



Pastor Kyle Mercer
The Gospel & Money

June 23, 2024
Series: Grace & Grit
2 Corinthians 8

BIG IDEA – THE GRACE OF GOD MAKES US GENEROUS

Two Cities Church, we serve and worship a generous God. God is a giver, and God is a forgiver. How do we know God is generous? Well, just look at creation. Here's the main philosophical question people ask. It's a foundational philosophical question. Here it is for your Sunday morning: *Why is there something instead of nothing?* The answer is very simple biblically. Because God is generous. That's why. Why is there something instead of nothing? Because God, out of the overflow and abundance of who he is, decided to share himself and his stuff with us.

But there's even a clearer place where we see the generosity of God. If you're a Christian, you know where I'm going. I'm going right to the cross of Jesus Christ where we get the self-giving, self-sacrificing God. No one is a more generous person than Jesus Christ. "God, who gave his one and only Son, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?"

This is what happens, though. When you experience the grace of God, you become generous, just like Nate and Alyse in that video. Here's what I want you to know: our church has been built from day one on normal, average, everyday people who put the church first in their finances. This church is not funded by a bunch of sugar daddies. This church is funded, instead, by saints who are disciplined in their generosity.

When you give, you make everything happen. By the way, you don't get into a building like this in less than eight years unless you have a generous church. So, here's what happens. When you guys give, it helps us for everything we've done, all that we're doing, and all that we will do. Like, the things we just did... For example, the prayer night. Look at these pictures. Incredible prayer night. It was meaningful and powerful, and it was made possible through your generosity. So thank you.

But not just everything we're *doing*...everything we're *going* to do. Here's the thing. Leaders set the vision. The congregation sets the pace at which that vision is accomplished. Guys, we're headed as quickly as possible to Lexington, North Carolina. Are you excited? I'm excited.

One of the leaders from Lexington emailed me this week and said, "Thank you. There are Community Groups reaching out saying that they're going to come down to Lexington and do prayer walks." I'm like, "Wow! That's so awesome." Guys, we are launching in Lexington. We're going to have a Lexington Community Group gathering this September, so we're building a launch team. Here at Two Cities Church, we do not announce things; we launch them.

Here's what I'm trying to tell you. Whether you're a part of it or not, I want everybody praying about this. I've done this before with planting this church. You have to get the launch team out of orbit. When a rocket leaves the atmosphere, it takes a swimming pool of gasoline to get it out of the atmosphere. Once it's in orbit, it runs on the same thing your Suburban does. The hard thing is getting something out of orbit.

We're building a launch team of people who love our church but love the city of Lexington. If you live closer to Lexington and want to be a part of it, I want you to come to our Lexington interest meeting a week from today after the 11:00 service. We know we already have 50-some people down there ready. We want to see what God is going to do. We are so expectant. So, I'm going to pray for this, and then we have a lot to cover today in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for the generosity of our church. Thank you for a powerful prayer night. We are so excited about the mission, message, and ministry of Jesus going forward, and we're excited about people who are going to, in many ways, say a gospel goodbye.

Really, it's less moving for the sake of mission; it's more being the church in their community. Lord, we believe theologically, foundationally, that the church is most effective when the church is most local, so we want to be the church in Lexington where people down there are living, learning, working, and playing. In Jesus' name, amen.

Guys, as soon as I walk through a book of the Bible (2 Corinthians), I never know what's going to come up, and every week is different. Sometimes I'm like, "Oh man! I didn't even know. Look at this theme that arises." Well, each week the theme or thesis or thrust of the passage is a little bit different, but this week, Paul is talking about... Do you know what the theme is? Get excited. Paul is talking about money. Woo! You're not as excited as I thought you might be.

It's really interesting. I did this last service, obviously, and I felt a stiff headwind the whole time. I'm dead serious. It was strange. I mean, I've preached some difficult topics before, and I know what it's like. You guys maybe think this is a monologue. This is not a monologue. I feel things in here. We'll see what happens *this* service. I felt a stiff headwind.

I think it's because money is an idol in people's lives. I mean, men, grab your wallets right now. Ladies, grab your purses. We're going to be talking about money for 45 minutes. Here's the thing about money. Money is not so much an idol in the Bible as much as it *reveals* our idols. That's what money does. Why is money so powerful? You're like, "It's a piece of paper." It's a promise. That's what money is. It makes a lot of promises to us.

Money amplifies and magnifies your personality. Like my dad's friend. My dad had a friend. He has a lot of friends, but he had this friend, and the guy liked to golf, but the guy didn't have much money. When you don't have a lot of money and you like to golf, you play public courses.

It's a long story, but let's just say my dad's friend came into a lot of money. All of a sudden, he did not work as much, and he joined three country clubs. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with being a member at three country clubs. If you are a member at three country clubs, I want to talk to you after the service. I don't even know if it was an idol for him, but his personality was magnified and amplified.

Today, Paul is going to talk about money and the gospel. What's interesting is whenever we come here, we love to talk about the gospel. "Just talk about Jesus, Kyle. Just tell us about what he did on the cross. Just tell us about the forgiveness of sins." We love to talk about the gospel, and we don't like to talk about money. In chapter 8, Paul puts money and the gospel right next to each other.

Let me just give you the big idea. If you have to leave early, that's fine. Here's the big idea. You don't even need to write it down. It's so simple. *The grace of God makes us generous*. Period. That's it. When you experience grace (I'm not talking about intellectually assenting to facts; I'm talking about emotionally embracing what Jesus has done for you), it makes you a generous person.

So, we're going to talk about unique Christian generosity. If you're here and you're not a Christian, this sermon is not for you. This is a sermon for Christians. Here, I'll show you. Let's look at verse 1. "***We want you to know...***" Paul is like, "I like to talk about generosity. I like to talk about money. I want you to know."

"We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God..." Before Paul talks about money he talks about grace. ***"...that has been given among the churches of***

Macedonia..." Paul is writing to the Corinthians. You know that. We've been in this letter. Paul is writing to the Corinthians to hopefully get them to give to the church at Jerusalem, but to motivate them he's going to talk about the church at Macedonia.

The church at Macedonia is the most generous church in your New Testament. Four different places, Paul points to the Macedonian church and says, "Be like them in generosity." Now, here's what I want you to know. He talks about the grace of God, and the grace of God is going to make them generous. That's why the big idea in this sermon is *the grace of God makes you a generous person*. Why? Because God's grace... In Ephesians 2:7, it's called the *riches of his grace*.

When you realize, "God has given me so much. Actually, everything I have, I have and don't deserve..." I know a lot of... "A self-made man. A self-made woman." You wouldn't be a self-made man if you were living in the seventh century in Tibet. You go, "Oh, that's right. Yeah, yeah. Sometimes my geography is part of my destiny." That's right. It's humbling.

I was meeting with this guy for lunch. I did not meet with him to talk to him about money. He brought it up. He had become a Christian in our church. He gave his life to Christ and got baptized in our church, and he brought it up to me. He said, "Man, this is so incredible. I became a Christian, and I was so excited to tithe. I just got a raise, and I'm increasing my tithe." I thought, "Where am I?" People don't normally talk like this.

Here's what I want you to know: giving is not normal or natural; it's supernatural. I know what you're thinking. "No, Kyle. I have my friend Bob, and Bob is an agnostic. He gives every year to this fund." Listen. Bob is haunted by a Judeo-Christian worldview. That's what happened. It's not natural to give.

Here's what's natural: "Get all you can. Can all you get. Sit on the can." That's what's natural...some version of that. What's natural is survival of the fittest. Come on. Let's be honest. What's natural is what your 3-year-old does. You don't have to teach your 3-year-old not to share. You have to spend a lot of time teaching your 3-year-old what it's like to be generous and what it's like to share.

Here's what I want you to see. Paul loves to talk about generous churches. Paul loves to celebrate generous churches, so he talks about the church at Macedonia. I want to celebrate *our* church for a minute. I said it earlier. You don't get to do what we've gotten to do without an enormous number of normal, everyday people being very generous and putting the church first in their finances.

Okay. This is real time. Are you ready for some real-time stats? As of right now, if you look around in America, what percentage of the average church gives regularly? Not

gives to Hold the Rope and doesn't give for another year. What part of the church gives regularly and consistently? Let's just go to the average 100-person church. How many people of those 100 people are giving? Answer: 25.

Twenty-five percent of the church gives, on average, in America today, anyone giving consistently and regularly. In our church it's 70 percent. Praise the Lord. And I'm excited, guys, because the other 30 percent of you are going to start giving today. We're going to be at 100 percent. It's going to be so awesome.

We need examples of giving. That's why parenting is important. I learned this when we did our Forward Initiative. If you weren't here, it's the generosity of our people through an initiative that got us into this building. Anyway, we had this goal of \$2.5 million. We ended up raising \$4 million, but we had this goal of \$2.5 million.

The week leading up to it, some people had gotten word that we were going to be doing this initiative. This is a true story. We had a single mom reach out to us and say, "Hey, I don't make a lot, and it's really tough, and I only have part-time work," and all that kind of stuff. She said, "But I really want to give to this. I believe in it. I want to give \$250." I thought, "Wow!"

At the same time, I ended up meeting this other couple that just moved to our church. I didn't know who they were, I promise. We went out to lunch, and they said, "Hey, we're passionate about buildings." I thought, "I'm building a building, so this is good. Tell me about it."

They said, "We're really passionate about it. We believe in buildings. We've seen them impact people's lives. So, if it's okay with you, we'd like to give a firstfruits offering of \$250,000 to the church." I cried as soon as they did it, because that was our entire budget for the first year of our church. They just gave it to us.

Anyway, I got up here (actually, it was the other building), and I went, "Guys, crazy story. This single mom gave \$250, and this couple just gave a quarter of a million dollars." At the end of the initiative, we had a lot of amazing gifts, but we had some very, very large gifts come in. I called a few of the people who gave large gifts and said, "Hey, why did you give a six-figure gift to this initiative?"

I got the same answer a couple of times, and I saw how God uses different people and different giving. They all said some version of, "Well, when we heard about the \$250 gift from the single mom, we were really challenged to give sacrificially, but when we heard about the family that gave \$250,000, we thought we could do a lot too." That's how the church works.

01 THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THEY GAVE

Verse 2 shows us the conditions of the giving of the Macedonian church. Look at verse 2. **"...for in a severe test of affliction..."** The church is suffering. **"...their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part."**

Paul tells us the conditions or the environment under which they gave, and it's really amazing, because the first thing we're told is they were afflicted, which means they were suffering. Now, what happens when you suffer? This is normal and natural. When you suffer, you pool resources. If your kid is sick, you're like, "Hold on." You lose your job. You go down to one income. "Hold on. Pool resources," because the future becomes unknown.

It says they were suffering, and then it says, "Extreme poverty." This doesn't, for the most part, even exist in America. To see extreme poverty, abject poverty, you have to get on a plane and fly somewhere else. *Abject poverty* is defined as poverty that gets in the way of your health. Like, your health is at stake because you're that poor.

I mean, this is not relative poverty. Some of you go, "Relative poverty. I have the smallest house on my street." That's not poverty. *Abject poverty* is "I don't know where my next meal is coming from, and I don't have any options for future mobility." That's the definition of abject poverty.

Look at this. They're experiencing extreme poverty, and they're experiencing affliction, but I want to show you the equation. Look at this equation. I'm not very good at math, but I put this up here for you. Here's the Macedonian church. Affliction + poverty + grace = joyful generosity. Grace is the X factor, the secret sauce. Let me show you the equation in most American churches. Ease + abundance - grace = nominal or no giving.

So, you read verse 2... I mean, there are certain verses that I read and am like, "I don't know how else to interpret this." Are you ready for this? Put your helmet on. I'm about to say something strong to some of you, but it comes out of this verse. I don't know how else to read this verse.

So, you read about a church that is in severe poverty and affliction and is generous. Here it is. Ready? *There is never an excuse for a Christian to not be giving.* Period. That's the end of it. There is never an excuse for a Christian to not be giving. And I've heard them all. I've been doing this for 20 years. I've heard them all.

Let me give you the... Are you ready for them? Especially if you're young. Here it is. "I'll start giving *when*..." "...when I pay off my student debt." "...when I get married."

"...when I get the better job." Oh, here's a big one: "...when we're stable." I'm not that old, but I'm headed toward 40. Let me tell you, life only always gets more expensive. Your kids get more expensive.

Here's the principle: you have to learn to give when you have little. I started giving when I was making \$5.15 an hour working at McDonald's, saying, "Would you like fries with that?" Thank God, I was taught, "When you make a dollar, you give a dime." I thought, "That makes sense." I was taught, "When you make \$10, you give \$1." Okay. "When you make \$100, you give \$10. When you make \$1,000, you give \$100."

Here's what I'm trying to tell you. You're not going to give thousands from tens of thousands or tens of thousands from hundreds of thousands if you didn't learn how to give dollars from tens and dimes from dollars. You have to learn to give when you have little.

Now, here's another thing. This is a dirty little secret about giving. There's never a good time to give. Wanting to know "Is there a good time to give?" is like asking, "When's a good time to have a kid?" Never! That is the answer. That is the legit answer. When is the best time to have a kid? Never.

I have a friend right now... This is a true story. He is trying to figure out how to have a kid and it not interfere with his golf season. I promise you. He's like, "Well, there's this three-month window, and if we..." I'm like, "Oh my goodness." There's never a good time to have a kid. There's never a good time to start giving.

02 HOW THEY GAVE

I want you to see what happens in verse 3. We're told *how* they gave. So, first, we're told the environment in which they gave. Secondly, we're told how they gave. "***For they gave according to their means...***" Or you could read "ability." "***...as I can testify, and beyond their means...***" Or you could say "ability." "***...of their own accord...***"

Okay. It says they gave *of* their ability, and they gave *beyond* their ability. There's one that's not mentioned, but I'll mention it. People give *below* their ability. So, you have three options when it comes to giving. I told you this is kind of a direct sermon today. Here it is.

The first is under your ability. I can't play JV Holy Spirit. How do you know if you're giving under your ability? It reminds me of a story. A guy told me... He was wondering if he was an alcoholic. He was wondering, "Do I have the gene? Do I like to drink too much?" He was kind of embarrassed about it. He didn't know who to ask.

He was at this event, and this expert on alcoholism spoke. He said to himself afterward, "This is my chance. I'm going to sneak up afterward. No one is going to see me. I'm just going to ask him." So, he gets to this guy who's an expert with alcoholism and says to him, "Hey..." You know, "Asking for a friend" kind of thing.

He said, "Hey, how do you know if you're an alcoholic?" Do you know what the guy who had 30 years of experience with alcoholics said? "You know." How do you know if you're an alcoholic? You know. How do you know if you give under your ability? You know.

Then there's giving to your ability. A great place to think about that is the tithe. We teach the tithe because the Old Testament teaches the tithe, and everything in the New Testament is expanded and enhanced, so we don't think there's less. We think of the tithe as the basement, not the ceiling; as the starting line, not the finish line.

Here's the truth about tithing. Here's another thing to know about people. Everybody tithes. Did you know that? Some people tithe to their country club. It's a tithe. Some people tithe to their kids' club sports. Some people tithe to their vacation fund. Everybody tithes.

Paul talks about giving to your ability, but then *beyond* ability. Let me pause for a second and just be honest. Maybe other pastors would disagree, but this is how I feel about this. I don't feel comfortable asking anyone to give beyond their ability. I mean, I'm just going to give you God's Word and call you to give to your ability. I think when you give beyond your ability, God is doing something unique in your heart.

We've seen this. There have been families in our church that have said, "God put on my heart that the largest check I write every month be to the kingdom of God, larger than our mortgage." Oh. We've had at least one example of a family that sold their house and tithed off of what they made on their house. I'm guessing most of us have not done that. The Bible doesn't say you *need* to do that. Extravagant.

I went to seminary with this wealthy guy. He owned an A/C company, and he was trying to be a pastor. He was probably in his late 40s or early 50s. Second career. Really nice guy. He took me to dinner one night when we were in seminary together, and he told me how God was working on his heart through generosity.

He said he had this big SUV. It was a couple of years old, and he wanted to get a new version of the big SUV. God put it on his heart to give his old SUV to a friend in the church who didn't have a very nice car. He thought, "This is great. My car is, like, four years old. I'm going to give him this car, and I'm going to get this new one."

Anyway, he buys the new car. He's telling me this story. His wife drives the one car. He drives the other car. They drive over to give the old car to their friend who didn't really have a good car at all. They pulled in the driveway, and he said, "God put on my heart, 'Give your friend the new one.'" Can you imagine?

So, he gets out, and his friend is like, "Whoa, dude! This is amazing. I get your old car." He goes, "No, you get my new car. I'm keeping the old one." That's about as extravagant as I can think of for a normal American to do something like that. Paul says you give under your means, you give according to your means, or you give above your means.

Look at verse 4. "***...begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints...***" They were eager, excited, and enthusiastic to give. One of my favorite stories about someone in our church who was so enthusiastic to give... This guy comes to our church, and he's loving it. Mid-service, he gets on his phone, and he goes, "I've got to give to Two Cities Church."

So, he gets on in the middle of the service, and he gives to Two Cities Church...in California. He gave to a different Two Cities Church. True story. They called us. They were like, "We'll contact him, but I think he meant to give this to *your* church." That's the only time that has happened.

There's a genuine desire to give. Right now, most people are trying to find out excuses not to give, not being excited and asking, "Hey, where's the next strategic opportunity for me to invest in?" Most people have excuses as to why they... Here are a couple of common excuses why people don't give.

Here's the first one: "I don't think it's going to make a difference." There are a couple of things you could say to that. First, the story of the widow's mite tells you that's not correct. Remember the story of the widow's mite? The widow drops in two mites, and Jesus says, "She gave more than everybody because she gave out of her poverty."

Do you know how much a mite is worth in today's money? Three-eighths of a penny. So, if you say, "I don't think it's going to make a difference," first of all, it's always vertical first. It makes a difference to God. Secondly, if you give to *our* church, we have a One Fund, which means every time you give a dollar, it goes to everything we do in the church.

The second reason people don't give is they say, "I can't because of financial constraints." Here's a principle: if you keep up with the Joneses, you can never be generous. Whatever you make... Think about it right now. Think about what you make. I know you know what you make. Think about your total family income. Then think, "I cannot live at the same level as people who make as much money as I do."

We've all seen this. Don't raise your hand if you bought a house that you shouldn't have because you really can't afford it, and now you're stressed about it. I had a guy one time tell me... I won't name the neighborhood, but it's a nice neighborhood. He said his friend was in a neighborhood, and his friend's refrigerator broke, and his friend was trying to figure out a financial payment plan to get a new refrigerator. He was like, "Maybe you shouldn't be living in this neighborhood if you can't afford the refrigerator."

People live way above their means. Young people expect to live like their parents immediately. People buy cars they shouldn't be buying. People go on vacations they can't afford. People live in neighborhoods they can't afford, and then they make all of these decisions so that they both have to work forever. Paul says we should be generous.

Here's another reason people don't give: they're not aware of needs. Supposedly, from what I read this week, the number-one reason people don't give is they don't realize there's a need or an opportunity. So here it goes. I'm doing it really quickly. I want to let you know there's an enormous need and an enormous opportunity to give to Two Cities Church.

One of my mentors told me, "If you're going to be the lead pastor of a church, at all times you need a \$10 million idea in your back pocket for someone to give to." Well, I want to tell you I have two. So, if you've been considering giving \$10 million to our church, I want to talk to you after the service. But I'm dead serious. I have two. I'm not going to go into them right now, but I'm just saying... Every church that's growing like us has more vision than provision, more momentum than money.

Let's continue on. We have to keep going. I want you to see verse 5. Why did they beg? Why did they give so generously? Why did they give beyond their means? ***"...and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us."***

This passage has so much in it. I don't have time to unpack it all. Here's what it is. They saw giving as worship. A lot of times, we think worship is what we do with our works and worship is what we do with our words. Let me just tell you, worship is also what you do with your wallet.

Here's the principle of giving: you have to give yourself first to the Lord, and then you're able to give your stuff to others. The main fight in generosity is giving your soul and yourself and your sin to God. That's it. Let me say something else kind of direct right now. Please do not lie to me or anybody else and tell us you are trusting God with your salvation if you've not trusted God with your salary. You're obviously lying.

You can't say, "God, I trust you to deliver me from hell and bring me safely home to my eternal heaven, but I don't know if I can give you a percentage of my income." You're playing games. Don't play games. Christianity is a horrible hobby. Don't play games. So, what they did was they saw... This is why sacrifice is connected to all this. Here's the principle. I've taught this before. This is not prosperity gospel, and this is not "Name it, claim it." This is not "Gab it, grab it."

If you want the blessing of God on your life, you have to put him first in your life. It's the principle of blessing. If you want God to bless your marriage, you put him first. If you want God to bless your parenting, you put him first. If you want God to bless your money, you put him first. If you want God to bless your health, you put him first. Now, blessing doesn't mean you're going to get more; it means you'll have the favor and fellowship of God on your life.

Paul starts talking in verse 6 about Titus. Look at this. ***"Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace."*** Paul talks about giving as a grace. ***"But as you excel in everything..."*** To *excel* means to become exceptionally good. Here's a question: How good do you want to get at giving? That's what Paul is asking.

"...in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you..." He repeats himself. Paul does this when he's trying to emphasize something. ***"...see that you excel in this act of grace also."*** Here's what I want you to know. The Corinthian church was obsessed with gifts. They didn't understand grace.

How do we know they were obsessed with gifts? Because the longest passages on the spiritual gifts in the New Testament are in 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 14. This church was obsessed with the gifts of the Spirit, but they didn't understand the grace of the Spirit. Let me translate it. They really liked to serve; they didn't necessarily like to give.

There are people who think, "Okay. I don't need to give. I don't need to give financially. I serve twice a month. I give my time." God says that's amazing, but for a church to be faithful and flourishing and fruitful, it needs people who understand the gifts of the Spirit and the graces of the Spirit.

03 WHY THEY GAVE (MOTIVE)

So, Paul is going to motivate. Look here. Verse 8: ***"I say this not as a command..."*** Here it is. Now we're getting to the heart of the issue. ***"...but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine."*** Here's what Paul does. He

does this often. He does this when he writes to Philemon. He says, "Guys, I could pull the apostle card."

Most married men... Their wife has a "wife card." You know what the wife card is. It's like, "You're not going on that golf trip." "Okay. Got it. Thank you. That was clear." Paul could pull out the apostle card and go, "Guys, I write Scripture. I'm an apostle. I've seen the Lord Jesus. It's time to give."

Paul is like, "I don't want to pull the apostle card. I don't want to motivate by law; I want to motivate by love." Paul is like, "I don't want to motivate by command. That's not fun. I want to motivate by gospel." These are the uniquely Christian elements of giving. We're going to spend a little bit of time here.

So, you have to ask, "Why do people give?" There are a lot of reasons. People give because they feel guilty. It's easy to make people feel guilty. You could say things to people like this: "Do you know that your garbage disposal eats better than children in a third-world country?" All you have to do is think about it. You're like, "Yeah."

All you have to do is say, "You have your two-, three-, or four-car garage. Do you know that just one of those garage doors, on the inside, is what most people live in in third-world countries?" "Oh man. Wow." You can start to feel guilty, but guilt is a short-term motivation, and it's often used in manipulative ways.

This is why Mark Twain... Remember the famous writer Mark Twain? He said one time he was in church, and the pastor started talking about giving, and he said, "I was so mad, because it was so manipulative and so guilt-oriented, that not only did I not give, but when the offering plate came by, I took some money out." If you know Mark Twain, he was a salty character.

People give for the tax break. It's interesting. When you get in some of these circles with nonprofit leaders, they're very concerned about religious liberty, and they're very concerned about religious freedom. What they're concerned about (rightly so), on a practical level, is "Will people still give a lot when they don't get the tax break if that were to go away?"

People give to be good citizens and use the word *altruism*. People give for a lot of reasons. I want to show you why Paul says we should give. It's in verse 9. ***"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ..."*** Here it is. Here's the gospel in one sentence. ***"...that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."***

Now listen. Jesus Christ is the richest person you've ever met. I know if you read the Gospels you go, "When was he rich?" Well, according to the Bible, it wasn't in the

Gospels; it was in his preexistent state as the second member of the Trinity in eternity past. I know that's a lot. Basically, theologians say he is rich in his person, just who he is. He's rich in power, his ability to do things. He's rich in possessions. I mean, heaven has golden streets.

Then it says he became poor. It's not the rags-to-riches story; it's the riches-to-rags story. It's hard to talk about just how poor Jesus became. You can't out-poor Jesus. My dad grew up poor. Whenever he gets with all of his friends, they like to try to out-poor one another.

Have you ever done that? "Oh, you think *you* were poor. We didn't even have a car." Have you ever done that? Have you ever been with someone and tried to out-poor them? You can't out-poor Jesus. Listen. Jesus was so poor that Mary and Joseph had to make a special offering for poor people of two doves when he was born.

Listen to this one. Jesus was so poor, when he was asked to pay the temple tax, he said, "Peter, you need to go find a fish, and there will be a coin in his mouth." He didn't have any coins on him. Jesus was so poor, when they were asking, "What shall we give to Caesar?" he said, "Does anyone have a coin?" Jesus had no coin on him. Jesus was born in a borrowed manger and buried in a borrowed grave. You can't out-poor Jesus.

So, he goes from rich to poor, but I want you to see why. Verse 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."*** When you realize that Jesus Christ has made you rich through his life, death, and resurrection, when you trust and accept, when you realize what has been put in your spiritual bank account, it makes you unbelievably generous toward other people. Paul goes, "The motivation for giving is the gospel."

04 MAKE FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS AND FOLLOW THROUGH

He goes on. Look at verse 10. ***"And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work..."*** So, basically, Paul goes, "I came here a year ago. I told you the church needed it, and you guys filled out commitment cards. You said, 'We're in. We're in. I'm in at *this* a month,' and all that."

Look here. "And you had the desire to do it. You had the quiver in your liver. You had the feelings." He says, ***"So now finish doing it as well..."*** "Keep your commitments." ***"...so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out***

of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."

It's very simple. Here's the background. Paul basically shows up, and a year ago they said they were going to give, and then they ended up not giving what they said they were going to give. Does that happen with people? Oh, yeah. All the time. Here's another principle from 20 years of ministry: people think they give more than they do.

Everybody thinks they're generous. No one says they're not generous. "I'm generous; I smile at strangers. I'm generous; I give directions." I saw this firsthand. When I used to raise support monthly, I'd get the report at the end of every year. "All right. Here's what this couple said. They committed to \$100 a month."

I'd look at it, and I'd be like, "I'm so grateful, but they gave eight months out of the year." Then I'd meet with them. "We are just so grateful to be on your monthly support team." I'm thinking to myself, "You missed four months." This is one of the reasons, by the way, we set up reoccurring giving: so it can be automated and we can keep our commitments.

Paul basically says... It's so simple. I don't even know how to preach on this it's so simple. It's so direct. Make commitments and follow through. Giving is like golf, for those of us who play golf. I used to be good at golf. I'm not good at golf anymore. Almost every time my brother, who's a scratch golfer, is giving me lessons on the range, it all has to do with my follow-through. He's like, "You've got to follow through."

Look at what he says next. ***"For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened..."*** "I'm not trying to make things hard on you and easy on others." ***"...but that as a matter of fairness..."*** Literally, *equality*. ***"...your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness."***

This is not Robin Hood. This is not "Steal from the rich, give to the poor." This is not Christian communism. This is not the mandatory redistribution of wealth or some silly idea like that. At the heart of giving is it has to be willing and voluntary. Here's what he's basically saying: "There were other people who gave when *you* needed it, and now you're giving at a time when *they* need it."

Here's the principle in Scripture. We should have equal... Not equal amount. We all make different amounts of money and have different commitments and all that. It's not equal amount; it's equal sacrifice. Paul gives an interesting principle from Exodus 16. Look at the next verse. Look at what he's quoting here. Verse 15: ***"As it is written,***

'Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.'"

Basically, Paul is like... He's going to do a version of this next week with a different passage. He's like, "Let me give you a spiritual principle from the Old Testament." You go, "Where did this show up?" It shows up in Exodus 16, if you want to look at it with your Community Group. Basically, Paul is like (here's what he's quoting from), "Do you remember when God let down just a little bit of manna every day?"

He told everybody, "Don't you get too much." The people who tried to gather a lot, to hoard the blessing of God... It spoiled, and they just had enough afterward. The people who took just a little, who said, "I'll take a little..." You know, they're a humble person. "I'll just take a little piece of manna." It was always enough.

Here's what I want you to know. This is an issue of trust. God has a secret, special, sovereign economy that we don't always get to see. John Calvin, the famous Reformer... His observation on 2 Corinthians 8 is the number-one lie Christians believe is that when they give, something is lost, that when they give they have less.

At the end of the exodus account, in the book of Deuteronomy, after it has been 40 years in the wilderness, God goes, "Hey, guys. Did you notice that over the 40 years your sandals didn't wear out?" I wonder if when he said that someone was like, "Yeah, that's... I mean, sandals last, like, six months or a year, not 40 years."

Then God goes, "Did you notice your shirt still fits and didn't wear out and doesn't have holes in it?" "Yeah, I guess 40 years wearing the same shirt in the desert, it's pretty amazing that it still works and fits." God is like, "That was me." Who knows how many things...? There are always a thousand things we don't see God doing in response to our generosity to others and the way God is secretly meeting our needs.

05 PAUL TELLS THEM WHAT HE WILL DO WITH THE MONEY

With the rest of the time, I want you to see something briefly. It's important, and I'm going to talk about it for a few minutes. Paul ends (and I think it's a great model for me to do) saying, "I want to tell you, just for a few minutes, about how we handle money so you can trust us to be men of integrity."

Let me show you. Turn with me to verse 16. ***"But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you."*** Basically, he's like, "I'm going to send Titus to talk to you about money and get the money from you." Paul is like, "Titus is going to talk to you about money because he loves you." This is why you

know I love you: I'm talking to you about money. One of the healthiest barometers of how a person is doing spiritually has to do with their generosity.

Look at what he says. Let's keep going. Verse 17: ***"For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel."*** We think this is Apollos.

Here's the first principle. Paul is basically saying, "Guys, I want you to know how we handle money," and the first thing he says is, "We don't handle money alone." You're not going to believe this. Last week, a guy came up to me. I'd never seen him before. He was visiting our church. He said, "Pastor, I did something silly. You know when you were passing those offering buckets?" Last week was Communion.

He said, "I thought that was for the Communion cups to throw them in the trash." He said, "So I threw the Communion cup. I actually have some money I want to give to the church. Here." I was like, "Do not give that to me." I said it nicer than that. I was like, "Hey, come over here. Here's somebody you can give that to," because I don't touch the money. We always have multiple godly people at once looking at the finances.

Follow along. Verse 19: ***"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."*** In other words, Paul is basically saying, "I know this is God's money." I mean, all money is God's money, but we particularly feel a special stewardship for money that is given to the kingdom of God through the local church.

I wish I could take all of you to some of our staff meetings, because every once in a while, Pastor Dave will sit down with our entire staff and go, "Guys, all right. Here's the new budget. This is God's money. The church has given generously and sacrificially. We need to spend this carefully and wisely."

Paul goes, "I get it, guys. This is serious." Look at what he says next. Verse 20: ***"We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight..."*** In other words, he goes, "I know God sees everything. I can't hide anything from him." But, also, he wants to do what's honorable in the sight of man.

By the way, I want you to know this. Maybe you know this already. This is why we have an outside accounting agency. We want to have the right systems in place. This is why we yearly have an audit. We have a financial colonoscopy of our church every year...I want you to know that...because we want to be above reproach.

Look at how he ends here. ***"And with them we are sending our brother..."*** There's another person handling the money as well. ***"...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. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit."***

In other words, "I'm talking to you about all of this for your own good." ***"And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men."***

Okay. We just spent roughly 45 minutes together talking about money, talking about the gospel, talking about generosity. Here's the truth. There are some of you who have your internal defense attorney, and he or she has been working hard this entire service of why you don't have to give and why you're the exception and why when you read 2 Corinthians 8 there's an asterisk, and we go to the back of the Bible and there's a picture of you. That's how we think.

I just want to talk to you for a second because, honestly, as I've prayed about this and thought about this... Look. I promise you there is no clearer explanation in the entire Bible of why to give than 2 Corinthians 8. There's nothing clearer. There's nothing more comprehensive. But here's the truth: there are some of you in here who don't need an explanation; you need an experience with Jesus Christ. You need an experience of the grace of God in your life, and you'll know you've had it when you become a generous person.

Have you ever heard the story of Charlemagne, that famous emperor? Before they would go out to battle they would baptize the men, and the men would leave their swords up in the air while they were being baptized. So, they would be baptized, and one thing would be sticking out of the water, their sword, because they would say, "I don't want to baptize this, because I know what I'm about to go do with this, and I want to be free to do whatever I want to do."

How many Christians, if we could symbolically show the baptism, it would be they're baptized but what's sticking out of the water is their wallet? I want to read to you one last passage. It's from Romans 15. Paul is talking about the same offering from a different place. I want you to see this.

"For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings."

Here's the principle we're going to close with: you should give materially to the extent that you have experienced things spiritually. I saw this recently. We had this gift come into our church. It was a large gift. I thought, "What's *that* about?" I called this couple and asked, "What did God do in your heart for you to give a gift that large and trust that to our church?"

They said, "This church has changed our son's life. He came to this church when he was a boy, and now he's a man, and we're seeing him growing. He's so transformed that we wanted to give back to the very ministry that's doing this in this city." What have you received spiritually from Christ?

If I could be so bold for a minute... If you've received from our church, if you've been helped here, if your marriage has been strengthened, if you've been equipped as a parent, if your kids have been invested in, we would ask that people would respond to the same extent materially that they have experienced spiritually.

I've been saying this for about a year now, and I can't think of any better way to say it, so I'm just going to close with it again. Here it is. God designed the world so that the very thing that takes the Christian the deepest takes the mission the farthest: generosity. Are you feeling a little dry spiritually? Let me ask you to increase your giving, your giving of your time, your talent, and your treasure. Nothing will wake you up like increasing your giving.

I want to invite you to invite God into your finances, no matter where you are, maybe reinstate. Here's what happens. I've been doing this long enough to know every person, at some point in their life, wants to invite God into their finances. You lose your job. "God, I need you. I need you." You don't have enough money for your kids to go to college. "God, help!" You thought you'd have more to retire and you don't. "Lord!" The problem is we often invite God into our finances way too late.

I want to invite you to invite God into your finances, and I want to invite you to ask this question: What would this church be like if everyone gave like you? If everyone gave like you, would it be like, "Oh my goodness! The budget would triple" or would it be like, because you give nothing, we could do nothing and we'd have to close the doors and go home tomorrow?

We're going to end a little differently. I don't want to manipulate anyone, but if you'll just stand, I'm going to... You can close your eyes. I want us to end just being openhearted and openhanded before the Lord. Just pray with me about this. In 2 Corinthians 6 and 7, Paul twice says to the church, "Open your heart." Paul says, "I didn't wrong you. Open your heart."

Paul says, "Love people deeply. Give people second chances. Be reconciled. Be an openhearted church." Then in chapters 8 and 9, Paul says, "Would you be an openhanded church?" So, wherever you are, just symbolically, put your palms up and say, "Lord, I want to be openhanded. I want to believe in your secret, special, sovereign economy.

Lord, I want to believe that when I give, I don't lose. I want to believe that everything is a gift of grace, and, Lord, I want grace to make me a gracious person. I want the legacy of my family, among other things, to be generosity. I want to be part of what you're doing in the world. I want to connect my heart and my finances to your global purposes in the world."

Lord, would you build here at Two Cities and across our city, across our nation, churches that are openhanded and openhearted? We pray this for your glory and our good, amen.