

Generosity

2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

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Sermon text and audio are online at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

Today our topic is generosity. But I want to start today by asking a question – “Do we really need to talk about money again?!”

When I was growing up, our church regularly had talks on money. And by regularly, I mean once a year. Once a year the church wardens would get up and encourage us to use the giving envelopes. A few Bible verses were mentioned. Then everyone, especially the wardens, would breathe a sigh of relief that the money talk was over for another year.

So why do we need to talk about it more? Offertories. Mission giving. Building work. Staffing. Fundraising. Money, money, money!!! Why do we need to talk about it so much? ... Because God does. God talks about it a lot.

Not only throughout the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. Just a brief look at the New Testament alone, and we see money mentioned and taught about in Matthew 6,13, 17, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, Mark 6, 11, 12, 14, Luke 3, 7, 9, 14, 16, 19, 22, John 2, 12, 13, Acts 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 16.

There are a lot of parables and stories just in the gospels about money – The pearl of great value, the rich young man (in Matthew, Mark AND Luke), paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus clearing the temple of the money changers, the widow’s offering, Jesus being anointed with the expensive perfume, the Do not worry passage, Jesus’ teaching on the cost of being a disciple, the parable of the shrewd manager, the rich man and Lazarus, the parable of the ten minas, the story of Zaccheus the tax collector... and the list goes on!

God speaks again and again about money. But why? I think we all know the answer to this question. Because money is a dangerous god. Money is a master. Money has a power over people like nothing else in our society.

And it’s not just money but the love of money – the things that lead to money – our work, our possessions, our lifestyle. So much of our lives are governed by money. But no-one wants to talk about this false god in our lives.

And that’s the problem. It is a god in our society, and we don’t even like to talk openly about it.

So today, we’re talking about it – again. But today, we’re not going to talk about HOW MUCH. We’re going to talk about HOW and WHY. And of course generosity isn’t just about money – it’s about our whole life and ALL that we have.

And I want start by summing up generosity for the Christian in one word. If we understand this word, we understand generosity. If we understand this word, our lives, and our community, can be transformed. It’s a word that’s crucial to our faith and it may have gone un-noticed as we read this passage.

- The word is **GRACE**.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 8 with me. Verse 1.

- *“¹And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in*

rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.”

The Macedonians were poor. Yet they gave. In fact, they **begged** for Paul to let them give to the work of the gospel. These poor beggars begged to give. Why? Because they understood **grace**. And to understand grace is to understand God.

So what is grace? The word “Grace” simply comes from the word that means “gift”. Grace is a free gift that we receive from God – a gift that we don’t deserve. And the Macedonians recognised that they had received God’s grace in receiving the free gift of eternal life. And **that** changed the way they lived.

God’s grace made them say: “We beg of you – let us help! We don’t have much but we’re offering you everything we possibly can!” The Macedonians had **received** grace and they **BEGGED(!)** to **share** grace.

Now, Paul is actually a bit frustrated as he writes this letter, because the Corinthians were much better off financially than the Macedonians. Yet they weren’t generous. So Paul gives them another example. Verse 9

- *“⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”*

The grace of Jesus – he was rich. Lord of all creation. Yet became poor. A servant. A suffering servant. Died on a cross. So we might become rich and have eternal life.

Here we have the poor Macedonians giving all they could, and the rich Jesus giving up all he had. You see, it’s not about how much. It’s never about how much. It’s about WHY. It’s about GRACE. We’re called to be generous because God, in his grace, was generous to us.

Do you remember how generous God has been to you? Just take a moment to remember, to put at the front of your mind, the grace that God has shown you. Open your heart to remember that generosity of the cross of Jesus. Remember what he’s done for you.

Genuine generosity. What **he** has done for **you**. The price **he** has paid for **you**. The free gift **he** has given **you**. We can only be truly generous if we can understand God’s generous grace to us in Jesus.

So let’s turn now to talk about **HOW**. Turn with me to 8:14 –

- *“¹⁴At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality...”*

Paul wants to see equality in the community of God. What sort of equality? Does he want the Macedonians to have the same amount of **money** as the Corinthians? No.

- Paul is talking about an equality of **willingness**.

He says in verse 12 –

- *“¹²For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.”*
- Paul wants us all to be **equally willing**. No matter how much we have or give. It’s about having the same **willingness** to be generous.

“Are you willing to be generous?” – with money, wealth, time, skills – all that you have. It doesn’t matter if you give \$1 or \$1000 a week. Are you **willing** to do it?

“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable.” (verse 12)

- If you are willing, let me give you **Pauls 3 R's** of "HOW to give" in chapter 9:
- **1. Ready giving.** Be ready to give cheerfully. Verse 7. Be ready with what you are giving. Don't **drag** it out of your pocket. Don't **grudgingly** give because you feel under obligation. Be ready – up front – here it is!

Generosity is joyful. Can you **readily** say to someone – YES! I'll help you move house! Not – Well, I'll check my calendar – maybe I can help for an hour or so with some boxes if no-one else can..." Say YES! I'll help with the washing up! YES! I'll clean the toilets! YES! I'll give generously. YES I'll pray with you tonight! Give readily, not grudgingly. Give cheerfully, not resentfully.

- **2. Responsive giving.** Let your giving be a **response** to God's grace that you have received. (read 9:8) Let others see God's grace in the way YOU show grace to them. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Love as the Lord loved you. Give as the Lord gave to you. Grace to those who hurt you, grace to those who make mistakes. Grace to those who are rude. Grace to those who cause you pain. Respond with grace because of the grace you have received.
- **3. Repeated giving.** Let your generosity repeat. When we're generous, God will bless us with more... generosity!

Look at verses 6-11. Some people like to interpret these verses as saying – If you give lots, God will reward you with lots. Give away your wealth, God will reward you with more wealth. But that's not what Paul's saying.

- Verse 10 says God will "*enrich the harvest of your **righteousness**,*" not our bank account. He will increase our righteousness.
- And verse 11: "You will be made rich in every way SO THAT YOU CAN BE GENEROUS on every occasion"

Be generous and you will gain the gift of **more generosity**. Be generous and God will make you more generous! And people will rejoice and praise God because of your generosity. (verse 13)

Be generous so God can make you more generous!
 Show grace so you can learn to show more grace!
 Love others so you can learn to love others more!
 Forgive others so you can learn even greater forgiveness!

- It's what I want to call "**the momentum of grace**". It's like the snowball effect – rolling downhill becoming bigger and bigger and picking up more and more momentum... until... it's hard to stop!

God's grace is like that. It's the gift that keeps gaining momentum! The more you love people, care for people, be generous to people, forgive people – the more God wants to gift us with more capacity to love, and care, and be generous and more forgiving.

Three R's:

- Be **ready** to give, not reluctantly, not for a reward, but cheerfully.
- Be **responsive** in your giving – respond to the generosity God showed you through Jesus.
- And **repeat** your giving – let the momentum build as you serve God with all you have.

Generosity is all about ... grace – be READY with Grace, RESPONSIVE with Grace and REPETITIVE with Grace – and we will be a **community** of Grace.

Let me finish with a great quote from John Wesley – I think it sums up the momentum of grace:

“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.”
John Wesley

Let's pray.