Pentecost, many of them apparently chose to remain in Jerusalem, thus worsening the economic crisis. Some interpreters believe the early Christian communal life was a failure, thus adding to the crisis (Acts 4:34-37). Luke, however, made no statement of disapproval regarding the community of goods. Instead, he recorded that “abundant grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

Why did Paul remind the Corinthian church of a monetary offering in view of the church’s problems with which he earlier had dealt? Perhaps Paul felt that Christians who are right with God in stewardship matters also will be right with one another in other matters. You may recall that the Corinthian church already had begun to collect the offering a year earlier (8:10). The Greek word for grace occurs five times in 8:1-9 where it is variously translated grace (vv. 1,9), favor (v. 4), and “gracious work” (vv. 6,7). When used of God, the term refers to His unmerited favor. When used of Christians, the word may refer to our expressions of kindness to others in response to God’s grace toward us.

Paul used the churches of Macedonia (located at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) as a great model of generous and joyful giving. In contrast to the wealthier Corinthian church, the Macedonians experienced deep poverty (v. 2). They also suffered persecution. Yet the Macedonian Christians gave sacrificially, generously, and voluntarily. By the phrase beyond their ability (v. 3), Paul perhaps meant that the Macedonians gave sacrificially from their meager supplies. They even begged to give (v. 4)! Having gone beyond Paul’s expectations, the Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God (v. 5). The term first may refer to first in time or in importance. If it means first in time, the point is that giving oneself precedes other kinds of giving. If it means first in importance, the point is that their total giving of themselves to the Lord and to Paul was their most important act of giving. In application, the meanings are similar. They were willing to give themselves in service in any way needed.

8:6-9. Titus, a Gentile convert, apparently accompanied Paul to the Jerusalem Council with reference to requiring Gentile converts to be circumcised and to obey certain Jewish laws (Acts 15:2; Gal. 2:1) although others distinguish between the events recorded in Acts 15 and those in Galatians 2. Paul did not have Titus circumcised because circumcision had no part in salvation (Gal. 2:3). Titus was Paul’s capable coworker in Corinth.

Second Corinthians 8:6 indicates that Titus had begun the task of collecting the offering in Corinth, and Paul wanted him to complete it. In 8:16-23 Paul expressed thanks to God that Titus shared Paul’s deep concern for the Corinthians (v. 16). In verse 23 Paul indicated his high regard for Titus as Paul’s “partner and fellow worker.”

Although giving has little significance to some who profess to be Christians, the expression gracious work (v. 7) shows that Paul considered giving an act of grace. Paul urged the Corinthians to grow in the grace of giving. Instead of exercising his authority as an apostle, Paul chose to soften his appeal by stating that he did not intend his words as a command (v. 8). He wanted the Corinthians to give voluntarily. He also wanted to prove, or test, the sincerity of (their) love. The Greek word translated love in this phrase is agape, a self-giving love that results from God’s action toward us in Christ. Since love by nature is active, it demonstrates itself in helpful deeds (Jas. 2:14-17). In the expression earnestness of others, Paul referred to the Macedonians’ generous and inspiring example of giving. Paul focused on the

great generosity of the Macedonians in spite of their poverty (2 Cor. 8:1) to inspire the Corinthians to give.

Paul also appealed to the example of Christ to motivate the Corinthians (v. 9). Jesus is the supreme example of generous giving. Verse 9 may remind us of Philippians 2:5-11. Christ became poor in the sense of humbling Himself, taking the role of a servant, and experiencing suffering and death. He freely gave up the glory of heaven in order to make all who trust Him spiritually rich. Furthermore, Christ's emptying of Himself is to be understood in a personal way. He gave up everything for you and me. We may conclude that if Christ's supreme example of giving did not inspire the Corinthians to give, nothing else would.

8:10-11. In these verses Paul challenged the Corinthians to put their earlier good intentions into practice by completing what they had started. Paul suggested that the completion of their offering was to their advantage, or "profitable" for them. They had begun the project a year ago. Paul had suggested a plan of weekly offerings to reach their goal (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Presumably, their failure to complete the project either had stemmed from lack of concern or from preoccupation with other matters.

Nevertheless, Paul urged the Corinthians to complete the project. He wanted them to act now (v. 11). What they needed to do was, not to renew their promise to give, but to actually give. The eager spirit they had demonstrated by their willingness to begin the task of collecting the offering needed at this point to be matched by action in completing the project. No matter how strong and good our intentions and desires may be, they are fruitless if we do not carry them through to completion of the action. Our failure to act on our intentions can harm our reputations. We need to put good intentions into practice. Although the Macedonians had given beyond their ability (v. 3), Paul challenged the Corinthians to give according to their ability (v. 11). Paul did not intend the collection to be a burden to the Corinthians.

8:12. Verse 12 builds on verse 11. The word translated readiness also means "willingness." Since the Corinthians previously had expressed a willingness to give, Paul currently was concerned with their present willingness, as well as with their performance. The motive was important. Moreover, the amount they gave was to be based on what the people possessed, not on what they did not have.

8:13- 14. Paul did not expect the Corinthians to burden themselves so that others might live in ease at their expense. Paul did not want the Corinthians to cause themselves hardship by giving. Paul stressed equality. Paul viewed all believers as comprising one spiritual body of Christ, the church. When any part of the body of believers hurts, the other parts have a responsibility to help the ailing part (see 1 Cor. 12:12-27) . In particular, the wealthier Corinthian church ought to help the suffering Judean Christians. God uses Christian giving to meet human needs. On the other hand, Paul did not teach that a wealthier Christian should support an idle church member (2 Thess. 3:10). All Christians are interdependent and our mutual sharing can benefit one another. Thus, in 2 Corinthians 8:12-14 Paul presented the principles of proportionate and reciprocal giving.