

# Blessing, Not Shame

Grace, Gratitude, and Generosity

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:15

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Happy Thanksgiving First Free! My name is Jordan Krahn. I'm the High School Pastor. Thanksgiving with kids has really changed my experience. For Thanksgiving my family really pulls out all the stops. I have six siblings with spouses. So there's a lot of people to bring great food. My family doesn't just bring a pie. We have multiple options of pies! We don't just have potatoes. We have options of potatoes! My family's Thanksgiving feast is a sight to behold. But then I show my son the food. I tell Jude, "All of this can be yours." I give Jude a wide variety of options from this feast. And then what does Jude eat? He eats exclusively bread and cheese. And all I can think is, "Jude, don't miss out on this feast!"

When it comes to our money we just want the bread and cheese. But when it comes to our finances, we need to realize there's a feast God calls us to. Generosity is a blessing God doesn't want us to miss out on. So come with that heart as we finish our look at generosity. We're calling this sermon mini-series "Grace, Gratitude, and Generosity." And we're going to be back in 2 Corinthians 8-9 where we'll see God's call for the church to be generous with believers who have little.

Before we look at our text, I want you to imagine with me the year is 1864. And imagine you're living in the American South, and it's near the end of the Civil War. You're a businessman and as a businessman you've accumulated a lot of Confederate currency. Now let's assume you know for a fact that the South is going to lose, the North is going to win, and the war will end soon. What will you do with the Confederate money you've accumulated? If you're smart, you'll exchange the Confederate currency because it will soon be worthless. The Confederate currency will not last. You know that US currency will last. When the war is over, US currency will be the only currency of value. As a businessman, you should invest your finances in what has lasting value. You should want your money to endure.

In the Sermon on the Mount, there's a parallel point. In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus says that our world's currency will not last. Our money will soon be moth eaten. Our treasures will be stolen. Our stuff will one day be destroyed. But Jesus calls us to a better treasure. Jesus calls us to a lasting treasure. If you're smart, you'll exchange our world's currency for treasures in heaven. When Jesus returns, treasures in heaven will be the only currency of value. When you die, eternal treasure is the only one that will last. And submitting our finances to God means treasures in heaven. Having God as the Lord of our finances means eternal reward.

So if for treasures in heaven, we are to surrender our finances to God; if for an eternal treasure, our money is to be in submission to God; how does God call us to steward our money? What does God's word say about our finances?

God calls us to steward our money in many different ways. And many of these principles can be applied to giving to the church. But here in 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul is looking at one facet of the call to generosity. Paul is looking at generosity to poor Christians. That grace awakens relief to those with little. And 2 Corinthians is Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. If you were here last week, you'll remember that about a year before this letter, the Corinthian church gave a pledge. They said

they'd give relief to the church in Jerusalem. But their problem was they hadn't fulfilled the pledge. Their passion to generously love these poor Christians waned. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul wants to see their passion for generosity revived by God's grace. Paul wants their generosity to be transformed by Jesus. Paul wants to see the church in Corinth follow through with their pledge.

And so this week we'll see the godly stewards Paul is sending to see this giving through. Paul is sending righteous delegates to deliver the offering. And then Paul will look at how giving blesses the giver. He will show how God blesses the generous.

## 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:15<sup>1</sup>

<sup>16</sup>But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. <sup>17</sup>For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. <sup>18</sup>With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. <sup>19</sup>And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. <sup>20</sup>We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, <sup>21</sup>for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. <sup>22</sup>And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. <sup>23</sup>As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. <sup>24</sup>So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

<sup>9:1</sup>Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, <sup>2</sup>for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. <sup>3</sup>But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. <sup>4</sup>Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—or being so confident. <sup>5</sup>So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

<sup>6</sup>The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup>Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup>And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup>As it is written,

*“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever.”*

<sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup>For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup>By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, <sup>14</sup>while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. <sup>15</sup>Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

This is the Word of the Lord.

In this text we'll see that godly stewards and God's blessing should lead the church to generosity.

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

It's broken up into three parts—the purpose of the delegates Paul is sending, a preparation call to be ready, and four blessings of generosity. So purpose, preparation, and four blessings.

### **PURPOSE OF THE GODLY, APPOINTED STEWARDS (8:16-24)**

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As we look at this passage, the Corinthians are dragging their feet to give. It's not totally clear why. But they might be questioning Paul's motives. They might not be sure if they can trust Paul. Many of us probably have similar hesitations to giving. So Paul sends three godly men to help Corinth in this process. Let's look at that.

Who are these godly stewards? Who are the men bringing this offering to Jerusalem? In 8:16-24 these three men are described. Titus is the first godly steward. In 8:16, Titus is said to be a man who “earnestly cares” for the church. Titus is excited about delivering the gift; he's eager to bless the poor saints. The second godly steward is mentioned in verse 18, yet is unnamed. He is described as being “famous” for preaching the gospel, and lives to share the hope found in Jesus. In verse 19, he is also “appointed” by the Macedonian churches. He's there in a partnership with another church. He's holding everyone accountable. He's making sure the money makes it to Jerusalem. In verse 22, the third godly steward is mentioned and is also unnamed. He is described as “tested” and “earnest,” with godly character. Overall, these three men are faithful. They are trustworthy. They are reliable. But what are these men trying to accomplish? What's their purpose in bringing this gift to Jerusalem? What's the motivation of these three men?

Let's unpack the purpose of these godly stewards. Their first purpose in coming is for thanksgiving to God. In verse 16, Paul gives “thanks” to God for these men. The word “thanks” is literally “grace.” Paul is giving the gracious gift of praise for the godly stewards. They're not coming to take money for themselves. They're coming to bring praise to God. Delivering this gift leads to worship of God.

The second purpose of this offering is an extension of grace from man to man. Verse 19 describes the offering as “carry[ing] out this act of grace.” They are coming to extend grace to the church in Jerusalem. They're not coming to take advantage of others. As God gives a gift in Jesus, these men come to deliver the gift of relief.

The third purpose of these godly stewards is to love their neighbor. In verse 19, Paul says that it's to “show our good will.” They are loving their neighbor by delivering the offering. They're not coming to take money selfishly. They are helping the Corinthian church to love their neighbor as themselves.

The fourth purpose of these stewards is to be above reproach. In verse 21, Paul says that they are “aim[ing] at what is honorable...in the sight of man.” Paul's saying these stewards are helping them be honorable. These stewards aren't coming to steal. They are holding them accountable. They are ensuring things aren't corrupt. They are making sure things are above board.

So now we've seen the stewards. And we've seen their purposes. What do these godly men mean for us? How do these three godly stewards apply to us? Here are the questions I think we need to ask in response: “Who are you entrusting your generosity to? Are the people you entrust your generosity to saturated with the grace of the gospel? Are their purposes godly and above reproach?”

On the Meet the Team page of our website there's a list of church leaders. You can find this list at the very bottom of the page. Let me encourage you to read through the list of elders who give

leadership to our finances. These are godly leaders. Sit down and read through the list of volunteer trustees who steward our money. Or talk with Chris Wolgamott and Lucas McGarity about the benevolence fund. Hear about the money we steward to love the under-resourced in our church and city. These are godly men. Talk with someone on the Missions Committee that's stewarding almost twenty-five percent of our budget to missions. These are godly men and women. They are passionate about the grace of the gospel. Thanks be to God who has put it in the hearts of these men and women to steward our finances faithfully. This is grace.

## **PREPARATION FOR THE GODLY STEWARDS (9:1-5)**

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In 8:16-24 we saw the purpose of the godly stewards. In 9:1-5, we'll see the need for preparation for the godly stewards. Paul wants the Corinthians to be ready for this act of generosity. In verse 2, Paul notes of their "readiness" in the past. Paul even bragged to the Macedonians about how ready the church in Corinth was. But Paul is hoping their readiness hasn't waned. Paul doesn't want their zeal to die out. And Paul wants them to be ready to avoid a few things.

In calling the church to be ready, there are three things Paul is hoping to avoid. First, Paul wants to avoid empty boasting. In verse 3 he says, "I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty." Paul boasted about God's work at Corinth. Paul bragged to the Macedonians of how greatly God moved the Corinthians to be generous. This boasting encouraged the Macedonians. Their commitment began a domino effect of generosity. The Corinthian pledge led to Macedonian generosity. Paul doesn't want his boasting to be empty. Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to fail. Paul's coming to bring grace, not disgrace.

Second, Paul wants to avoid humiliation. In verse 4, he says if they fail to give "we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you." Paul's not coming to humiliate. Paul's not coming to embarrass. He doesn't want to shame. Paul's coming to bring grace with the blessing of giving.

Third, Paul wants to avoid exacting the generosity. In verse 5, his hope is that "it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction." Paul doesn't want to pull teeth to have the Corinthians be generous. Paul doesn't want to lift the church in Corinth up by their ankles to shake the money out. Paul wants them to be ready to love, eager to give. Paul doesn't want the disgrace of exaction. Paul wants to bring grace to the Corinthians.

So Paul's saying the point isn't to shame them into giving. The point isn't to peer pressure them. The point isn't to disgrace them. But what is Paul's point? The point is to prepare them for an opportunity. Paul wants them to be ready for the gift of giving. Josh went over this last week, so I want to acknowledge the repetition. But, the point *for us* is to be ready to give. The point *for us* is to prepare for this blessing.

We want to help our people be ready for generosity. So, starting in January we're hosting a biblical finances class. In this class, we'll utilize both Dave Ramsey and Compass material. And our hope is to equip and disciple you for biblical generosity. We'll walk you through the Scriptures and we'll get practical with your finances. If you've never taken a class on biblical finances, take this one. Are you a broke college student with no money? Take this class. Are you a young family spending all your money on diapers? Take this class. Are you getting ready for retirement? Take this class. Our biblical finances class will be so helpful. Look for registration in coming weeks. We want you to be ready for blessing.

So if giving isn't to shame, isn't about peer pressure, but is about blessing the giver, how is generosity a gracious gift to the giver? What's in it for those who give?

## **BLESSING OF GENEROSITY (9:6-15)**

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Generosity is a blessing. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Paul is going to look at four blessings of generosity, four ways generosity graces the giver.

### ***God rewards the generous.***

In 9:6 Paul says, "whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Paul compares giving to a farmer planting for harvest. For a farmer to have a great harvest he has to sow a lot of seed. As a 16-year-old kid I worked on my grandparents' farm. There was a ton of scattering when it came to planting. Planting used a massive amount of seed. I know firsthand that when the farmers scatter seed they aren't stingy. If the farmer only scatters little the farmer will harvest little. The farmer sows so much seed. The farmer scatters knowing the harvest will be great. For the giver, great generosity leads to the harvest of great rewards. Sowing our finances for God's purposes gives a crop of reward. In verse 11, Paul reaffirms this when he says "You will be enriched in every way." TV preachers *actually* have something right; generous giving *does* lead to riches. Generosity *is* a get rich quick scheme. But generosity leads to riches of faith. Generosity leads to the riches of joy. Generosity leads to the riches of spiritual growth. Generosity leads to eternal riches, treasures in heaven. Sometimes in response to generosity God will give earthly riches. But in verse 11, Paul makes it clear that greater earthly riches are given so that you can give more. Or as Randy Alcorn says, "God prospers us not to increase our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving." The more you give, the more God gives back to you. God rewards the generous.

### ***God loves a cheerful giver.***

The second blessing of generosity is God's love. In 9:7 Paul says, "God loves a cheerful giver." Now God certainly loves all. God loves the whole world. But there's a special love God gives happy givers. God isn't after your finances. God is after your heart. God wants your heart to find joy in generosity. Does the thought of using your finances to impact eternity make your heart leap? Does the idea of using your finances to help those in need bring your heart joy? Does using your money to store up treasures in heaven stir your heart? God loves a cheerful giver. And God loving a cheerful giver has implications. God loving the joyful generous has impact.

Because God loves cheerful givers Paul says right before this, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart." Paul's saying to cheerfully ask God, "How much are you wanting me to give?" In your heart pray to God, "How generous am I called to be?" Then listen to God. And obey how much he has called you to give. If you truly want God's wisdom on your finances, ask him. God won't leave you in the dark. God has given you his Word and his Spirit to guide you. God has given his people to teach you.

So if God loves a cheerful giver, what do your finances say about where your heart is? Are you a cheerful giver? The average American gives between two and three percent of their income to charity. If your accountant looked at your finances, would they see a joyful giver? Or would you compare to the rest of secular America? Do your finances simply reflect the two to three percent average that non-believing Americans give? Or do your finances demand a gospel explanation? Has the gospel brought to life joyful generosity in your finances?

I remember before I became a believer I thought Christians who sacrificially gave were weird. I thought, “Why give so much? Why not have a nicer car? Why not have a bigger house?” I was confused by joyful generosity. Our non-believing accountants should be confused by our joyful generosity. Our non-believing family should think our sacrifice for God’s purposes is weird. God loves a cheerful giver. And our finances should reflect the cheerful giving God loves so much.

***God provides for the generous.***

The third blessing of generosity is that God provides for the generous. In verse 8, Paul describes God’s provision as “grace” that “abounds.” For the righteous giver, God is not stingy in his provision. God overwhelmingly provides. God abundantly blesses. In verse 9, Paul quotes Psalm 112:9 when he writes “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” In this quote, “he” is the righteous giver. “He” is a generous godly person. And “he” is established forever by God. Psalm 112:9 affirms that God supplies to the righteous generous. The psalmist says, God gives all we need for generosity. So when we give to poor saints, God supplies. When we sacrifice to make Jesus’ name known, God supplies. In verses 10 Paul says, “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing.” Paul is saying that God gives to the farmer. God supplies what the farmer needs in the harvest. God will certainly meet the needs of the generous. Do you trust that God will supply all you need? When you’re generous, God will replenish all you need.

My wife is one example of God meeting the needs of the generous. I remember very early in my pastoral ministry my wife and I were doing our budget. We’ve got a spreadsheet out, looking at my income. And we’ve broken it down to know where all the money is going. We’ve set our percentage amount for generosity. We said, “We are committed to giving this percent.” But we cannot get our expenses to meet my income. Our expenses are too much. My first response? “Holly, we can cut what we’re giving. We don’t have to give this much. We can give less.” Holly’s response? “No, I want this amount to be the least we will ever give. I always want to give more than this. I want the generosity line to always be growing in our budget.” Inside I’m thinking, “Babe, I’m a youth pastor. Yes, my retirement plan is heavenly. But surely we can take it easy on giving.” I wasn’t believing in a God who supplies. I believed God would fail us. I thought God couldn’t meet our needs, while my wife’s faith was confident in a God who supplies. You know what? God has always supplied what we needed and more. God has always blessed the faith and the cheerful giving of my wife.

***God receives praise.***

The fourth blessing of generosity is that God receives praise. In 9:12 Paul says, the “ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.” Our generosity leads to thanksgiving to God. Our generosity leads to praise to God. The church unites and sings, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” And God’s glory is our good. God’s praise is what our hearts long for. But what are some avenues where we can be generous with Christians in need? How can our generosity bring praise to our God?

When I think of opportunities at First Free to be generous with the poor, three main things come to mind. The first way you can be a part of giving to poor saints in need is through regular giving to First Free. Our church stewards our budget to bless Christians with little. First Free gives almost twenty-five percent of our budget to missions. And in the poorest half of our world we have missions partners in nine countries. We’re sending to countries like Moldova, Mozambique, and Zambia. We’re mobilizing in regions like North Africa and South and Southeast Asia. First Free is

sending to make disciples among the most impoverished of our world. In the hardest of places, we're offering mercy in the name of Christ. First Free sacrifices more of our regular budget to make Jesus known than any other church I know of. And just regular giving to our offering impacts poor saints in need. And regular giving results in the praise from poor saints.

The second way you can be a part of giving to poor saints is through our benevolence offering. This offering is collected once a month and meets the needs of those in need within our church and city. Lucas McGarity and Chris Wolgamott meet with those who have benevolence requests to check finances, look at bills, confirm the difficult situation, and bless those in need. So the benevolence ministry helps where there's unemployment, car needs, rent needs, medical needs, professional counseling needs, or physical needs. The benevolence offering is one avenue to be generous to poor saints that results in praise.

The third way you can be a part of giving to poor saints in need is by being a part of our year-end giving strategy. At the end of the year we hope our giving exceeds our budget. And every dollar we collect over our budget goes toward Christians in need. So if our giving goes over budget for 2018, the trustees have allocated \$50,000 in projects to be generous with poor Christians. We've planned \$45,000 to give to the Union Rescue Mission's New Beginnings program to provide scholarships. The New Beginnings Program is a residential program to get homeless men back on their feet. It trains them spiritually, financially, and practically to build a new life in Christ. Together our church can give several scholarships to the New Beginnings program. And second, there are some unexpected medical expenses for some of our missions partners. We want to love and bless these partners in need. And we want to meet those needs. So if you're a regular giver I'd encourage you to give more so we can meet these needs. We want to ask our church to give above our normal generosity that we might love these poor saints. And if you've never given, generosity is a part of discipleship. Disciples give. Followers of Jesus give. Generosity is an essential part of following Jesus. So begin giving today. These projects are going to result in praise and thanksgiving to God. These believers will give glory to God for our generosity. Church, let's not give in order to get. Let's give to see God praised!

### ***Conclusion***

Paul ends 2 Corinthians 8-9 saying; "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift." He began our section in 8:16 with thanks. And now he ends our section with thanks. This word "thanks" is also "grace." And the gift he's wanting us to remember is the gracious gift of Jesus.

This grace is well captured in the hymn "Grace, Grace, God's Grace" where the hymn writer says,

*Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!  
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,  
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilled.  
Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;  
Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our sin.*

Have you experienced this grace? It will lead you to the grace of generosity.