

## Part 5: Why We Give

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Are you generous with your money?

Now that's kind of a trick question because what I really want you to notice is how you respond to being asked about your money. Being asked about your money isn't normally how we like to start a conversation. When we realize the sermon is about money our defenses go up. We sense a guilt trip in our future.

We are asked for money all the time. And it's not always clear what the right thing is to do. Are you supposed to give to every mission trip fundraising letter you get? What about every Go-Fund-Me page for unexpected medical expenses? What about the friends who never ask for money but just give you all the details about how they can't pay their bills?

In every instance it's like there's a battle inside of us between not wanting to be taken advantage of and not wanting to feel guilt for not giving - between protecting ourselves financially and protecting ourselves emotionally.

And so we rationalize why we shouldn't give and if that fails we rationalize what the smallest amount is we can give without feeling stingy. One way or another, we're glad when it's over. But that only lasts until the next fundraising letter, the next cardboard sign, or the next sermon. Then it starts all over again.

But can you imagine a world where - instead of suspicion or guilt - you felt joy when you heard about an opportunity to give? Wouldn't that be freeing?

Now we all know that money is the means of getting or keeping things that matter to us, and so giving it away doesn't come easy. We need a "why" behind our giving because to say "yes" to something means we have to say "no" to something we want. It means saying "no" to something on our shopping list - "no" to that subscription we feel we can't live without - "no" to more security in a savings account or retirement. So what we want to talk about today is what we are saying "yes" to. We are commanded to give in Scripture - we're to give to the poor, to our brothers and sisters in need, and to the advance of the gospel. But what is it that motivates a Christian to give that turns the negative experience of guilt and uncertainty into a positive experience of joyful devotion and obedience?

And we are in a series right now that is walking through the different parts of our Sunday service and helping us to understand why we do what we do. Every Sunday in our service we have a section titled "We Respond with Generosity." What makes generosity so essential to our devotion that it's a part of our service every week?

And I love the practicality of this topic. We know phrases like "talk is cheap" and "put your money where your mouth is." We say these things because we know that how we use our money says more about our hearts than our words do. So we're not after your money today, but we are after your joy.

And our main point today is this: **[Slide]** We disadvantage ourselves for the sake of others in response to Jesus.

Now that word “disadvantage” might be off-putting - and I realize that. And you’ll understand why I’m using the word “disadvantage” a little later on, but for now I want you to keep this idea in front of you: “We disadvantage ourselves for the sake of others in response to Jesus.” You see, a heart that responds to Jesus is a heart that earnestly gives. Generosity is actually evidence that the gospel is transforming you.

And we’re going to look at this in two points: **[Slide]**

We Give Because:

1. Generosity is a Fruit of Grace
2. Generosity is Motivated by Gain

And so our passage is in 2 Corinthians. And the backstory is that Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were suffering because of a famine. And so Paul started raising money from churches in other regions to send back to Jerusalem. And the church in Corinth was one of the ones that eagerly volunteered to give. But they actually ended up in a conflict with Paul and so they didn’t set aside the money they’d promised to give. So now we’re dropping into the middle of the book where after reconciling with the Corinthians, Paul is once again urging them to give generously to the relief of the saints in Jerusalem.

So let’s look at the 1st point: **[Slide]** Generosity is a Fruit of Grace.

### **1. Generosity is a Fruit of Grace**

Let’s start by reading 8:1-7: **[Slide]**

So the first thing that Paul does is present the Macedonian church as an example of generosity. But do you see how he starts with God? The Macedonian example is really impressive but everything they did had its source in “the grace of God that was given to them.” Grace is actually a central theme in our passage today. More than half of the times that Paul uses the word “grace” in 2 Corinthians are found in these two chapters. So what’s the connection between grace and generosity?

Well what we’ll see is that grace is the basis of joy, love, and trust and all three of these produce generosity. It would be like if grace was a tree and joy, love, and trust were all branches and generosity would be the fruit on those branches. Grace is the basis for all of it and yet each of these branches uniquely produce the fruit of generosity.

So let’s start with the grace of joy. **[Slide]**

#### *The Grace of Joy*

Let’s reread verse 2: **[Slide]**

So God’s grace came to them in the midst of a test. You see God’s grace hadn’t removed severe afflictions and poverty, but rather had supplied an abundance of joy inside of their afflictions and poverty - so that when they heard of the Jerusalem church’s great need, somehow, the deficit caused by their poverty when combined with their abundance of joy produced an overflow – a wealth of generosity. Affliction was no match for the grace of joy.

And we see this throughout 2 Corinthians. Paul uses the word “affliction” several times. Paul has affliction, his companions have affliction, the Macedonians have affliction - and so surprisingly throughout the book, the grace of joy comes in the midst of affliction rather than removing affliction.

Doesn't that seem backwards? Wouldn't we expect that if God was going to show us grace then our problems would go away? Don't we just assume that we won't be happy until our suffering stops? I'll be happy when I feel well again - or when I have that better job – or when finances aren't so tight - or when that relationship is restored. Then I can have joy.

But in 2 Corinthians, the triumph over affliction is that you are joyful in the affliction. And this abundant, overflowing joy is a joy that gives.

And what does this look like? Well we'll come back to this later but first we're going to see the next branch on this tree of grace and it is the Grace of Love. [Slide]

### *The Grace of Love*

Let's read verse 8: [Slide]

So Paul wants to inspire the Corinthians to be like the Macedonians because he wants them to demonstrate the grace of genuine love.

Now we all know the verse "the love of money is the root of all evil." And in this passage you also see love and money. But do you see the contrast? Here it is actually through the use of money that the Macedonians prove their love. So love of money is turned on its head and instead you see money as the means of loving others. Love of money uses people. Love of people uses money.

And so the Macedonian example tests our hearts. What do we really love?

But even though the Macedonian's example is challenging, they're actually just a small picture of an even more costly love. Let's read verse 9: [Slide]

This is one of the most precious gospel summary statements in the Bible. "For your sake he became poor."

We've talked about grace already – but here Paul defines grace. Here is the grace that is the basis for every other experience of grace. For your sake he became poor.

Paul is using a rich vs. poor metaphor but what does he mean? Well "poor" refers to Jesus' incarnation – the eternal Son of God entering humanity in the person of Jesus.

The eternal Son had always been with the Father – loved by the Father – in perfect intimacy with him. He was equal with the Father, glorious and radiant and worshiped by angels. And he set all of this divine glory aside when he took on flesh and became poor.

There's a line in a song we sing that says "He the theme of heaven's praises, robed in frail humanity." This is what it is talking about. In his poverty, he became vulnerable. What he willingly gave up in glory was something all the money in the world couldn't buy. Before the incarnation he never had to experience feeling tired, thirsty, or hungry. But when he became poor, the one who could not be tempted was tempted in every way. The one who could never sin bore our sin. The one who could never die experienced death.

The gap between what Jesus gave up and what he endured is infinite. Genuine love was Jesus cosmically disadvantaging himself for us.

And Paul's point throughout 2 Corinthians is that this is what genuine ministry is. You see false apostles had deceived the people claiming that Paul's ministry was unimpressive and flawed because of Paul's humility and suffering. Surely a true apostle would have been more impressive and wouldn't have

experienced Paul's afflictions. But Paul throughout the letter is making the point that authentic ministry is disadvantaging yourself for the sake of others because that's what Jesus did for us.

So wherever you incur a cost to help someone know and follow Jesus – you are doing authentic ministry. You are reflecting Christ's genuine love.

For Christ to love us meant he incurred an infinite cost. And so because he has loved us in this way, we incur a cost in order to genuinely love others. He gave up far more than we could ever give. So Christ's grace towards us - his genuine love for us - produces the fruit of generosity in us.

So often we think of suffering and weakness as obstacles to ministry. If my health wasn't so bad, if I wasn't so lonely, if only I wasn't in the midst of this massive project at work or if only I wasn't still in college – then I would serve Jesus.

But God doesn't primarily get glory in the big things we can do for him when we feel strong and self-sufficient. He gets glory when inside of whatever circumstances he has ordained we treasure Christ more than health, more than success, more than significance and instead we love those around us in the grace he supplies.

It's out of that cherishing of him that true ministry happens – that we give ourselves in love to others – spending and being spent - no matter how weak or how small or how painful.

So we need to assess our hearts and ask “do we love money or do we love people with our money?” Are we using our stage of life or the uncertainty of the future to excuse a lack of love? Or are we humbly seeking to disadvantage ourselves for the sake of loving others?

The next branch we see on the tree of grace is **[Slide]** the grace of trust.

### *The Grace of Trust*

Notice the word “earnest” in our passage. You see it multiple times throughout the chapter. In fact, in 2 Corinthians almost all instances of this word are here in chapter 8. And in chapter 7, right before this section, Paul connected earnestness with repentance. Let's read 7:10-11: **[Slide]**

Remember that the Corinthian church had been in a conflict with Paul. So Paul had written a tearful letter to them warning them to repent. And to Paul's great relief the church actually responded to his letter with godly grief. They were convicted of their sin and repented – they changed direction. And so godly grief had produced repentance, but it also says that it had produced earnestness.

Now what does it mean to be earnest?

Well when you make an offer on a house you're expressing a conviction “I want that house.” But when you put down earnest money on a house you're demonstrating the character of your conviction “I'm willing to lose something to get that house.” It proves you're serious.

And the location of our passage coming right after chapter 7 is significant. It's only after Paul addresses their repentance in chapter 7 that he moves on to urging their generosity in chapter 8. Paul is making his appeal to a repentant church because our generosity is downstream of receiving grace.

And we see this repeatedly through the Bible that earnest generosity flows out of receiving grace:

- In Exodus after the Israelites received grace for the incident with the golden calf, they gave generously to the work on the tabernacle.

- In 2 Chronicles after the people received grace for the wicked rule of King Ahaz, they gave generously to support King Hezekiah's reforms.
- In Nehemiah after the exiles received grace in returning to Jerusalem, they gave abundantly to the work of rebuilding the city.
- In Luke after the tax collector Zacchaeus received grace by being called by Jesus, he generously gave half of his goods to the poor.
- And in Acts after the crowd that had called for Jesus' execution received the grace of salvation, they sold their possessions and generously distributed to their brothers and sisters in need.

And so likewise everyone is earnest in this passage. There is a sincere and intense conviction behind all of the giving that is happening. And what is that conviction? They trust God. If they've experienced God's grace in salvation, then they can trust his grace to provide what they need tomorrow. The grip they have on their possessions is loosened because they don't have to trust in themselves anymore. And this trust leads to something Paul calls "fairness."

Let's read 8:10-15: [Slide]

So Paul showed them these incredible examples of generosity in the Macedonians and in Christ himself. And the Corinthians might have been feeling a little nervous because they were probably fairly well-to-do. They lived in a pretty prosperous city. They had an "abundance". Like many of us they probably had a lot to lose.

But Paul isn't asking them to be radical for radical's sake. He tells them to give according to what they have so they can meet their brothers' needs. And this is what he calls "fairness."

So what does he mean by "fairness"? Is Paul imposing a system of wealth redistribution for the sake of equality? Well Paul actually explains what he means by using a quotation from Exodus (Exodus 16:18) about gathering manna in the wilderness. And again he connects it to trusting God. You see God miraculously provided the Israelites with food every day in the wilderness. And he did this in order to test them. Would they trust him to provide, or would they rely on themselves and disobey? Many Israelites didn't trust God to provide what they needed tomorrow so they gathered extra today – just to be safe. But anything they saved up for tomorrow spoiled.

It seems like almost every day our kids come to Patty at meal time and inform her that they are hungry. She's working in the kitchen. Food is on the counter. But for whatever reason it's like they're nervous that mom might forget that there's this little thing in the middle of the day called "lunch." Imagine your kid is so untrusting of you that you find old plates of food hidden in their room. That would be irrational and kind of gross.

Well that's exactly what the Israelites were doing. And their lack of trust in God's provision and their self-reliance only brought them trouble.

Instead, in God's providence, some were able to gather more and some were able to gather less but in the end the whole community had exactly enough for everyone.

You see this conviction of who God is, his grace towards you, and his trustworthiness that he'll provide is what gives us the freedom to let go of our grasp on money. Remember the Macedonians gave themselves "first to the Lord, and then by the will of God to us." First and foremost they entrusted themselves to Jesus – they trusted him. We submit ourselves to God and his way instead of trusting in ourselves and the empty promises of more manna now.

So “fairness” doesn’t mean an imposed redistribution of wealth. Instead it means that your abundance is meant to help you meet the needs of others instead of storing up excess for yourself. Paul’s point is that there’s nothing to gain by holding on to more than you need while your brother is in need. You will trouble your own house. And you’ll miss out on the joy of knowing that there’s no lack amongst your brothers and sisters.

So when we see the Macedonians’ joy, Christ’s poverty, and the promise of provision, we see at least that our giving should be sacrificial. There should be things that we go without in order to be generous. We should have a lifestyle of living simply not for minimalism’s sake but for Christ’s sake – that our resources could flow to others’ needs, to gospel work, and to evangelizing the nations. Some have called this a “war-time” or “missions-minded” lifestyle.

So is how you use all of your money a result of grace? Can you connect everything in your budget to loving God and others? Are there things that you are willingly doing-without for the sake of love? Or is there a greater joy to be had in how you spend your money?

In the rest of chapter 8 Paul talks about the integrity of his partners and the collection that they are overseeing. He wants to clear away any suspicion that he’s trying to use the collection as a means of personal gain. Far from trying to defraud them he’s trying to help them. Rather than trying to get gain for himself he’s after gain for them. And this leads us to our second point today: **[Slide]** We give because Generosity is Motivated by Gain.

Where in our first point we looked back at everything God has supplied, now we’re going to look forward to what we gain when we give.

## **2. Generosity is Motivated by Gain**

Let’s read 9:1-5: **[Slide]**

So the Corinthians have yet to follow through on their promise to give. And Paul’s assuming that they will give, but first he reminds them that it would be ridiculous to not willingly give. It wouldn’t make sense for them to give under compulsion. So before he talks about all they have to gain, he shows them what they have to lose.

You see what’s at stake is Paul and his associates’ reputation and the Corinthians’ own reputation. If the Macedonians come and realize that the Corinthians that had inspired them were a fraud, then everybody’s going to be disappointed and humiliated. Then the Corinthians will give – but it won’t be a willing gift – it’ll be an exaction – it will be giving out of guilt.

You see we hate giving out of guilt. When the cashier suddenly asks you if you “want to donate today” to a children’s hospital you’re caught off guard. We talked before about the struggle between excuses not to give or just giving so you don’t seem stingy. But there’s a difference between giving out of guilt and giving out of grace.

Relief from guilt doesn’t come from opening your pocketbook under compulsion or convincing yourself you can keep it closed. It comes from knowing you’ve received the grace of God at the cross so that when you do give it’s a joyful response to grace.

In a couple verses he says to give – not reluctantly - but as you’ve decided in your heart.

Once again, we see how Paul is not trying to impose equality between everyone's finances. In order for it to be Christian, it has to be voluntary – it's up to the giver to decide in his heart and cheerfully give of his own accord.

And it's important to think about that phrase "decided in your heart" because it may not be the way you've thought about your giving.

Often in the church you hear about something called "tithing" and this might even be the principal you've used to guide your own giving. The word "tithe" just means "a tenth" and by tithing we usually mean giving 10% of your income to the church.

Now giving tithes was one of the things commanded in the Old Testament Law. But when you add up all the giving that the Israelites were commanded to do, it equated to something more like 20% of their income – not 10%. So already if the Israelites are the standard then most of us aren't even doing that. Then you come to the New Testament and there are no commands to give 10%.

You see God is more concerned with what we love than the amount we give. But what we give can give us some insight into what we love. If we love possessions and seek security in money then we will give sparingly. But if we are amazed by God's love and grace towards us in Jesus then we will give bountifully.

So what do we do with tithing? Well first, ask yourself if you've looked to a percentage instead of looking to Jesus for what to give. Perhaps you've put yourself under law instead of rejoicing in grace. Perhaps rejoicing in grace means that you have to take a season of giving less than 10% in order to provide for the basic needs of your family. There is no shame in that. But more often, rejoicing in grace probably looks like cheerful giving in greater amounts. Shouldn't we who are privileged to know Jesus and his Spirit in such intimate ways – shouldn't we give more than those who were under the old covenant?

And so in our Sunday services we've always used the phrase "tithes and offerings." But now we're just going to call it an "offering." Each one must give as he has decided in his heart – not according to the Law of Moses and not as an exaction but according to the effect of grace on your heart. And when the affections of your heart are warmed to Jesus, what you decide to give will never be stingy.

So it's the Corinthians' own joy that's at stake. If they only give because they have to, then they're wasting something – they're going to miss out.

So after showing them what they could lose, Paul wants to show them all they have to gain.

Let's read 9:6: **[Slide]**

Did you see the motivation he gives? He's asking "Do you want a bountiful harvest? Do you want a bountiful reward? Then sow bountifully."

And this doesn't sound much different from a health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. And it's true - God wants us to be motivated by blessing, by reward, by gain. But here's what sets the true gospel apart: what are we harvesting? What do we gain?

And we're going to look at this in 3 ways: **[Slide]**

- The Love of God
- The Harvest of Righteousness
- The Glory of God



## *The Love of God*

So first we'll see the love of God. Let's read verse 7: [Slide]

So God loves a cheerful giver. Now maybe you're asking yourself, "Does this mean that God loves me based on what I do?" Well the answer is "no" and "yes".

Remember we read before that though Jesus was rich for our sake he became poor so that we by his poverty might become rich. Well we looked at what it meant for Jesus to become poor but what does it mean that we become rich?

The word "grace" has sometimes been turned into an acronym for "God's Riches At Christ's Expense." Because Jesus became poor for you, every time you suffer – Jesus sympathizes with your weakness. Every time you are tempted – Jesus has already endured in your place. Every time you sin – Jesus has already been punished in your place. For our sake he made him to be sin – for your sake he became poor.

Jesus didn't just restore us back to a state of being like Adam and Eve in the garden with potential to obey or to fail. But instead Jesus took our sin and gave us his righteousness so we don't stand before God with potential but with Christ. God accepts us with Christ's sacrifice and Christ's record. As part of Christ's family you are very wealthy indeed. Jesus' exclusive rights and enjoyment of the Father have been extended to you.

Now, probably some of you here today aren't disciples of Jesus and are just trying to understand what Jesus is all about. And others of you might call yourself Christians but you might think Christianity is all about doing good things, just loving people, being spiritual, or being a responsible part of our community. You might even think that there's truth in all religions and many paths to God. But we want you to know that this is the gospel message that you must believe to be saved. If you think being a good person, coming to church, giving lots of money, or you doing anything else makes you worthy of God's love then you don't understand your greatest problem. Our sin has separated us from a good and holy God. Our sin is so offensive that it has made us deserving of a loving God's wrath. And no amount of "doing the right thing" and no amount of money can buy you what Jesus freely offers you. God's love is a giving love. God so loved the world that he gave (John 3:16). Christ loved us and gave himself up for us (Eph. 5:2; see also 2 Thess. 2:16). We get grace through Jesus making himself weak and vulnerable for our sake. He experienced your poverty so you - by simply receiving this gift - could experience his riches. This is the Jesus that you must receive in order to be saved.

So can we earn God's love through our works? No. But, as those who have experienced his grace, can our works increase his love for us? Well in a sense, yes.

There probably hasn't been a greater joy in parenting than when one of our children has imitated our devotion to Jesus. I remember Nehemiah as a 2-year-old listening to worship music. He was rocking back and forth and raised his hand in worship as if it was just the natural thing to do. Or how excited the kids have gotten to give to the church or put something in the missionary jar. Or when all on their own they start singing a hymn together as we're driving in the van. My kids doing these things don't create my love for them – I already love them. But when they bear the family resemblance of devotion to Jesus, it just enhances my love for them. I am so proud of them.

How does it make you feel to know that that's how your Heavenly Father feels about you? As his grace produces love and cheerful generosity you have the assurance that your Father loves you. Isn't that



gain? Doesn't your Father's pleasure in you as you bear the family resemblance of Christ - doesn't that make you want to sow bountifully?

So this is where we start to understand that word "disadvantage." You see, yes, we disadvantage ourselves for the sake of others. Yes, there is a cost to us. But hopefully what you're seeing is that generosity is actually to your advantage. Generosity is costly because we're giving up something there's a loss of feeling in control that we have the means to protect ourselves or get for ourselves what we want. But we are trading worldly treasure for heavenly treasure. If your heart is set on your Father in heaven then in the midst of making yourself weak for the sake of others, Christ's power is on display. It's on display because we love him more than health, we love him more than wealth, we love him more than the security and pleasure found in prosperity so that we can have none of these things and yet we are still full. Whatever our financial means – we are rich in Christ. We have something to give away because in Christ we are freed from the love of the world and instead of our eye never being satisfied we have no lack.

And this leads us to our next motivation: **[Slide]** The Harvest of Righteousness.

### *The Harvest of Righteousness*

Let's read verses 8-11: **[Slide]**

So Paul uses a lot of phrases that get at the same point. He talks about all grace abounding, having all sufficiency, and being enriched in every way.

The word "rich" in 2 Corinthians normally refers to spiritual riches. And yet on top of this, he physically provides us with so much. And Paul quotes from Psalm 112 to illustrate this. Let's read verse 9 again: **[Slide]**

In Psalm 112 it talks about how the faithful man is generous and isn't afraid of loss because God cares for him. His provision for others actually reflects God's provision for him. When it says "his righteousness endures forever" it's referring to the faithful man. But this same phrase is also used in the previous Psalm – Psalm 111 – and there the same phrase "his righteousness endures forever" actually refers to God. You see the faithful man's righteousness endures forever because God's righteousness endures forever and God is supplying everything we need for every righteous, Christ-like deed. So God will continually meet our needs and enable us to help others in need so that we grow in acts of righteousness.

And so verse 6 talked about reaping bountifully. But what are we harvesting? It's righteousness. The moment you believe you have become the righteousness of God in Christ as a gift. And now Christ in us is transforming us to become more and more like him so that more and more what we do is righteous – he's increasing the harvest of our righteousness.

And this leads into the third motivation of gain: **[Slide]** The Glory of God.

### *The Glory of God*

Let's read verses 11-15: **[Slide]**

So the ultimate aim of generosity is thanksgiving to God – and this brings glory to God.

But what is glory? Well you see God is holy and perfect in all that he is and yet he is invisible. So his glory is the reality of who he is going public – it's his invisible majesty breaking into our world so that his worth and value are displayed. So when we make much of Jesus in giving thanks to him, we glorify him.

And so how is God going to get glory through the Corinthians' gift? Well as the believers in Jerusalem see the generosity of the Corinthians, they're going to respond with thanksgiving to God. The Corinthians' generosity is a live confession of the gospel of Christ.

When we recite the apostle's creed we're making a confession of the gospel of Christ. When someone shares a confession of faith before baptism they are making a confession of the gospel of Christ. But do you see how obeying Jesus and imitating Jesus in costly generosity - against all of our flesh and because we trust him - we are also making a confession of the gospel of Christ. The Corinthians' confession of Christ is being lived out - and the transforming power of the gospel is on display in their submission to him.

And so the Corinthians' generosity isn't just a response of their own hearts, but it is also the occasion for others to glorify God. The Corinthians have received God's grace, and now their generosity is a grace to the Jerusalem church. So saints are praising God for how he has met their own needs through the Corinthians in this act of grace.

And this response of thanksgiving changes how we go about the offering portion of our service. Several months ago I was thinking about how we do the offering on Sundays, and I wanted to suggest some changes for practical reasons. Since covid we haven't passed around a bucket, and even before covid most people were giving online. And no one ever really utilizes the offering time so it seems more like a transition than a part of our worship. I've also always admired churches that just have an offering box somewhere in the lobby and never ask for money - it helps to communicate that we're not after your money and we trust God to provide for the church.

But in studying this passage my mind has been changed. And instead of wanting to minimize the offering, the elders want to feature it in our service. There's something better than convincing you we're not after your money and that is responding to the gospel. There's something better than convincing you we trust God to take care of our budget and that is giving thanks to God. That's why generosity belongs in our service.

So after the Scripture reading in the first part of the service, we are now going to draw your attention to the offering like Jonny did this morning. Just as we respond to the reading with "Thanks be to God" we're also going to give thanks by responding in generosity. Whether you walk back and put something in the new offering boxes by the doors, or if you gave online, we want to remember as we sing that third song how Jesus though he was rich became poor for us. We want to thank God for his inexpressible gift in Christ and for the privilege of reflecting his costly love in the giving of our offering.

So you remember that this passage is all about grace. It is a gracious thing to experience all that we gain when we give. Generosity is not only the fruit of grace but also - as it turns out - more grace is the motivation for generosity. What do we have that we have not received? Everything comes to us as a gift.

Paul himself gives thanks in the last verse when he can't contain his own thanksgiving any more and bursts out "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"

God's inexpressible gift to us is Christ. Genuine ministry - genuine love - is grace on display in making ourselves weak or disadvantaged for the sake of others - all in reflection of Christ and enabled by Christ for the glory of Christ.

### *Closing*

In closing, I know personally that just like the Corinthians it's easier for me to get inspired in a moment than it is to really live this out.

I like to think I'm a generous person – but in reality most of my generosity has been out of the excess I've had. It hasn't been often that I've truly disadvantaged myself for the sake of others.

But there have been a few times where I've just been really aware of God's sustaining grace as I've tried to be generous. For instance, one time Patty and I both had an idea – we were in the middle of a conversation about a need in the church and suddenly we looked at each other and had the same thought at the same time. But even after we made the decision to help with the need, I still wrestled with it for weeks. Off and on I felt excited and then weak – I was anxious and kept thinking of how it might hurt in the future if we followed through with it – I wanted to protect myself. I had to pray and read and keep listening to sermons and reminding myself of Christ's worth and the privilege of any infinitely small imitation of him.

And there's still days where I'll think of decisions like that and I'm tempted to feel like we gave something up, but I have to remind myself of all we have gained.

Have you heard the story of the man whose carriage breaks down on his way to collect a million dollar inheritance. He sulks all the way there going "My carriage is broken, my carriage is broken." Look at what we have inherited in Christ – we only have a few miles to go. How small is this inconvenience?

No matter how generous we've ever been, we have never lacked. But the greatest gain we experience is just knowing his grace and care and love in all of it. Just letting go is the hardest part – but I'm so grateful when it's gone! You just praise God for his faithfulness that the world is losing its grip on you – that Jesus really is better than money – and what a privilege it is that we get to love people this way.

Aren't you grateful that his grace gives you something better than worldly security? Isn't it better to experience his intimate fellowship in clearer ways? Aren't you grateful that your Heavenly Father is pleased even with your clumsy attempts to glorify him? What a joy when you get to taste his costly sacrifice glimpsing his love in greater ways and knowing he's graciously receiving your fumbling efforts saying "Well done. I am so very pleased."

Don't be radical for radical's sake - Paul says "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Spend and be spent because he loves you. Give because you want to love others with that same love. Let go of worldly security and possessions and pleasures and cherish Christ so that whatever you decide to give you can say "I don't need any of it – if I only have Christ I have no lack!"

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.