



*Week 3*

# **Generous Givers Experience a Life Full of Joy**

**2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:15**

## *Sermon Outline*

### **Generous Givers Experience a Life Full of Joy 2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:15**

- I. ILL – Dad teaching me to give –this was one of the greatest gifts I had ever been given
- A. As we talked about generosity, what I am really trying to do is hand you a gift
1. What you'll see today is that while we sometimes initially feel like we're losing by giving; the truth is that we are really gaining
    - a. Here's the thing that I really want you to get - **We're not trading down when we give, we're trading up. Generous givers experience a life full of joy.**
  2. ILL – Mission teams coming home – “We thought we were giving to them, but we found that we were really the recipients.”
    - a. The reason this happens is because these mission teams are exchanging a little of their time and a little of their finances for a life of overflowing joy
  3. Please hear me...this is about what we as a church want FOR you and more importantly, this is about what God desires FOR you. It's not about what we can get FROM you; it's about experiencing newness of life in Christ and having the life of joy that you really desire to experience.
    - a. You have heard, “God loves a cheerful giver.” Maybe the best interpretation of that is not that you need to smile when you give, but maybe God's saying that He loves to see the joy that results from generous giving. And our passage today reflects that interpretation.

#### II. 2 Corinthians 8

A. Background - Paul traveling around the Middle East raising money for the church in Jerusalem

1. Paul checks in with Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) and Corinth

B. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

1. v. 4 – holds up the Macedonian churches as an example

2. v. 7 – You're excelling in every other area of generosity (faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness and love), so excel in the financial aspect of generosity

3. v. 8 – Not forcing you to give...urging you to strongly consider giving

4. v. 9 – Ultimate example of generosity – Jesus

5. v. 9:15 – Paul finishes this section of Scripture by thanking God for His gift (and example) of incredible, indescribable generosity.

a. Do you hear the joy that is woven throughout this passage?

b. The Macedonian churches longed to give and considered it a joy to help others. Jesus counted it joy to trade in the riches of heaven for the poverty of being with us (flesh out riches to poverty).

1. We are God's ultimate treasure. So, He joyfully gave up these riches to purchase...redeem...us

c. Paul was overwhelmed by joy as he thought of God's generosity...calling it an “indescribable gift.”

**(continued on page 2)**

d. All throughout this passage, there is a unique connection between generosity and joy.

III. Dream with me for a minute. What if...for one month you could somehow manage to wake up every morning with the mindset that I want to give whatever I have for the good of others and for the sake of the kingdom of God? What if – for one month – God led you to dream daily about meeting the needs of those around you?

A. Feed the hungry, help the disabled, provide for an adoption, foster a child

1. What if your job – for one month – was to wake up daily and give?

2. What do you think that would feel like? I kind of think that it would feel like Christmas every morning. Better yet, it would feel like walking in God's footsteps.

a. I think, based on this passage, that it would be the most freeing, fulfilling month of our lives.

b. I think, based on this passage, that it would be a month of overwhelming joy.

IV. ILL – Lee Strobel and impoverished family

A. God's not calling us all to live in poverty, but here's what He is calling us to...JOY. He's calling us to imitate His ways and find the life that brings radical joy...the life of giving generously.

B. Leave with this reminder – The Bible and our experiences indicate that **we're not trading down when we give, we're trading up. Generous givers experience a life full of joy.**

## *Sermon Manuscript*

When I was a child, my family was very active in the church. My parents both served in various church ministries and as a result, our family was structured around many of the events of the church. It was normal for me to be at the church building three or four days every week. But, one of the beautiful things about my parents is that they did not live a double life. Even as a child, I understood the deep love that my parents had for God.

As I talked to my father later in life, he told me that one of the things that they wanted to instill in us as children was a love for God's Word. They used various means to demonstrate that love for the Bible, but the one that sticks with me most, is the fact that my father would always get up around 5:30 in the morning to spend time reading God's Word and praying. It didn't matter what day of the week – or weekend – it was...and it basically didn't matter how my father was feeling. He was incredibly faithful to his time in God's Word.

Now, I remind you that I am not a morning person. I am the type of person that could stay up until 2am each night, but I have incredible difficulty pulling myself out of bed. So, I have utterly failed to live up to my Dad's 5:30 routine. And even as a child, I was very rarely awake at that time of day. But, I always knew that my father was awake. Probably once a week, I would wander out of my room while he was still sitting in his recliner, reading and spending time with God.

As you can imagine, it was normal for me to have spiritual conversations with my father. He never pushed this stuff on us, but it was a natural part of our conversations since it was such a passion of

his. And I'll never forget one particular spiritual conversation that my father initiated when I was nine or ten years old.

At that point in my life, I had begun mowing our yard. My Dad needed the help and I was eager to earn a little money. We never had an allowance growing up, so if I wanted to buy baseball cards or a candy bar from the store, I often had to work until I could afford what I wanted. Mowing the lawn was the perfect way for me to get that spending money to use when I was with my friends.

Additionally, I had also been given the opportunity to mow my grandparent's lawn. My grandfather was a little more meticulous about his yard, so he would work on the flower beds, the weed eating and edging while I pushed the mower around. And for my 30 or 40 minutes of labor, he would pay me handsomely. He paid about three times what my Dad paid.

So, in light of this new source of income, my father initiated a spiritual conversation with me. I don't remember exactly how he brought it up, but it was probably after I made a statement about how well Papa paid me. And the conversation went something like this:

“Now that you are earning a little bit of money, I want to challenge you to do something.”

“What's that, Dad?”

“I want to challenge you to start giving some of your money back to God. When the offering plate is passed at church, why don’t you start putting in about ten percent of whatever you’ve earned?”

I remember him helping me figure out how to calculate a percentage and I also remember the feeling of dread around this conversation. I didn’t want to give away my money. I needed that money! If I was ever going to have the baseball card collection that I really wanted...I needed to save every penny! But, my father kept encouraging me in this way. I kind of hoped that the conversation would just go away, but every few months, he would ask how I was doing with his challenge.

Do you know what often happened? I failed the challenge. I may have given a little bit here and there, but I regularly failed in giving back any significant amount. I really thought God should let me keep the money that I worked to get!

My Dad was gracious throughout this process. He did not belittle me or act disappointed when I failed. Instead, he was gracious and kind. And one day, he said something that surprised me. He said, “John, I know it’s hard to give the money back to God. I struggle with that at times, too. But, what I’m really trying to do for you is give you a gift.”

That didn’t make a whole lot of sense to me as a child, but he explained himself further.

“What I have seen in my own life,” he said, “is that trusting God with our money is one of the greatest things that we can do. If you will trust God with your money, you will find out that He will trust you with things that are much more valuable than money. So, I want you to understand that

when I challenge you to give back to God, I’m really trying to give you a gift. And I think you’ll understand that further as you start to really trust God with your money.”

I tell you that story because I think that most of us still struggle with this issue of money today. We think that the more we hold on to what we have, the happier we’ll be. We think that we can’t afford to give back to God. We say things like, “I wish I had more money so that I could give to God’s work...but I can barely pay my bills as it is.”

Here’s what I want you to hear from me today. As we talk about money and generosity, you may have already made up your mind that giving to the God’s work is impossible. You may have already decided that this is hard and it is above your head. You may think that generous giving is only for the “super” Christians. So, you may be ready to tune me out before we even get started. But in truth...in all honesty...I am trying to give you a gift. I am trying to introduce you to a way of life that hold value far beyond anything that money can buy.

And what I hope you’ll see today is that while we sometimes feel like we are losing by giving away our money...the truth is that we are really gaining. Just as is true with so many aspects of God’s kingdom, this is a paradox. It seems illogical. It seems like we would find the greatest joy and satisfaction by keeping and hoarding. But, according to the design of God, the opposite is actually true.

When it comes to money and giving, God has designed our lives so that we gain by giving. So, as we continue to talk about and dig into the subject of generosity, please understand that I have no intentions of getting anything from you. I'm not asking for anything here. Instead, I want you to know that I am trying to hand you a gift. When God encourages us to give, He is trying to open up something in our lives that is far more valuable than anything money can buy.

According to God, here's the truth about money: We're not trading down when we give, we trading up. Ask anyone who has learned the secret of generosity. Ask anyone who has walked out on a limb with God and given more than they thought they could give. Ask anyone who dares to trust God more than they trust in their own money. And here's what you'll find out.

We're not trading down when we give. We're trading up.

The incredible truth is that generous givers experience a life full of joy.

Have you ever been on a mission trip to help others in need...or have you ever witnessed people return from a trip like that? Most of the time, when groups take trips to build homes for the poor or to temporarily live among people who have very few resources, they plan and they go with a mindset of being a helper. They come up with the funds that they need for the trip and they think of all the ways that they can help these impoverished people with their resources. Or maybe, they're part of a group that is going to conduct Backyard Bible Clubs. So, they take off and go to an area of the country that has fewer churches and fewer Christians to invest in the lives of some local children.

Regardless of where they go or what they do to serve others on those trips, the story is always the same when they return. As they begin to share their experiences with others back home, they always say things like, "I went thinking that I could really help them...and that they could benefit from me being there. But, what I found out was that I was the one who really benefitted. I was the one who received the 'gift' from this trip."

And whether those people know it or not, what they are saying is, "I thought I was going to lose something by taking off of work and giving to others. But, what I found is that I actually gained by giving. I did not trade down. I traded up."

When people make those types of expressions, they are affirming what God has been telling us all along. Generous givers experience a life full of joy. These mission teams are exchanging a little bit of their time and a little bit of their finances for an experience of overflowing joy.

So, again, please hear me on this. As we talk about generosity, this is about what we as a church want FOR you. More importantly, this is about what God wants for you. It's not about what we – or HE – can get FROM you. God doesn't need your money. He owns it all anyway. So, this is about experiencing newness in life. This is about finding out what Jesus was talking about when He said that He came to give us life...and that he wants us to experience it abundantly. This is about what Paul expressed to Timothy when he said that as we give generously we start to experience "the life that is truly life."

Generosity opens the door in your life to what God wants for you.

You have probably heard many church leaders state that God loves a cheerful giver. And maybe the best interpretation of that is not that you should smile when you give. Maybe the best way to think about that verse is not to imagine that you need to conjure up joy to do this thing that is really a burden. But, maybe the best way to interpret that verse is to know that God is saying that He loves to see the joy that overflows from a generous life. He loves to see the happiness and fun that generous givers experience as a result of their giving. He wants you to experience cheerfulness in life and one of the best ways to experience that is through living a life of generosity.

So, to dig into this idea, let's look at 2 Corinthians chapter 8. And while you are getting there, let me just give you a quick reminder of what is going on at this point in 2 Corinthians. At this point in history, Paul is traveling around the ancient Middle East and as he travels he is doing two major things. He's going back to the churches that he has helped plant to encourage them in their faith. He's checking on them to make sure that they are standing strong and that they are growing spiritually. He's checking in to see how they are doing as they learn to imitate the ways of Jesus. So, that's the first thing that Paul's doing at this point.

But, second, Paul is also on a multi-country fund raising campaign. He's not out to raise money for his own travels. He's not even looking for people to support him in his ministry. But, instead, he's touching base with all of these churches that he started to ask them to give generously to the church in Jerusalem. He's calling on them to collect money to help out those in the Jerusalem church who are in financial ruins.

Just as a reminder, there are a couple of reasons that the Jerusalem church is struggling so much, but primarily, the reason that they are impoverished at this time is because of a famine in the land. There was a major famine in the region of Jerusalem that decimated crops and made many of the Jerusalem Christians even more dependent on the Roman government than they were previously. You may remember that we discussed the fact that about 90% of the Jews and Christians in Jerusalem during this time were peasants. They didn't have much to begin with and now that this famine has swept over the area, they were in desperate need of outside assistance.

So, Paul is encouraging these young churches that he started across the Middle East to pitch in and help their fellow believers in Jerusalem. Here's what the passage says...starting in verse 1.

“And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.”

And by the way, when Paul talks about the Macedonians, he is talking about a few churches. It's not just one group. I believe he's talking about the church at Philippi, the church at Thessalonica and the church at Berea. So, he's saying to the Corinthians, I want you to know about what God is doing in these other churches. I want you to see how much God is using them and compare where you stand to them. This is not a them vs us thing. Paul's not trying to put down the Corinthians and exalt the Macedonians. He's just saying, “Look at what they're doing with the little bit that God has entrusted to them.”

Verse 2...

“In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people.”

As I said, Paul is not trying to put down the Corinthians here. He is simply holding up the Macedonians as a remarkable example. He’s noting that they, too, are going through some several trials, but because they understand the remarkable way that generosity becomes a gift to the giver, they want to be a part of it.

Let’s keep going in verse 5.

“And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”

Did you see what Paul did there? He pointed out that fact that they are getting it right in so many other areas of their walk. He essentially said, “You’ve done well in so many areas of life! Your faith is remarkable! Your understanding of the gospel is growing. You are sincere in the way that you love God.” And as he has noted these positive aspects of their church, he then says, “Don’t

miss out on the joy of giving. Don’t skip this one aspect of faith, because it will be radically good for you and it will also help those in need.” So, he encourages them to excel in the financial aspects of generosity as well.

Verse 8...

“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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 through his poverty might become rich.”

So, he closes this section by saying, “I am not trying to force you to do something that you are opposed to doing.” He reminds them that they had earlier agreed to participate in this generous act toward the Jerusalem church. And then, in verse 9, he tells them the greatest motivation for giving. He says, “Here is what Jesus has done for you. He gave up everything. He walked away from the riches of heaven and stepped aside from the glories of being God. He was incredibly rich and he gave it all up for your good. He gave it all up for your benefit.”

And make a note of this. When Paul is talking about following the example of Jesus in giving, he doesn’t back-peddle and say, “This was so hard for Jesus, but, begrudgingly, He did it anyway.” No. Instead, throughout this entire passage, he’s been looking at the joy that comes from being generous. He pointed out that the Macedonians considered it pure joy to be able to contribute, even



though they were struggling. He points out that the Corinthians are getting joy out of following God in other areas of life and notes how living generously will just serve to increase that joy. And finally, as he holds up the model of Jesus, he shows that Jesus willingly made the sacrifices that He made. He demonstrates that this was a joyful thing for Jesus.

And before we leave that thought, I want you to jump down to the last verse in this section of Paul's letter. This section where he is talking about giving generously is kind of long and it extends all the way to the end of chapter 9. So, jump to the end of chapter 9 with me and see how Paul closes out these thoughts.

Chapter 9, verse 15...he says, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

As he draws this appeal to a close, Paul can't help but get excited about the gift of God. He can't help but rejoice at the way God has given us the gift of Jesus...the gift of the gospel...and He has done it freely. The gift of Jesus Christ and the gift of the gospel both come wrapped in generosity. That's God's way. That's the way generosity is supposed to work. It's a regular part of everyday life and it is a remarkable source of joy for both the giver and the recipient.

Tim Keller, a pastor in New York, has noted that of all of the gifts in the world, Jesus is the only one that doesn't cost us something. Every gift you buy at Christmas will cost you financially. Every gift you give of your time will demand that you make sacrifices to give away that time. Every gift that you could want in this world will demand that you go to the mat to obtain it. But, Jesus...the ultimate gift...is the only gift that will go to the mat to obtain you. Jesus is the only gift that will go to the mat in order to be with you.

Do you know why that is?

Jesus, the indescribable gift, has everything that He could ever want. He has the riches of heaven. He has the glory and honor. He has the angels as His servants. He has everything that He could ever want...except you. You see, you are God's greatest treasure. You are the only thing that God has to work to obtain. And because of that, Jesus doesn't demand that you go to the mat to be with him. Instead, He's willing to go to the mat to be with you.

Isn't that amazing? We are God's ultimate treasure. So, joyfully and generously gives up all of these other treasures to purchase and redeem us.

Paul, in his amazement at this type of love and generosity, says to God, "Thank you for your gift that is too great for words! Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" And all through these two chapters on money and generosity, there is a unique connection between generosity and joy.

When we give, we are acting like God. When we are generous, we are not trading down; we are trading up...to joy. Because generous givers experience a life full of joy.

Dream with me for a minute. What if...for one month you could somehow manage to wake up every morning with the mindset that "I want to give whatever I have for the good of others and for the sake of the kingdom of God?" What if – for one month – God led you to dream daily about

meeting the needs of those around you? What if we stepped out of bed each day, and instead of thinking about all of the stuff we had to accomplish...or instead of thinking about all of the things we need to obtain today...what if our feet hit the ground and we started dreaming about ways to connect with the hungry around us? What if our feet hit the ground and we started dreaming about the possibility of helping a disabled friend? What if we rolled out of bed and from our first thoughts in the morning, we starting thinking about how we could help fund an adoption for a family that desperately wants to adopt, but doesn't have the money? What if – taking it a step further – what if when our feet hit the floor in the morning, we started figuring out a way to bring home a child with us...to act as a foster family to a child that has endured hardship after hardship?

What if that was our job and our vision for one month? That each day we would wake up dreaming about how we could live generously and imitate the generous ways of God?

What do you think that would feel like? I kind of think that it would feel like Christmas every morning. Better yet, it would feel like walking in God's footsteps. And I think, based on this passage, that it would be the most freeing, fulfilling month of our lives. I think, based on these verses, that it would be a month of overwhelming joy. Because givers don't lose out on the best things of this world. Givers gain the best things of this world.

While working as a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, Lee Strobel was assigned to report on the struggles of an impoverished, inner-city family during the weeks leading up to Christmas. A devout atheist at the time, Strobel was mildly surprised by the family's attitude in spite of their circumstances:

The Delgados—60-year-old Perfecta and her granddaughters, Lydia and Jenny—had been burned out of their roach-infested tenement and were now living in a tiny, two-room apartment on the West Side. As I walked in, I couldn't believe how empty it was. There was no furniture, no rugs, nothing on the walls—only a small kitchen table and one handful of rice. That's it. They were virtually devoid of possessions.

In fact, 11-year-old Lydia and 13-year-old Jenny owned only one short-sleeved dress each, plus one thin, gray sweater between them. When they walked the half-mile to school through the biting cold, Lydia would wear the sweater for part of the distance and then hand it to her shivering sister, who would wear it the rest of the way.

But despite their poverty and the painful arthritis that kept Perfecta from working, she still talked confidently about her faith in Jesus. She was convinced he had not abandoned them. I never sensed despair or self-pity in her home; instead, there was a gentle feeling of hope and peace.

Strobel completed his article, then moved on to more high-profile assignments. But when Christmas Eve arrived, he found his thoughts drifting back to the Delgados and their unflinching belief in God's providence. In his words: "I continued to wrestle with the irony of the situation. Here was a family that had nothing but faith, and yet seemed happy, while I had everything I needed materially, but lacked faith—and inside I felt as empty and barren as their apartment."

In the middle of a slow news day, Strobel decided to pay a visit to the Delgados. When he arrived, he was amazed at what he saw. Readers of his article had responded to the family's need in

overwhelming fashion, filling the small apartment with donations. Once inside, Strobel encountered new furniture, appliances, and rugs; a large Christmas tree and stacks of wrapped presents; bags of food; and a large selection of warm winter clothing. Readers had even donated a generous amount of cash.

But it wasn't the gifts that shocked Lee Strobel, an atheist in the middle of Christmas generosity. It was the family's response to those gifts. In his words:

As surprised as I was by this outpouring, I was even more astonished by what my visit was interrupting: Perfecta and her granddaughters were getting ready to give away much of their newfound wealth. When I asked Perfecta why, she replied in halting English: "Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do."

That blew me away! If I had been in their position at that time in my life, I would have been hoarding everything. I asked Perfecta what she thought about the generosity of the people who had sent all of these goodies, and again her response amazed me. "This is wonderful; this is very good," she said, gesturing toward the largess. "We did nothing to deserve this—it's a gift from God. But," she added, "It is not his greatest gift. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. That is Jesus."

To her, this child in the manger was the undeserved gift that meant everything—more than material possessions, more than comfort, more than security. And at that moment, something inside of me wanted desperately to know this Jesus—because, in a sense, I saw him in Perfecta and her granddaughters.

They had peace despite poverty, while I had anxiety despite plenty; they knew the joy of generosity, while I only knew the loneliness of ambition; they looked heavenward for hope, while I only looked out for myself; they experienced the wonder of the spiritual, while I was shackled to the shallowness of the material—and something made me long for what they had.

Or, more accurately, for the One they knew. (*Lee Strobel, The Case for Christmas, Zondervan, 2005.*)

Let me ask you a question. Do you live with that type of mindset for generosity? Do you live to be generous and to experience God's riches as a result of your generosity?

I don't believe that God is calling us all to live in poverty. But, instead, I believe that He is calling us to joy. He's calling us to imitate His ways... He calling us to walk away from our lifestyles of materialism and consumerism to find joy. He's calling us to something that initially feels difficult, but ultimately brings a deep satisfaction that is beyond compare.

So, let's join Him in this radical, exciting way of life. Let's walk in His footsteps. Let's experience His joy.

As we walk out of this place today, let's start living this out. It's for our own good. Because we're not trading down when we give sacrificially, we're trading up. In the kingdom of God and in the plans of God, generous givers experience a life full of joy.