

The Heights Baptist Church

ACTS 11:27-30; 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15; 9:6-8 • 3/7/2021

MAIN POINT

Generous giving draws our hearts closer to God and strengthens our faith in Him as our ultimate joy.

INTRODUCTION

Ask someone in your Life Group to be ready to share about how giving to God has been a blessing to them.

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the best gift you have ever given someone?

Does generosity come naturally to you, or does it take more effort and awareness?

Explain.

Giving does not come naturally to many of us because we fail to trust that if we give much we will have much left over. However, in terms of our relationship with Christ, generosity is the only option. We desire to live generously as a response to God's supreme gift in Christ Jesus and to His command to sacrificially meet the needs of others. Giving draws our hearts closer to God and strengthens our faith in Him as our ultimate joy.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 11:27-30.

While Barnabas and Paul led and disciplined the new church in Antioch, the church had the opportunity to put into practice what they learned about the body of Christ.

What need presented itself to the believers in Antioch, and how did the church respond?

The Spirit inspired Agabus, one of the prophets from Jerusalem, to predict a severe famine would ravage the Roman world. The Christians in Antioch determined to send relief to the

brothers in Judea. Barnabas was concerned about the Jerusalem believers and led others to join him in helping and encouraging them. Previously, he had encouraged needy Jerusalem believers by providing funds from the sale of his own land (see Acts 4:36-37). The text tells us that they all participated, “everyone according to his own ability.” The Christians in Antioch gathered the relief funds and sent them to the elders in Judea.

What qualities or attitudes did these Christians’ financial help convey?

How did sending financial aid to the church in Jerusalem show that the Christians in Antioch were maturing disciples, as was Barnabas’s goal?

What is the connection between discipleship and giving?

Giving is one way Christians can act to meet particular needs. It can also be a sign of spiritual growth. Those who have begun to grow as disciples have discovered the principle that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). We can encourage other Christians by showing we care about and will help them in their difficulties. Making ourselves and our means available to them may cost us, but Christ’s love motivates us to care about all people; especially others in the community of faith.

Sacrificial generosity was a practice established by the church at its very conception, and in 2 Corinthians the apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian church that generosity should be fundamental in their ministry to one another. Paul told the Corinthians about the generosity of the Macedonian churches who, despite their own poverty, had raised money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Even though they were poor, they gave generously because the Christian community was in need.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15.

What do you learn about the Macedonians from their giving? What amazed Paul about their giving?

What “grace” had God given to the Macedonian Christians?

The giving discussed in 2 Corinthians 8 was a special offering, not the regular church offering, and it was collected to meet a specific need. Paul had hoped the Christians in Macedonia would support the offering. But because of their own deprived circumstances, he evidently did not expect they would give very much. Their giving was spontaneous and voluntary, fueled by grace, not by pressure.

The Macedonians gave out of devotion to Jesus, love for fellow believers, the joy of helping those in need, and because it was the good and right thing to do. They knew what it was to be in need because they had experienced poverty—yet they gave most generously. Anyone can be generous, but Christians have the most worthwhile motivation. The love of Christ compels us to take care of each other.

Generous giving is a ministry, and ministry requires faithful and generous giving. It was this ministry that the Macedonians shared. They saw their giving as a partnership with other believers to help with the needs of “the saints”; a preferred description of Paul for followers of Christ.

Second Corinthians 8:9 reveals what motivates all believers to willingly sacrifice for the sake of others in the community—Jesus’ sacrifice for us. Jesus practiced and taught sacrificial giving. Gratitude for what Jesus has done motivates us to demonstrate responsible stewardship of our lives and our possessions.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-9.

Paul sought to help the Corinthians gain the proper perspective on giving. He realized they needed to move beyond their good intentions to action because the time to deliver the offering to Jerusalem was drawing near. Paul hoped to lead the Corinthians to give as a ministry and to set a positive Christian example.

What words in these verses describe the attitude about giving that God will honor?

What words describe attitudes God will not honor?

How does your attitude affect your giving? What is the result of giving reluctantly or under compulsion?

In this passage, Paul taught how Christian giving is to be done. Believers are to give generously and cheerfully. Giving will be neither generous nor cheerful if givers are anxious about meeting their own needs.

Paul was not advocating that we give so we can get rich. On the contrary, when one’s giving is an expression of God’s grace, God will provide more to the giver, who then will be able to give even more. God sees far more clearly than we do that all worldly wealth is temporary. God has given us excess so that we will live generously and take care of others. He expects His people to invest their financial resources in ways that will endure for eternity. Generous giving is not to be done haphazardly but purposefully and sacrificially.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Is your life marked by generosity and wise stewardship as you seek to leverage your finances toward accomplishing God's mission through the local church? How do you know?

Are your acts of generosity and sacrifice more closely linked to joy or obligation? How does a person develop a generous, willing attitude without reservation like the examples we read about in today's passages?

How has your relationship with God been impacted by using your finances to help the kingdom?

PRAYER

Thank God for all that He has given to you. Pray that in response to the generous grace of Jesus, you would give generously to His church, including your life, talents, and resources. Ask God to work in your heart to lead you to become a cheerful giver.

COMMENTARY

| ACTS 11:27-30

11:27-28. Though Antioch lay far north of Jerusalem, we commonly read the word down in situations like this because of the topography. The Jews didn't use up and down as we do, to refer to north and south, but rather to describe low country and high country. Enter a visitor from Jerusalem, a prophet named Agabus whom we see again in 21:10-11. We have no evidence that he was sent by the Jerusalem church; prophets in this time tended to wander about a bit. Proclaiming this message of the coming famine wherever he traveled, Agabus found his way to Antioch.

Egyptian documents indicate a major famine in certain parts of the empire around A.D. 46. Here Luke clearly placed emphasis upon how these young believers responded to the dire news of coming hunger among their brothers and sisters to the south.

11:29-30. The process here is very important for us today. Jerusalem did not ask for help, though they certainly had heard Agabus' message even before Antioch. Paul and Barnabas did not start a relief program with canned goods stacking up in the foyer ready for shipment to Jerusalem.

The crisp and precise text provides several crucial lessons for congregational operations today:

1. The people themselves initiated the relief effort on the basis of what they learned from Agabus.
2. Apparently everyone participated.
3. Participation depended upon one's ability to give.
4. Whatever theological differences might have still existed between Jerusalem and Antioch, they posed no barrier to sharing with other Christians in a time of need.

| 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

8:1 The churches of Macedonia were congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Ac 16–17).

8:2–3 These churches had been born in affliction (Ac 16–17). Moreover, they were limited in financial resources; yet these factors had not impeded their giving.

8:4 The same word (ministry) previously used to describe Christian service (4:1; 5:18; 6:3) is now used to describe Christian giving. Financial stewardship is ministry.

8:5 Here is the key to understanding giving as a ministry. When believers offer themselves wholly to the Lord, they have no difficulty in offering their wallets to him.

8:6 Paul's collection for the Jerusalem Christians had been a long-term project. He had evidently put Titus in charge of at least part of it. The Corinthians had "been ready since last year" (9:2) to give, but had not completed the task. The recent trouble in Corinth, causing Paul's sorrowful visit and the severe letter, had surely been the major factor. Now that the Corinthians were restored, it was time to finish the task, but it would only be done the right way if it was prompted by God's grace (v. 1).

8:7 The Corinthians were more affluent than the Macedonians; therefore they could give more generously, and this is what Paul expected to happen (excel also in this act of grace).

8:8 The generosity of the Macedonians set a challenging standard for giving. Only love for God by his grace would enable the Corinthians to pass this test.

8:9 Jesus's self-sacrifice is an even higher standard of giving. He willingly exchanged all the wealth of his deity for the poverty of the incarnation.

8:10–11 On finish the task, see note at v. 6.

8:12 God is more concerned with the quality of giving than with the quantity, as with the widow who gave two coins (Lk 21:1–4).

8:13–14 A congregation that has been generous may later find itself in need of help from others.

8:15 The quotation from Ex 16:18 comes from the Israelites' first experience with gathering daily manna. God saw to it that those who gathered little had enough and those who gathered much did not have a surplus. In the wilderness God enforced this principle of equality (Ex 16:20). Paul calls on the Corinthians to be equitable voluntarily, trusting God that they would have enough.

| 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8

9:6. Some Corinthian Christians may have reasoned that the more they gave, the less they would have and the more likely they would become dependent on the giving of others. Paul explained how the grace of giving operates in the lives of those who trust in God. A farmer reaps in proportion to what he sows. A wise farmer sows generously in order to reap generously. He was not advocating that we give so we can get rich. On the contrary, one's giving is an expression of God's grace.

9:7. Generous giving is not to be done haphazardly but purposefully. Each person should do as he has decided in his heart. The word decided indicates a choice and could be translated "purposed." Again, Paul made clear he was not trying to compel the Corinthians to give. Individuals are responsible to God for their giving. Some Christians give but fail to practice Christian giving. Out of regret is literally "from sorrow." The phrase describes a person who grieves over the loss of what was given rather than rejoices over the ministry it renders. God loves a cheerful giver. Why? Because God is a cheerful giver. Cheerful translates a word that basically means "merry" and is used to indicate the idea of willingness.

9:8. God alone is able to make every grace overflow to you. God is not a miser. If He were, the Corinthians prudently should have hoarded all of their resources and given nothing away. God is, however, a generous Provider. Paul reminded the Corinthians that God is capable of meeting their needs as they followed His leadership in meeting the needs of others.