

Loving Generously

2 Corinthians 8

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Good morning everyone. It is so great that you can join us both in person and online thank you for coming to worship this morning and I pray that He will draw near to God this morning.

This past week the youth group have been doing a mission experience. I really wanted the youth do some type of mission trip this year but of course with the covid-19, and restrictions with Gathering, had to think a little outside the box. So I created a socially distance missions trip. Basically each day last week the students were given five different missions to accomplish. These missions revolved around something in the community something in their home generosity something artistic and worship. Then using an app, they would get the daily missions and submit a photo or a video of them accomplishing their mission. And the minimum goal was for them to do 5 of the 26 missions during the week, but so many of them did so much more. **I was so encouraged to see how seriously the youth took each of these missions and put effort into each one. And the result was this flow of pictures and videos that I got of youth giving serving and loving others so generously. It was really powerful to see.**

At the start we talked about what it means to be generous and giving with our time talents and treasures. We talked about how when Jesus was questioned about what the greatest commandment was, He answered that it was to love the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength, and that it was like it to love your neighbour as yourself. We stressed that the reason that we want to be generous and giving and doing good works is not because of that feeling of Pride for doing good, which of the built-in side effect of doing good works, and it's not an attempt to earn God's Love Somehow, or to earn the respect of the Christian Community. But rather when we do good and we love others and we are generous with our time talents and treasures to help other people, we do it as a way to show our love to God. It is an expression of our faith, our salvation, and our love for God, not a requirement for us to get God love, or to get salvation - but rather this beautiful expression of our faith and love of God.

This morning we're going to be looking into 2nd Corinthians chapter 8 continuing in this Corinthian series. So go ahead and find that in your Bibles now. As you likely remember as Paul was writing for Corinthian Church, they've often had many issues that he addressed, and in this second letter, Paul really tries to encourage the Corinthians. In this passage we're going to read Paul is sharing about a church in Macedonia and talking about how generous they were even though they had very little to share that they

were incredibly generous and then he encourages the Corinthians to likewise be generous.

Let's read together: 2 Corinthians chapter 8

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 10 And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. 11 So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. 12 For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. 15 As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

I want to draw your attention to this church of Macedonia that Paul was talking about. In verse 2 he says how generous they were. He says they were under a severe test of affliction. And somehow in this test of Affliction says they are in extreme poverty but yet they also have an abundance of joy. And this joy and extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity. And he doesn't Define how they were generous here, but as the chapters go on and he refers back to the Macedonians, we get the idea that it was in some form of provision for others. So that would be food or money, maybe accommodations, but they were able to be extremely generous even though they didn't have much in the way of money. And Paul clarifies here that they gave according to their means and he says even beyond their means. Which is really cool. That doesn't mean that they went into debt to be generous, but from the little that they had, they gave

generously. Then, they gave beyond that with other acts of generosity. He says they were so eager to give that they were begging to contribute. I haven't been a whole lot too places of extreme poverty, but the stories I hear when people travel to visit Christians and churches in these places, is that it is not uncommon to see this level of generosity among God's people.

And so to the Corinthian Church Paul wants to let them know that Titus wants to encourage them in what he calls this act of Grace, giving and generosity. He encourages the Corinthians (and by extension us), in verse 7, when he says but as you excel in everything in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of Grace also.

When I came across this phrase Act of Grace to refer to generosity I thought wow that is so cool. Why would Paul refer to generosity as an act of Grace? Well it make sense. Because when somebody gives something to somebody because they did something to earn it, that is a payment. It is a deserved favour. But when somebody gives something or does something for somebody else who hasn't done something to deserve it per se, that is an undeserved favor and generosity. And that is exactly what Grace is. Undeserved favour. **And this is the gospel!** While we were all sinners in Rebellion against our God, Jesus died for us to give us the gift of eternal life and to rescue us from our sin. We didn't earn it but God gave us Jesus as a gift. **That is Grace.** So it makes sense when Paul refers to generosity as this act of Grace. It mimics what God has done for us in showing us this great gift of Grace. In fact Paul even ties these two things together and verse 9 he says **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.** Then in the famous John 3:16 Jesus says **For God so loved the world,[a] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.** Did you catch it? God so loved the world that he gave. God loves you and I so much that his expression of Love towards us is a gift. An act of Grace.

When you think about giving, and again not just giving financially, but any kind of generosity towards others, we don't always think of it as an action of love, but rather as a social obligation, and yet it may be one of the most important actions of love. When we think about loving God, how do you show love to God? Well we tell him in our worship, prayer, we read Trust and obey his word, but we can also give as an act of worship. Of course Jewish people I knew this when it came to the tithe, and in our

context we can give to the local church, but even when we express our love for others, remember the second greatest commandment?, even as we express our love for others through generosity we are actually loving God by loving his people and being obedient to this command. And I think that this perspective helps us to love being generous even more.

In the North American materialistic world, I would argue that it is even harder for people to be generous. In our culture we are taught that we need to provide ultimately for ourselves, then from the excess we may trim some off to give to others. As a culture we don't typically love being generous, but will skim off the top to give to others. And in verse 10 and 11 Paul says his wish is it they would desire to be generous to match the level of their generosity. He says in verse 10 **And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. 11 So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.** There's an element of being generous that is about being obedient and just doing it as well as an element of enjoying to do it. We have to do it we have to be generous it's an expression of our faith to do good for others, but sometimes it takes a while for a heart to catch up. Next week Riley gets to bring the message on chapter 9 where Paul actually digs into a little bit about being a cheerful Giver, which can be very convicting for us as we grow in that. Of course that's a broad generalization of our culture, but we know from experience there are so many of you that are so incredibly generous. Some with your resources, others with your desire to organize, others with giving your time to the Ministries in the church, other people giving their leadership gifts, and so much more. I was reminded in this preparation for this youth ministry missions experience, at just how much work goes into maintaining a building that we can meet in. I was asking around to see how the youth could be helping around the church for this week, and there are so many opportunities with the people that give so much of their time to this building to us as a community of believers. I think about how many hours are spent on these things. We have paid staff for some of the work but there's more work than staff could do alone. Don Cameron has been at the church mopping up water from a leaky roof. Climbing up and down on the roof trying to figure out where the leaks are. Phoning different people to get various assessments done. Talking with Sally about all of the little things she helps get done, and that she does and needs help with - like even the weeding along the fence. And Lance primmer who is so involved in keeping the grass mowed around the building. I'm sure he would love other people to help with that. The ladies have been in the kitchen week after week cooking meals to be able to give to other people through this difficult time. And so so many more. The generosity of our brothers and sisters in

this church blows me away. And there are so many opportunities for us to be involved to serve the Lord being part of a local church community.

So this morning I would encourage you as you read a passage like this, to be reminded and see how amazing it is to be part of the local church. The way that God is called the church to act and to be that we learn from this passage, is so neat. It's incredible to watch how people give to one another in order to meet the needs of each other. And this has to be mutually beneficial. And by that I mean we have to all be giving for this to work. It's not like some people just have a spiritual gift of generosity or something, but instead everyone gives from their abundance to those who have need. And here's the secret to making it all work we all have abundance and we all have need. Look with me at verse 13 to 15 for I do not mean that the others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should Supply their need, so that their abundance May Supply your need that there may be fairness. As it is written, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.

Giving generously from your time talents and treasures must be something that we're all doing as brothers and sisters. One person can't just be doing all of the giving. One person can't just be doing all of the receiving. But we're all giving and receiving to each other.

So what this means for you whether you've been part of this church for decades, or you recently started joining us, whether you are old or whether you are old or young, take a look at your life and your skills your talents or abilities your resources your time, and ask yourself the question where do I have abundance. In what ways has God given you much that you're able to share with others? Even giving beyond what you are able to give. There's a Christian comedian named Michael Junior and part of his shtick is that he talks about add how a joke is framed in a way that it has a setup and a punchline. The setup of the joke is what leads you to assume something, and the punchline comes in and redirects which results in laughter and joy. He then says all of us have a set up. This would be all of the experiences talents knowledge and resources that we have good or bad, where we are set up to do something. And our punch line comes when we use our setup to give to others. So when you look at your setup and all of the things you're equipped to do, where is it that you can redirect your punchline you need to look for ways where you can be generous towards other people and give.

But there's also a flip side to this coin.

In verse 14, he says your abundance at this present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need. See that? Their abundance may supply your need.

We are not only to be generous givers, but also receivers. This is difficult for people. Even receiving a compliment. Most people, when they receive a compliment, don't know how to accept it gracefully. We deflect or minimize it. "Oh, thanks, but it wasn't a big deal" or "No, thank you for what you did." And when it comes to accepting help, often pride gets in the way of us accepting help or even letting others know that we need it. *I will never forget the first time someone bought me a bag of groceries.* Andrea and I were just dating, and I was a starving student. I was literally on my last bit of food. For dinners I was eating from a huge bag of rice I had bought when I moved out, and I had a can of kidney beans that was the last of my canned food. I only put a quarter of the can of beans on my rice because I had to make the beans last. I wasn't worried, I knew God was providing for just what I needed each week. Then one day Andrea came to visit with some groceries from her mom, and I was so offended. I hadn't really talked to Andrea about my food situation, and I thought that she had figured it out and had told her mom who then bought groceries out of pity for me. My pride was stinging. She assured me that wasn't the case and that her mom was really generous and just liked to do nice things like that for people. *God did a work on me through that time – identifying my pride in this area and squishing it out.* He started teaching me about the importance of receiving. It wasn't overnight (I'm too stubborn), And this is no small thing! If we only give and don't receive, we can set up in our mind a power imbalance. We feel that there's power in providing, and weakness in receiving. But that pridefulness is sin, and can actually hinder someone from seeing their weakness and receiving the Gospel truth in their life. We must recognize our weakness, failure, and sinfulness in order to see our need for salvation and sanctification. It's doesn't help if we just ignore it. Then in the every day life of the church community, we all have abundance in somethings, and other areas of need. We have to let others be able to generously use their gifts to help others – to help us. And likewise, how do you know where to give, until someone identifies a need?

So we need to figure our areas of need and find ways of communicating that to our brothers and sisters. That requires being vulnerable. So we are not always taking from others, and we are not always giving without receiving anything. Rather the church is filled with extremely generous people who humbly recognize their own needs. We build each other up, loving generously.