



## **Going Deeper**

Grace Under Pressure: Journey to Generosity

2 Corinthians 8:1-13

October 25, 2009

### **Opening Prayer**

We thank God for his word:

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16

**Leader**      **The Lord be with you**  
**People**       ***And also with you***  
**Leader**      **Let us pray**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### **Remembering the Message**

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-13.

What words or phrases stood out to you as you read this passage?

What is Paul seeking to emphasize in this part of his letter to the Corinthian church?

### **Introduction**

Paul begins this section of scripture with a very personal admonition. “And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know...” (8:1) (Your translation may, like the NIV, simply say, “brothers.” However the noun “adelphoi” can be understood to mean either “brothers” or “brothers and sisters”.) That’s because he’s going to be talking about a very personal subject: giving. Rather than speaking from above with the authority he could hold over them as an apostle, he comes alongside, speaking to them as a brother in Christ. He even goes so far as to say that he is not commanding them to give (8:8). Paul is intentionally taking the road of grace as he commends the example of the Macedonian churches to the Corinthian church.

Fr. David took a similar tack as he commended us to think about ways that Christ Church has given over the past 25 years. He used stories about the buildings on our campus, giving to Peru, the Roof Dog Run, people inviting friends to church, and even the young people who received communion for the first time at the 11:00 service Sunday morning. All are examples of ministries that happen because of the gifts of God’s generous people. However, one is not coerced or commanded to give, it comes out of the overflow of relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Going deeper

1. Read Matthew 5:16. How does this relate to the invitation to give?
2. What are ways that you have seen the Christ Church family (your brothers and sisters) at work for God?

## The Severe Trial

In this text, Paul describes the plight of the Macedonian churches. Macedonia was a region of northern Greece that encompassed the area where the towns of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were located. While Paul doesn't give any specifics about what type of severe trial these churches faced, we can guess that it would have included oppression by the Roman government that the entire region endured as well as particular persecution because they were Christians. Whatever the reason, the trials had left the Macedonian churches in poverty, which Paul compared to the affluence of Corinth.

Yet rather than shrink back from contributing to Paul's offering, the Macedonian churches "welled up in rich generosity" (v. 2), giving as much as they could, "and even beyond their ability" (v. 3). What's amazing is that they weren't asked or instructed by Paul to give, they begged ("urgently pleaded") with Paul for the opportunity to give! Despite hardship and heartache, their lives were filled with joy (v. 2), which led them to generously share what little they had with others.

This is an example to us as well as the Corinthian church. Rather than have our hearts shrink back in fear during a difficult time, the example of the Macedonian church would call us to have joy and generosity that we can share with others.

## Going deeper

1. Paul himself had known difficult times, yet he remained content. Read Philippians 4:10-13. What circumstances had Paul faced with joy and contentment? How have you known contentment in difficult times?
2. Paul said that extreme poverty in Macedonia had overflowed into great generosity. Have you seen this? What about the opposite? Have you ever seen great wealth result in great greed?
3. How do you handle times of difficulty? Do they result in joy in your life?

## The Source of Generosity

Paul gives a clue to the source of the Macedonian's great joy and generosity. In verse 5, he said that they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to [Paul]. The Macedonians had a relationship with Jesus Christ that had forever changed them. They knew that Jesus had been generous with them, going so far as to give up his life so that they would know forgiveness of sin. Paul said that in giving up everything, Jesus had made us rich (8.9). The Macedonians understood what James, the brother of Jesus, meant when he said that "every good and perfect gift is from above" (James 1:15). Because Jesus had given generously to them, the Macedonians wanted to express his life by giving to other people whose need might be greater than their own.

This gives us two important truths about biblical generosity:

1. Giving has to come out of our love for God in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the source of everything we might give to another person. His life becomes our life (2 Corinthians 4:10). His light becomes our light (1 John 1:7). His love our love (1 John 4:19). His generosity is our generosity (2 Corinthians 8:9).
2. Giving has to come out of love for our neighbor. When we have known the life and love of Jesus, we naturally want to pass it on to other people. The Macedonian church couldn't wait to share with others. They had been given so much that they begged to share – even though they were financially impoverished!

Does this sound familiar? Giving is one way we fulfill the Great Command to love God with all that we are and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39).

### **Going deeper**

1. What ways have you seen the love of Christ overflow from your life to another person?
2. What ways have you been blessed by giving to further God's work?
3. Has there been an occasion that you've given in the midst of a difficult, even impoverished, time? Did you find joy in those moments?
4. Do you need a "restart" button in giving? How will you follow the example of the Macedonian church in its joyful giving?

### **Concluding Prayer**

#### **Prayer for Generosity Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)**

Dearest Lord, teach me to be generous.  
Teach me to serve You as You deserve;  
to give and not to count the cost;  
to fight and not to heed the wounds;  
to toil and not to seek for rest;  
to labor and not to ask for reward, save that of  
knowing that I am doing Your will. *Amen.*