

Gospel Serving Ministry

2 Corinthians 8:1-2; 9:6-11

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Introduction This is the fifth and final message in the June series called *Of First Importance*. Its objective was to explore the uniqueness of the gospel and its life-transforming power for those who believe. We maintained throughout the series that the Christian life is a process of reviewing and renewing every aspect of life with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We saw:

- How the gospel creates a repentance that leads to salvation without regret
 - Gospel **Repentance** – Luke 15
- How the gospel empowers an outcast to come freely to love Jesus publicly
 - Gospel **Worship** – Luke 7
- How the gospel is the only hope for us to cancel the debts others owe us
 - Gospel **Forgiveness** – Matthew 18
- How the gospel gives us what we need in order to give to others what they need to hear
 - Gospel **Speaking** Ministry – Isaiah 6
- How the gospel makes possible for us to joyfully sacrifice for one other
 - Gospel **Serving** Ministry – 2Corinthians 8-9

Having thought over the uniqueness of the gospel and its transforming power over these last four weeks, we are now ready to conclude our series by opening our Bibles to 2Corinthians 8:1-2. What will motivate us to serve one another in generous ways? What must be present in order for us to be openhanded with our time, money and attention? What could slow up and even stop our growth in *Gospel Serving Ministry*?

It's just a natural thing

To begin, let's think together over a natural phenomenon. It is my observation that *when misery increases ministry decreases*. You know, it's just a natural thing. During periods of tension in our family we tend to pull back from other relationships until home is in harmony. When we are sick we focus on getting well. When our job is threatened generosity is calculated. When conflict needs resolution we play it safe with others lest additional conflict start. When interactions go sour at work interactions go silent at home (and church). I think our general movement when hardships come is inward until the storms of trouble blow by. This is just natural.

The flip side seems to be generally true as well. *When suffering goes down serving goes up*. When the stock market is up generosity is up. When the meal is tasty and the chest x-ray is clear, we like to serve. When primary relationships seem warm and engaged we give of our time. You know, it's just natural.

Now someone might say at this point, “What’s wrong with that? You seem to be building up to introduce a problem. What you’ve talked about is simply a normal thing. It’s just natural”.

If the trend I just described is even marginally accurate can you see the most basic problem we face in relation to generosity? Do lack of time, energy, resources, safety and comfort hamper serving one another?

The message for this morning is called *Gospel Serving Ministry*. The arch enemy to generosity is not outside us. It is not hardships and income loss. It is not busy lives and pressing responsibilities. It is this: Thinking that Christian giving is just natural. God is watching. People are wanting. And I take inventory of my resources to see whether or not I can help.

Beloved, that thought simply is not true. In fact, it is just the opposite. Listen to how Peter talked about this topic. “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace...whoever serves as one who serves **by** the strength that God supplies in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. (1Pet.4:10-11)

The book of the Bible from which we get today’s texts starts in an amazing way. 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 tell us that suffering is meant by and used by God to wean us off of self-reliance and to fix us upon the All-sufficient God (quote 1:9; see also 2 Cor.8:1-8).

What does “serving one another **by** the strength God supplies” mean? In what ways does the idea that “Christianity is supernatural or it is nothing at all¹” affect our tithes and offerings, our providing help at someone’s home, giving undivided attention to a sister hurting? What must we hear and believe that will motivate each of us toward generous giving?

Today, we will look at two texts. From these two passages we hear the same thing that the 1st century church in Corinth heard when they needed motivation to generously give their resources to the poor in Jerusalem.

To help us increase in *Gospel Serving Ministry* we need to understand and experience grace giving. This will happen as we first see a pattern for grace giving. Following this we will hear the principles of grace giving. Then we will conclude this morning with noticing the power for grace giving.

The Pattern

8:1-2

First The Pattern of Grace Giving found in 8:1-7. For our purposes I will only read v.1-2.

In this section, Paul specifically exhorts the Corinthians to complete their intended gift for the church in Jerusalem by noting the faithful generosity of the churches in Macedonia. Due to a famine in and around Jerusalem, Paul’s burden was to collect monies to relieve the poor saints in Jerusalem. And so, to motivate the Corinthians

¹ A Piper quote.

for generous giving Paul describes how the churches in Macedonia gave. Notice three key things.

Grace comes down **v.1**

First, Paul wanted the church in Corinth to know something. His desire was that they would see what is behind generous giving. Verse one says “the grace of God has been given”. Grace has come down upon the churches and is the source of what we see in v.2. All that we talk about this morning is a work of God’s grace.

Joy wells up **v.2**

Second, we come to a hallmark of the Christian life. Here is a basic characteristic of grace in a believer’s life, joy in the center of awful circumstances. This is the epicenter, the wellspring, source of Gospel *Serving Ministry*. Grace-produced joy generates generosity even in the midst of difficulty.

Generosity moves out **v.2**

Finally we notice that this abundance of joy overflowed in a wealth of generosity. This verse is mind-blowing if we take it at face value. The churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, etc.) were hurting. There was severe affliction and extreme poverty as a result of God giving them grace. (cf. Acts 16-17). This means that when grace was given and conversion happened and growth in the church occurred life got harder not easier. Grace does not necessarily take away pain and poverty. But it does leave the person with abundant joy. And this abundant joy amid severe pain and poverty generated amazing generosity.

Summary

To summarize the pattern of grace giving using these two verses we can say that *grace is the God-given joy in God that cares less about circumstances and more about people.*

With 2Corinthians 8:1-2 as a pattern of grace giving, now let’s concentrate upon the principle & practice of grace giving. We can find these as we turn to 2Corinthians 9:6-7.

The Principle & Practice **(v.6-7)**

We can observe from this passage key teaching that is to guide our thinking and stimulate our serving one another. Notice with me v.6.

Foundational Principle **(v.6)**

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”. Here we have a basic farming principle or proverb. It was a simple observation from an agrarian society. The Apostle Paul is motivating the people in the church at Corinth toward generous giving. He desires to fuel their generosity by using a commonly known event.

The two basic words Paul uses to motivate generosity are “sparingly” and “bountifully”. The contrast Paul makes is clear. On the one hand the giver who gives sparingly (that is, cautiously, guardedly, penny-pinching) will receive back small por-

tions. But, in contrast with that type of giver, the one who gives bountifully (that is, generously or abundantly) will receive back plenty.

The word for bountifully is a curious one. It is used in other contexts to talk about praising or blessing. It is the word from which we derive our English word eulogy. In effect, what Paul is talking about is not merely the quantity of the gift. It has much to do with the quality of the giver. The source of giving is not the checkbook. It's the heart. The Corinthian church is to give not merely much but joyfully with an eye on blessing the recipients.

The important lesson which Paul is urging upon the Corinthians at this point is that *to give is to sow*. We are to believe that what is given is not lost but like the seed sown by the farmer, contrary to all appearances, it possesses the power of life and increase. Giving is not decreasing but rather increasing ones resources. Generosity does not take away but rather multiplies the storehouse of the giver. It does not decrease but rather develops reserve. Giving IS sowing!

In order for us as a church to increase in *Gospel Serving Ministry* we first must believe the foundational principle of v.6.

Faithful Practices

(v.7)

We also need to be clear on faithful practices of Gospel Serving. What practices spring from belief in the principle found in v.6? Some of these faithful practices are seen in v.7.

Gospel Serving is to be done...

Collectively

Notice how Paul starts his teaching on the practices of giving. He says "each one must give". It is for each of us ("Each one"). And it is non-optional ("must give")! Whether we have much or little the Bible commands us all to bountifully sow. *Gospel Serving Ministry* is not merely for the mature or the financially sound. We all are to participate.

Purposefully

The second thing we notice about faithful practices is seen in the phrase "as he has made up his mind". This phrase highlights the importance of purpose and intention. The emphasis lands on planned giving done on purpose with thought and conscious obedience to God's Word.

Cheerfully

Thirdly, we see that faithful practice of grace giving is done voluntarily. Notice with me the phrase that captures this way of giving; "not grudgingly or under compulsion". No sadness. No regret. No guilt trips. By the grace of God, we are to delight in the glory of God and let loose gladly of God's money that He has entrusted to us, the gifts He has endowed us with, the energy He provides, and so forth. We are to be "cheerful givers".

Worshipfully

And lastly, in order for us to increase in Gospel Serving listen again to how the Apostle teaches God's people on faithful practice of grace giving. "Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, FOR God loves a cheerful giver". The little word "for" connects how we are to give (i.e. not grudgingly not under compulsion) with why we are to give (i.e. God loves a cheerful giver). Grace giving is to be done worshipfully. It is to rejoice the heart of God! *Gospel Serving Ministry* is ultimately about God.

What we've seen thus far is a pattern for serving. This was sketched out briefly to give us a model to guide us. Next we came to a foundational principle and faithful practices that summarized how and why we are to give.

What we haven't talked about enough is enablement. What is the spring from which all grace giving flows? From where do we get the ability to do all that we've noticed?

This leads us to vv.8-11 and "the power for grace giving".

The Power

(v.8-11)

God gives the inward and outward ability to give as we ought. Grace does not nullify requirement – it just makes us able to do the requirement and to do it with gladness. Let's see this by first noticing the enabling power of grace; v.8.

Enabling Power of Grace

(v.8)

Look at v.8 carefully. Notice the heaping up of the words *all* and *abound*. The sense of the verse seems to be that if we are willing to serve, God will always make it possible for us to give. If the arch foe to generosity is self-reliance as we asserted at the beginning of the message what is the arch friend of generosity? If we are not to look to ourselves for sufficiency to whom shall we look? GOD IS ABLE should be written over all our hesitancy. Is there anything in view here in this verse that we are not enabled to do? The power for grace giving enables us to obey. It also encourages us when we face uncertainties.

Encouraging Purpose of Scripture

(v.9)

Verse 9 quotes from Psalm 112:9. Perhaps you are sitting here this morning with thoughts haunting you. Your body and employment are more frail today than they were five years ago. When you think of serving it scares you. How will you take care of your needs? You might be here this morning without work or with little hope that you will enjoy gainful employment. Bad news greets you in the newspapers and over Fox news. You hear these words this morning and there is a flicker of hope. Now you need encouragement to overcome your fears. Listen to what Paul is doing in order to motivate and convince the Corinthians for generosity.

Quoting from Ps.112 listen to these words. "It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered for ever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid.

He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor, his righteousness endures forever". Paul is using this as a means of actually communicating the enabling grace of verse 8 and of encouraging obedience grounded in Scripture. We are learning this morning to take our gaze off of ourselves and situations and place it upon the all-sufficient, all-happy, all-gracious, all-powerful, all-generous God.

"We will not be afraid of bad news; for our God is able" says the Scriptures.

Enriching Provision of God (v.10-11)

Not only do we have the enabling power of grace and the encouraging purpose of Scripture, we find in vv.10-11 the enriching provision of God.

Take note of the phrase "He who supplies". This expression must echo constantly in our minds, lest we lean upon our own understanding and not involved ourselves in *Gospel Serving Ministry*. Verses 10,11 are projecting a God-centered concept. It is a symptom of our very materialism that we hear these verses in terms of money. You know, "If we give to God, then God will prosper us." Notice though that the sowing God does in our lives brings **first** a harvest of **righteousness**. In the end, our very prosperity is in order that we might be generous and liberal in our serving others.

I'll land this message this morning with lessons gleaned from these two passages.

Lessons

- Gospel Serving Ministry is: (8:1-2)
 - Not a natural thing
 - A work of God's grace
 - Caused by joy in God
 - Sacrificially serving others
- Gospel Serving Ministry is to be done: (9:6-7)
 - Collectively
 - Purposefully
 - Cheerfully
 - Worshipfully
- Gospel Serving Ministry is: (9:8-11)
 - Enabled by grace
 - Encouraged by the Scriptures
 - Enriched by God's provisions

All Scripture points toward partnership in serving God's grace and resources to his people in need. All Scripture points toward the context in which this giving is to be done and enjoyed, namely the local church. God's people giving through God's house to God's people who are in need of God's grace is what we see today. It is our prayer that your God-honoring giving of time, talents and treasure come from a glad heart that has experienced the grace of God. And this at Clearcreek Chapel will enlarge our *Gospel Serving Ministry*.

Let's pray.



Title

Text

Speaker

The Chapel Pulpit • <date> Sunday Morning

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Introduction

Heading

➤ **Heading**

Heading

Conclusion