

## Joy // The Joy of Generosity

During the Christmas season we don't just celebrate that God became man or that God put on human flesh, but that Jesus Christ was the only person in human history who wasn't just born— He was given.

This is why we celebrate the Christmas season by giving gifts to one another. By being generous to one another.

At Christmas, everyone gives, and everyone receives. Because what we find in the birth of Christ is the fact that we've been given a gift whose value is without measure.

Today we're talking about the joy of generosity. And while generosity is a much broader category than money, generosity absolutely includes money.

If you're undecided about giving financially to the mission of the church, I would love for you to make a decision to give here because I believe in what God is doing in and through the people here. I believe that God has something incredibly meaningful and impactful in store for this family.

Today, I'm talking about generosity because I don't want you to miss out on the JOY that God has for you when you give. When you drive a stake in the ground and make the decision that believers have made throughout 2,000 years of church history, to obey Jesus faithfully with your tithe (10%), and with offerings to God (above and beyond the tithe).

If you've been uncertain about giving, I want to help you get certain.

There are more than twenty-three hundred verses in the Bible about money. Jesus spoke more about money than any other topic. He said more about money than about heaven or hell. There's more written in the Bible about money than prayer and faith combined.

How you handle your money is simply an indicator of your trust, or lack of trust, in God.

**Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

Your budget, your bank account, your finances, according to Jesus, simply reflect what you love.

See, according to Jesus, and according to the whole Bible, your finances are not about your finances. Your finances are about your heart. It isn't a financial issue. It's a discipleship issue. It's an apprenticeship to Jesus issue.

**Do I really believe what the Bible teaches about money,  
and if so, what am I going to do about it?**

The apostle Paul is writing to a very wealthy church in Corinth made up primarily of Gentiles, non-Jewish believers, and Paul is reminding them of a promise that they made to give for the purpose of famine relief in Judea. But they haven't given yet, so Paul in chapter 8 is reminding them of the promise they made and is encouraging them to fulfill their promise to give. Paul sent a few of his companions ahead to arrange for the collection of the gift. Not as an exaction, something that they would begrudgingly give, but as a willing gift.

**2 Corinthians 9:6-12**, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God."

**2 Corinthians 8:11**, "So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it..."

**2 Corinthians 9:7**, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

That word cheerful in Greek means hilarious. Paul is saying, "*you ought to have so much joy in your life, that you are hilariously generous. That your generosity is a response to your joy. It's not motivated by guilt, or external pressure, or some compulsion, but by joy! And I'm not commanding you to do it because I want your motives to be pure.*"

Now, can you imagine the Bible saying that about any other issue? Like, "*I'm not going to command you not to lie, or to not murder... but I want you to not murder, only if you want to. Or, I'm not going to command you to tell the truth, but tell the truth, only if you really want to tell the truth.*"

No, no other moral issue is approached this way. Why? Because nearly every other moral issue has very clear external indicators as to whether or not you are complying with it. You know if you're lying or not. You clearly know if you've committed adultery, or murder, or any other moral issue.

But when it comes to greed or generosity, there aren't those clear external indicators as to whether or not you're actually greedy or generous. It's not clear cut. See, in God's eyes, generosity is almost entirely a matter of the heart. It's about your motives, your attitude toward money.

You even see this when Jesus talks about tithing.

**Luke 11:42**, “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”

Do you see what’s happening here? The Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, they’re tithing with everything. Money, food, herbs, every resource they’re giving 10%. That seems pretty generous, doesn’t it? And yet Jesus still rebukes them! Why?

Because they neglect justice and love for God. In other words, *you’re giving out of legalistic obligation... you’re just complying with a percentage, not out love for God or His people but out of love for yourself!*

The reality is God does invite us to test him with the tithe in Malachi 3. And there are promises attached to our giving. But what we see here is that God cares far more about, not just WHAT you give, but WHY you give. See, if you’re sitting here listening to this and thinking, “how much do I have to give?” you don’t see it yet.

What Jesus is telling us here is that while the tithe is a great guideline, it’s fine as a benchmark, but if your heart is filled with the joy of the Lord, overwhelmed by the grace of God, the amount will take care of itself, because you’ll be pushing yourself to give away more and more.

10% is not the finish line. It’s the starting point. Jesus doesn’t want 10% of your finances or 10% of your heart or 10% of your life. He wants it all. He wants ALL of you! And when you recognize that He gave all of Himself in order to rid you of the disease of sin and bring you into His family, you won’t be able to help but become a “hilarious” giver.

And unless you’re giving joyfully, eagerly, stretching yourself to give more and more, you actually don’t have a heart of generosity.

There’s a fantastic example of this in the beginning of 2 Cor 8. Macedonian Christians, incredibly poor, facing their own famine.

**2 Corinthians 8:1-3**, “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup>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...”

Beyond their means does not mean that now they’re starving to death because of how much they gave. It means that they’re giving sacrificially. They saw a greater need than that of their own, and they took what little they had to live on and made it even smaller in order to give some away to those with greater need than their own.

The Macedonians believers didn't give out of abundance, they gave out of obedience. They made adjustments in the practical details of their life in order to meet needs of those who were facing hardship worse than their own.

Even if you give 10%, according to God, that doesn't mean you're generous. Some of you, you could give 20-30% and not even feel it. And even that doesn't mean you're generous. Others of you, it would be a stretch for you to give 5% because you're currently living beyond your means. Yet there are very real situations, with some of our widows and single mom's that are working 3 jobs trying to make ends meet, trying to provide for their children, and pay rent, and are still giving 2% to the Lord., and according to God's economy, are some of the most generous people in the room.

There's a place in 2 Cor 8:15 where Paul paraphrases from Exodus...

**2 Corinthians 8:15** "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

Paul is referencing the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. They had no way to gather food, and so, God provided manna, or essentially bread from heaven. Every morning except on the Sabbath day, they would gather the Manna, but they weren't supposed to gather more than what their family needed just for that day. If they took more than they needed for one day, the next morning they'd wake up and the extra manna would be rotten and covered in maggots and worms.

Paul is comparing money to manna. He's giving us two enormous realities.

While the Israelites had to go out and work to gather the manna each morning, ultimately the question is where did the manna come from? It came from God's hand.

Paul is saying, *"whatever God has made available to you in regard to your provision, is a gift from His hand. You've worked for it, sure. But your ability to work, your intellect, your health, where you were born, the circumstances that made way for your provision - it's all from His hand."*

You can't expect to gain it without work, and yet once you've gathered it, it's a gift. And that fact alone ought to fill you with incredibly joy. Everything is a gift. If that isn't your perspective, you'll be incapable of real generosity, or real grace, or real kindness, of real joy, because you think you have what you have all because of you! There's no grace or gratitude. There's no joy in that.

Paul is also telling us that if you gather too much money, if you're not generous with it, if you keep too much of it for yourself, it will turn your life bitter, rotten. It will bring sickness into your life. And your greed will rob you of the joy God wants to give you in your generosity. There is a great danger in not growing in generosity.

**2 Corinthians 8:7**, “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.”

**Obj:** Well, Rob I might not give financially, but I serve. I give of my time and my talents.

What does Paul say? That’s right and good. Continue to excel in those things but see to it, that you excel in THIS ACT OF GRACE also! He’s talking about money! About giving! About generosity. There is a legacy of generosity in this church family and God has changed countless lives through those of you who have faithfully and consistently given financially here. But how do we continue to get our motives in the right place, how do we continue to press into becoming a church family that excels in this act of grace also?

**2 Corinthians 9:6**, “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

2 Corinthians 9:9-10, “As it is written, “He has distributed freely, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.” <sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

When you give, when you’re generous, when you sow with your finances, it produces a harvest of righteousness. The word righteousness isn’t just about morality. It’s a word that carries with it an enormous amount of social implications. Whenever you see this word in scripture, it’s not just talking about morality. It’s talking about the healing of social relationships, mending what is broken in the world, bringing down walls that divide and separate, replacing hatred and animosity with forgiveness and unity. “Given to the poor, distributed freely...” Poverty is healed, conflicts cease, families are reunited.

**2 Peter 3:13**, “But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

The point is that everything wrong with the world is going to be made right. Everything is going to be healed. Every sad moment is going to be redeemed. The relationship between God and man will be mended. No more hunger, no disease, no war, no malnourished children, no more orphans, no famine, no more tears, no poverty, no death. Everything will be right. Every relationship will be right.

When you sow generously, you’re contributing to the healing of what’s broken in the world. You are reaping a harvest of righteousness. The more generous you are, the more you are healed, and the more healing you bring into the world.

This is why 21% of everything that comes in, goes out to efforts Sudan, and DR, and India, and Haiti. It’s why our money is going toward the release of enslaved people in South Asia, and

families are being restored, they have freedom and hope for their future, for their children and grandchildren.

Out of the \$700,000 raised for the Freedom Fund, Grace Chapel has sent \$332,500, which has allowed 143 families (705 people) to be set free, relocated, and start small businesses. Many more to come. And as wonderful as all that is, it still doesn't solve the motive issue. At least not completely.

**2 Corinthians 9:15**, "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!"

Jesus Christ wasn't just born. He was given. This is what we celebrate at Christmas.

**John 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son..."

Isaiah 9:6, "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given..."

**Romans 8:32**, "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?"

The Father gave us His Son. The Son gave us His life, and it changed everything. You and I are made in the image of God. Made to live in alignment with God's ways. There will never be anyone more generous than God. When you're generous, you're molded more into the image of Jesus, and you give the world a picture of who God is, and what He's like.

But decide. How is God wanting to grow you in generosity?

**Acts 20:35**, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Blessed! Happy! Joyful! Phil 4, Paul says there is a "harvest of blessing" or literally a harvest of JOY for those who are generous.

**2 Corinthians 9:8**, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

God is not short on resources. He's given us the greatest gift we could ever be given.

*"Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."*

- Isaac Watts, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*

When we grow in joy, we grow in generosity. When we grow in generosity, we grow in joy.