



Joy of Generosity – Part 2

Seeking to Excel in the Grace of Giving

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Well, I had a friend who recently bought a used car, new to him and he got a good price on it, it looked good, paint was good. You know, tires were good and he had the engine checked out. The engine was good. It was just a good deal. He was very happy that everything was going well. Everything was great except for the transmission, which he found out was shot because he was about to go on a long road trip and he thought I should take it to the mechanic for a once-over. And sure enough, the mechanic said this transmission is not going to last maybe for the next ten miles. This is almost non-operational. Now had he told me that and I responded with, well you know what? No big deal. I mean, 90% of the car is great. This car is great. It's almost perfectly excellent. I mean, he would have responded like I'm dumb because it doesn't matter if everything's great, it doesn't matter if the engine's good, if the tires are good, if the suspension's great. If the transmission is not working, that's a catastrophic problem and you'd be dumb to put your family in the car to go on a road trip. So, of course, my friend had to give immediate and costly attention, very costly attention, to the transmission before he put his family in that car and took it on the road trip.

And that is a way in which we should view the Christian life. Paul is certainly trying to get the Corinthians in Second Corinthians to view their Christian life that way, because as he puts them through the ten-point inspection, they did great on everything but one thing. And the one thing he's concerned about needs to be addressed. And it's not ancillary, it's not, you know, secondary, it is not tertiary, it's not just some, you know, varsity trait that you ought to work on. He says this is essential. And I got to tell you even just thinking of it that way, the way he presents it here in Second Corinthians 8 verses 6 through 9, I am 100% convinced we don't normally think of it this way.

I mean you know the theme we started last week, a seven-week series in Second Corinthians Chapter 8 and 9 on generosity. And most of us would think, well, that's a good thing to be generous. And as I started last week, we thought, you know, it's good if we all plan to be generous. We want to be generous. But, you know, it just can't happen now. We have to wait and can't afford it now or whatever the reason we're not generous, it's easy for us to make rationalizations for not being that way. But Paul says something so significant here in these four verses that he says basically there's a real problem here. I mean, you're not going to make it down the road in the Christian life without this. It's too central.

Now, I know we have a hard time connecting the dots. But that's exactly what Paul does in these four verses. And we're going to pick up where we left off last week after we know the context is a special giving project in Jerusalem. Paul's telling these Corinthians, you know, you guys are wealthy, pretty wealthy. You're a lot wealthier than the Christians up in Macedonia. And, you know, those Christians in Macedonia and Philippi and Thessalonica, Berea, they gave sacrificially and they didn't even really have much to give, but they went beyond their reasonable, you know, capacity to give to these saints in Jerusalem because of the famine out there and, you know, now it's your turn. And it's not news to them because

Paul had already interacted with them on this very topic and we learned from the context it had been over a year. I mean, it had been a year since this had been discussed and they had responded positively. Yeah, we want to help. And now in Second Corinthians Chapter 8 verse 6, take a look at this with me, he's going to say, okay, now we're going to give you a chance to do the thing that you intended to do.

So let's read these verses and see why it's something so critical that it cannot be overlooked. And if we are not generous like we think we ought to be we need some serious and immediate attention to this part of our Christian life. In Second Corinthians Chapter 8 verses 6 through 9, I'll read it from the English Standard Version, and here's what it says, "Accordingly." Right? That's, of course, tying together what we've just heard. They were begging us up there in that not well-to-do section of Greece. They were begging us to get involved in this giving project. And he says, "Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace." Now there it is again. We've seen this already and I've told you this is ten uses of the Greek word "grace," translated "Charis," translated variously but mostly, usually "grace" and one time "favor" in the previous passage. But the word "grace" here is used ten times in two chapters, one of the most dense populations of this word. And if you have some other translation it might even say as it relates to grace, it's tied to the concept of giving, but this becomes the heading for it.

Look at the next verse. "But as you excel in everything," we've given you the inspection, "in faith, in speech." I mean, the repentance was good in the previous chapter. Your knowledge is growing. Your sincerity is in place. And then he has this interesting phrase, "in our love for you," more on that in a second, "see that you excel in this act of grace also." Some translations would say grace of giving. Now "of giving" is put there just to help us know what the context is. But the word is not there. This word is just grace, because grace becomes a stand-in word for this concept of giving and generosity in the Christian life. By the way, that list like you excel "in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you." Do you see a footnote after the word "you" in your English Standard Version text? Or if you're in another translation, maybe based on Byzantine text manuscripts, it might say "your love for us," which seems to make more sense, which is one of the ways and one of the reasons we know that the harder reading in textual criticism is always preferred because there tended to be after some centuries a little tweaking if it seemed like I don't quite know what this is saying. Because it's hard for us to say, hey, you're excelling in all these things and you're excelling in our love for you. Paul says, me and Titus love you, and you're excelling and our love for you. Well, that doesn't make much sense, right? At least on the surface and so there was a variant reading that crept into some manuscripts. And I get it. I understand why it's there. But why this is in the text of the English Standard Version probably it was because it is probably what was written and what he is saying in this, though it's harder to understand than your love for us is increased, right? He's trying to say our love for you has increased because of you. Right?

Now we know the context in the last chapter was looking at your repentance in Second Corinthians Chapter 7. I mean, you responded to our letter. You've done well. Even your earnestness in wanting to give, all of this is good. We respect you and honor you more than



ever before, and that's all based on your progress. We are really impressed with this vehicle, this car. There's just one problem. This particular act of grace, your generosity needs to be completed. There needs to be something done about your interests and sincerity in wanting to help. And that lack seems like, okay, is that really a big deal? I mean, can't you be a good Christian, study the Bible, pray? Your faith is deep. Your knowledge is good. Your earnestness and sincerity are great. People love you because you're a good Christian. But you don't give. You're not generous. Is that really going to just foil this entire project? Yes. Next verse, "I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others," look at how those Macedonians were giving, "that your love also is genuine."

Now, if I start talking about love in the Christian life, I hope you know how central that is. You're a Sunday school grad. You know this, right? You've read First Corinthians Chapter 13, "faith, hope, and love ... but the greatest of these is love." That's at the top. But Jesus tries to summarize for the people asking what's the greatest commandment. The greatest commandment is that you love "God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength." You "love your neighbor as yourself." Love is the embodiment, as Paul put it, of all of the law, all the 400+ laws of the Old Testament, it all comes down to this. If you want to summarize it, synthesize it, it is you love God and you love people. And as Paul said in First Corinthians Chapter 13, if you do everything right, "but you have not love, I gain nothing."

So whatever we're going to get to in terms of generosity, the catalyst of it, the foundation for it is love. Not to mention that the word that's so important theologically that we'll try to unpack again this morning, is the word "grace" is a stand-in for the act of generosity. Love is the predicate. Love is the motive. Love is the underlying thing. And then grace needs to be understood in its theological context about, well that also is what's driving this. As a matter of fact, it's a stand-in for the actual act. But those are the things I need to be thinking of if I'm going to think about doing what God has called us to do as Christians. The outflowing or, I don't know, pardon me, the connection to the illustration, the transmission, if the engine is in place, it needs to be transmitted to the wheels and where the rubber meets the road, literally. Right? There needs to be propulsion here because the transmission is making it happen. And it's a real story, the guy whose transmission and car and all that. But the point is this, you can't really say everything's working right in the Christian life if you are not turning love into the grace of giving. It has to happen.

Why? Well, because our leader, Second Corinthians 8 verse 9, "For you know the grace," the giving, the favor, that kind of overflowing thing called grace, "of our Lord Jesus Christ," you know, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich," and I guess in every way you could say that from Daniel Chapter 7, the Son of Man, all dominion, all power, all riches, all glory, everyone should bow to the great King of kings, the one like a Son of Man, and Jesus loved that label to call himself the Son of Man from Daniel Chapter 7. All that's true, rich in every way, but certainly rich in terms of just existing in the glory as John Chapter 17 said as he prayed before the incarnation. Jesus had everything. Everything was going great, right?



But because "he was rich, yet for your sake," there was a need, "he became poor." Which is not just the incarnation, although, you know, to go from being the King of kings of all the angelic beings and then to have to cut teeth through your, you know, cut molars through your gums as a baby and slobber all over the place, that is becoming poor. But it's worse than that. He became, "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." You want to talk about becoming poor? You lost all. Not just privilege and power. You lost comfort and convenience and safety. Right? Now you're in a place where you're being pummeled by the fist of strong Roman soldiers, being stripped naked, being whipped on your back, having nails through your hands and feet, being hoisted up so that everyone could see your naked body hanging on a cross. You became poor.

Now why? Well, "so," last line, "that you by his poverty might become rich." The whole point of salvation was that he was willing to sacrifice for your benefit. He was willing to sacrifice for your benefit. We call that grace. And the whole point is he says you need to be that. But you have to exercise grace. Now, the expression of grace on the table is you should pony up some shekels to give them to the Jerusalem saints. Right? Is this tertiary? Is this secondary? Is this ancillary? Is this varsity Christianity? The answer is no. It is central. Okay.

I want to start in Second Corinthians 8 verse 7. It starts with a contrastive, adversative, word that is a conjunction that seems like it's saying, well this, but then this. And oftentimes it stands between two opposites. This is not what's happening here in Second Corinthians 8 verse 6. Sometimes these aversive conjunctions aren't just showing like this is this, you know, loud and quiet or hot and cold, but it is a transitionary conjunction. And this Greek word, "Alla" is trying to say this. I've talked about the act of giving in Second Corinthians 8 verse 6. I'm going to send Titus. He's going to pass the bag. He's going to actually do it when he brings this letter and you read it in the church and he's sitting in the front row, the next thing he's going to do is pull out a bag, and he's going to walk around and make the collection that you guys said you were so ready to do. Now we're going to complete it, and we're going to have him bring that to me, and I'm going to take that to Jerusalem because they're in great need there in the famine.

So we're about to act. But then he says now, let's go beneath that. This great little conjunction is trying to show, okay I want to go to motive. And that's really where we're going in Second Corinthians 8 verses 7 and 8. And so before we get back to Second Corinthians 8 verse 6, I want to go to motive because we dealt with this just briefly last week. And as we try to give you the quick overview of giving in both Old and New Testaments between mandatory percentage giving and mandatory non-percentage giving and then voluntary giving non-specified amounts. And then we looked at the New Testament and we said okay there are mandatory non-specified amounts and then there are voluntary non-specified amounts.

And so we learned about all of that and we said one thing based on the first five verses and that is that I quoted Philip Brooks I think and I said hey, you know, duty makes us do things well, right? We know we have to do stuff but it's love that makes us do things beautifully. And that's a flowery way to say it. But clearly Paul is moving toward motive and he's trying to shift not to, as he says in Second Corinthians 8 verse 8, a command. Now, I told you it was



interesting. We didn't spend much time explaining it, but I hope you didn't stumble over the fact that when we read Romans Chapter 15 he's talking about the same exact problem in Jerusalem. But he doesn't say I'm not going to command you this. He says, I am commanding you to do this. You Romans who are doing well financially, you all need to be giving to the famine relief in Jerusalem. You owe it to them.

Now he's not looking for that here. That's why the focus is not on stewardship so far in this passage. It's about moving into I want you to do this because you're showing the sincerity of your love for these people. And love strikes at the heart of the Christian faith. That's what it's all about. Look at Christ. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son." Christ loved the people, John Chapter 15 that he said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." So it's about that, and he wants them to get there. It's not about the edge of duty and stewardship. It's about really connecting with the core of the Christian life.

So I want to start here with the motive part. And there are two words, at the end of Second Corinthians 8 verse 6 is the word "grace." We see it again in Second Corinthians 8 verse 9, the word "grace." And we see it at the end of Second Corinthians 8 verse 7. Grace. So grace is clearly something we need to see and again, redefine a little bit here today theologically. But then he uses the word "love." I want, Second Corinthians 8 verse 8, for you "to prove by the earnestness of others," the Macedonians are loving the Jerusalem saints, I want your love to be shown to be real. It's not just words, it's action. And it's giving in this sense.

Okay, let's take those two words. Let's at least give a heading for this first point, Second Corinthians 8 verses 7 and 8. Let's call it this, number one, "Let Love and Grace Motivate Giving." This whole series for seven weeks in Second Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9 is going to surface the importance of generosity as a primary virtue of the Christian life. And you need to be a more generous person, and I need to be a more generous person. And I hope at the end of these seven weeks we're going to be more generous people with all that God has entrusted to us. We could focus on stewardship, but we're going to focus now, at least in the first nine verses, on the fact that God would want us, and Paul would want the Corinthians to say listen, let's do this because you love. Let's do this because it's an expression of grace. Okay.

Let's define grace again, just real quickly. And a word that helps us with this is a word that is distinguishable but also involved in God's wonderful gift of salvation to us. Let's start with this where Jesus gives a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector who goes up to the Temple Mount to pray. Now the Pharisee is looking up and the tax collector is looking down, and he's not trying to ask for something like I really want a boat in the harbor. I just wish I had a vacation home in Big Bear. And if I could just, you know, have my business go better. He's not looking up to ask God for anything. He looks down and he beats his chest and he says have "blank" on me a sinner. What's the word? Have "mercy" on me a sinner. When it comes to salvation what we want is to hear Romans Chapter 8 verse 1 apply to us. There is no condemnation for you. If there's no condemnation for you after reading Chapter 3 of Romans, and you're a bad sinner as we all are. You "fall short of the glory of God." Right? Then it'd be



great to hear that I'm not getting what I deserve. I'm not getting the punishment that I've earned. That's called mercy. And mercy is something we all want. And we come to Christ by faith in salvation and we want his mercy.

But we get more than his mercy where he says I'm not going to punish you for what you deserve. You're never going to hear "I never knew you; depart from me." You're never going to hear into the judgment that you earned. You're going to hear no condemnation for you. That's total mercy. And you should feel great relief. And no one should tell you that you shouldn't talk about hell or that you shouldn't, you know, threaten people or don't scare people into the kingdom. Well, if you're not at least at some point touching on the fact, as Paul did in Romans, that your sin should earn for you, to quote Romans Chapter 2, "storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." And if you trust in Christ like Romans Chapter 4, well then you could be by Romans Chapter 8, no condemnation. We should know that we are clinging to the mercy of God.

But we read all over the book of Romans. We read all through the letters of the New Testament that it's more than that. There's a withholding of what we have earned. And then there's this, what's the word? Giving of what we don't deserve. And that's good. And here are some verbs that are attached to it. Let's just pick Ephesians Chapter 1. It talks about the grace of God being, here's a great word, "lavished upon us." Okay. That's giving. God doesn't give us what we deserve. He withholds what we deserve. That's mercy. And now he's giving to us without reference to what we've earned. You didn't merit it. You didn't earn it. Your works don't earn it. God is giving you all kinds of grace. And grace is, you can see why that's a good word for the stand-in of giving. And it's giving what? Good. Without what? Without interest in my mind whether you earned it or not. It's a gift. And God is giving it to you not because you earned it, not because you deserve it. Just because he's going to give. He's giving the virtue of God; he's giving to you. So grace becomes a great word that's very active and it's moving good things toward you. Right? As opposed to just mercy, which I want that, too, of withholding what we deserve. Do you follow all that? Okay.

Grace, we need to understand theologically and then we can say, okay I get why that's the whole point. By the end of this series, seven weeks, I want us to say I'm more giving without reference to what someone deserves. I'm ready to lavish people whenever opportunity arises to do good financially, materially, to people and to God in a way that shows that I, like God, am exercising grace. Is it the grace of giving? Yeah, it's the grace of giving, if I would define it that. But it's summarized in Second Corinthians verses 6, 7 and 9 just as the whole point of giving in a good way to benefit without reference to what someone deserves. Great.

Love, right? No question in your mind, I hope you understand, love is this active thing that if you don't have it, your whole Christian life is for nothing. You're a banging gong, a symbol that just makes noise and love is going to edify. Knowledge puffs up and that's great that you have knowledge. It's great that you have faith. It's great that you have all this stuff. The earnestness, the sincerity. It's great that we're impressed with you and loving you. But the real problem is if you don't love then you're just nothing. And Paul makes that so clear. So I want to say okay, I want to love, that's the foundation, and I want love which is a good, solid



commitment to your well-being to then say what do I have that I can use to give grace? I can lavish you, I can give you something that is not in reference to you earning it. Okay.

And just again, this is a little step-out sidebar. This particular part coming up. Not as long as the last one. You're welcome. But let me say this. All of the giving in the Scripture is in two directions, just like love is in two directions, I love God, I love people. That summarizes all of the law, vertically and horizontally. Let's look at giving if it's going to be predicated on love, like how do I get there? What do I think? How do I do it? How does the Bible present giving as an act of love? Well, three different ways as it relates to God and three different ways as it relates to people. Okay.

Let's give you a few verses to jot down. Let's think first vertically. Because vertically I know this is the hard part and you're cynical about this and at least, you know, I can picture that they're from Naphtali or Issachar or Judah and they have to give to those deadbeat Levites. Because they don't have to plow anything, they're just baking bread for the shewbread and lighting candles and killing my animals, and you know. But I'm giving to them and I know it's going to them but that is not how God wanted them to think about giving. When you come to the temple or you come to the outpost where you have a priest and he's going to accept your offering, you need to see this as giving to God, and that giving needs to be an act of love to God.

In what ways? Three ways. Number one, jot this one down. Here's a good example from the Bible, very practical. Proverbs Chapter 3 verse 9. Proverbs Chapter 3 verse 9. In another way it supplants a different word for giving. The verb "giving" is not here. There's a verb that's different, but it makes the point in a perfect way that I'm trying to first tease out as one of the ways that we can give as an act of love. Okay. Here's what it says, "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce." So here's an act of faith by taking the first of the crops, and I'm bringing it to God. But instead of the word "give," it's the word "honor." Now that helps, because honor is something you do to someone who you think deserves it. So this isn't just giving to God because I think, well he doesn't deserve it. Of course he deserves it. He's God. Now, I know practically it's going to feed, you know, the bratty kids of the Levites. And I know it's just for all the stuff that they're doing. But I'm going to come thinking about this is a gift to honor God. And a great example of that is the Magi in Matthew 3. The Magi hear all about this Son of Man from Daniel, we assume. And then the Persians learned about it. And then 500 years later, the Magi show up with gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Now, if you know the chronology of all this they're not living in the stable, they're living in a house at this point. And eventually we're going to find out when the Magi appear that Herod wants to kill all the kids under two. And since I'm sure he wants a little margin and buffer to make sure he gets this kid, we can assume that Jesus is probably between 12 and 15 months old. Let's just say rough and dirty. We'll see if I'm right when we get to heaven but I think that's probably rough and dirty how old he was. So I just want to ask you this. Someone shows up with some myrrh or some frankincense for your 18-month-old, what in the world is an infant, a toddler, going to do with some myrrh and frankincense or gold for that matter? I



know what an infant is going to do, they're going to put it in their mouth. That's what they're going to do. That's all they're going to do. And mom's going to oh no, no, no, don't, don't chew on the frankincense. Right?

It's not doing any good for the kid. And the Magi did not come to help support the kid. They didn't come to say, hey, Mom and Dad, I'm sure you're going to have some expenses with this kid. And he's very important so I'm going to give you gold, frankincense and myrrh and all that's going to be just so you have a little money to put in his 401K or his, you know, his 529 plan for college. That's not what they were thinking. They came to bring a gift to honor the king. That's what they said. They're coming to honor him. It's not that he needs it. And you can say I want to write a check to the church. That's what I've learned from this. I'm supposed to write checks, it's mandatory although I should do it with love and grace and all the rest. So I'm going to write this check. But you know, God doesn't need my money. Some of you that's why you don't give. Because God doesn't need my money. Well that's true. Just like in the Old Testament. You can jot this down if you want. In Psalm 50, he says if I needed food I certainly wouldn't be asking you for it. I don't need food. That's the passage where you hear God say he owns "the cattle on a thousand hills." God, he says, I own everything. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." I don't need anything. I certainly wouldn't come to you if I were hungry and I'm not hungry anyway, and I'm never hungry, I'm God.

So he doesn't need it. But he's asking them to bring it. Why? Because he's the king. And you should be giving because you love the king and this is an act of honoring. So that's the first one. I want to love God. I want to think about giving to the church because we saw that last week as mandatory. We have to give to the church. You have to give with love as a predicate and grace as the expression. And you need you to say I want to do it because I love God and I honor him. I'm bringing him something I know God doesn't need. But just like Joseph and Mary used it in practical ways, so it is the giving to the Levites in the Old Testament was used in practical ways. And if you give money to your church as you're commanded to, we're going to use it in practical ways here. That's just how it works. The cynic is always thinking about it. Right? But the worshiper thinks about I'm giving this to honor the king. Okay.

Secondly, let's look at this one. Deuteronomy Chapter 16 verse 17. Deuteronomy Chapter 16 verse 17. If I'm going to love God through my giving, in that vertical giving, what does that look like? Well, Deuteronomy 16:17 says this, "Every man shall give." Now this is the context of the three pilgrimage feasts and I said elsewhere it says don't show up empty-handed. Bring a gift. And he says, "Every man shall give as he is able, according to," now we're going to get a word that's very helpful, "according to the blessing," here it is, possessive now, "of the Lord your God that he has given you." The emphasis here is on blessing. He gave it to you. He blessed you, gave it to you. Last week we looked at another passage that talked about even if you think your education, your hard work, your industry, your all that has created your wealth, the Bible says no, God gives you the power to earn wealth. So everything you have, you have to see the connection to God because, "in him we live and move and have our being," to quote Acts Chapter 17 verse 28. And the point is here he's saying just know that when you come and bring something to me, which again we know is going to the Levites and feeding those kids, and they can make their bread and do their candles and all that. But you believe



that that's all honoring to God, just like this church is honoring to God and you're giving to the coffers so that you can say I am responding to the blessing of what you've given me. Let's call that gratitude.

The first one is honor. The second one is gratitude that we should give to God vertically even though there are practicalities to it that we shouldn't even really focus on that much, even though we can if we'd like. Whatever. But the point is this I think first and foremost I'm honoring the King and I'm grateful to the provider. Those are the first two aspects of love. Do you want to focus on loving God as you put money in the coffers of your church, whether you're listening on the radio to your church or here sitting in this church, think about honor and gratitude.

Thirdly, Matthew Chapter 6 says something interesting about giving. Of course, it's comparing the Pharisees who were out there giving and sounding trumpets. Hey, look at me! Look at all that I'm giving. And Jesus is trying to say that's not the way we do it. Ask Ananias and Sapphira when you meet them one day they will tell you don't give for your reputation. It ain't good. Does anyone know Acts Chapter 5? Okay. Don't give so that people can think you're cool, you're godly, you're generous. That's not why we give. If we give to God he ends up saying, Matthew Chapter 6 verse 3, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing," which is an interesting way to put it. And he says this in Matthew Chapter 6 verse 4, "So your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret," now here's the key word in this sentence, "will reward you." Reward. Why would God reward anyone for anything? Why would God reward someone? Because he likes what you've done. Just like you might reward your kid because he's done something you like. And here is God saying even if no one else knew what you gave, even if that was the case, God will reward you. Matter of fact, he says, don't blow the trumpets.

By the way, let me just say this, it doesn't mean that every gift needs to be absolutely in secret. Just like every prayer does not have to be in your prayer closet. It doesn't mean you can't go to a prayer meeting. It doesn't mean you can't pray in a group. Just like this it's just saying stop being ostentatious about your giving, about your self-aggrandizing concern for your reputation and just know that really this is between God and you and you're commanded to do it. But when you do it, it's an act of love by saying this: the first one is honor, the second one is gratitude. The third one is I want to please you, because that's when God rewards when he's pleased. And according to Second Corinthians Chapter 5, we already learned this from Paul, we make it our aim to please the Lord. Or as Ephesians Chapter 5 verse 10 says we are trying to find out "what is pleasing to the Lord." Well, we don't have to search too hard to know this. When you give to your church it is pleasing to the Lord and God rewards that. As the passage is going to go on and say, even though it's used by prosperity preachers to twist and contort the Scriptures, it clearly is embedded in the text. God loves to reward givers. Why? Because it pleases him.

Three ways you can think about what it means to have love and grace be how you really give as opposed to stewardship and duty. Because if you want to look at First Corinthians Chapter 9, Paul says, I'm an apostle. If I preach, there's nobody who needs to applaud me for that. I



can't boast about it. Right? "Woe to me if I don't preach the gospel," because this is my job. Just like us. Woe to us if we don't give. But he says it's not about duty. He says really if I preach willingly then I have a reward. What's that? If I were preaching, if I preach as an apostle, not because I'm commanded to, he says even if I don't, I still have a stewardship. He injects the word "stewardship" in his job, saying, yeah I have a stewardship, I have a duty, but I want to lean into it if I do it willingly. And the willing giving when it's not about reputation, it's not about anything else other than it is an act of love to God. Right? God says, I reward that. Just like Paul says I have a reward if I can do what I'm called to do willingly. And that means it needs to stem from God. Love. If I ask Paul, why are you going on these missionary journeys? I love God. I love God and he's called me to this. Same thing in giving. Okay.

What about horizontal because I want you not just to give to God and your church which you should, but you should be giving to people in your small group, your sub-congregation, your friends whom you talk to in the lobby every week. Right? Even your neighbor who's a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim, you should be giving if there's a need and that giving needs to be more generous five weeks from now than it is today. That's what we're moving toward. And how does that become love, the predicate, and grace? Okay. Here's how. First one, jot this down. First John Chapter 3 verse 16. First John Chapter 3 verse 16. He says, "By this we know love, that he," that is Christ, "laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." Now, I say this often. It's not like he laid down his life for us, let's lay down our life for him. Now, is there a true sense to that? Of course. Can we see that elsewhere? Yeah, sure. But he says really if you want to do something for me then lay down your life for your brothers. And that picture of God did something sacrificial for me. You do something sacrificial horizontally.

That picture right there is super helpful and it helps me know I'm giving to you out of deference to God, because I know God's love toward me should be reflected in my love toward you. That's all over the book of First John. And that's super helpful, because what that means is I'm doing something ultimately for the honor of God. But he didn't tell me to give to cats or dogs or trees or volcanoes. He wants me to give to people who have the "Imago Dei." They have the image of God. They are created in his image even as Ephesians Chapter 3 says, God is the Father of all mankind. And in that sense, my non-Christian could be an atheist neighbor when his house floods and I come over and help and I give money for him to go to a hotel, or I give him all my tools in my garage or whatever I do to try and help him, I'm helping someone out of honor for them being made in the image of God. And God says love my people. And it starts, of course, with the brothers. But as we saw in Galatians Chapter 6, it's not just the household of those who believe, I should be doing good to all men, but especially the household of the believers.

So I have a priority in this. And that means that if your person who you fellowship with every week in your small group has a need then you ought to meet it. That's where the next verse goes, by the way. If you see your brother has a need don't close your heart toward him, you should meet the need. And why? Because I'm honoring that person. Especially if they're children of the King. So how do I think about love? I want to think this is a child of God in a redemptive sense, if they're Christians, and just in the image of God as a creation of God, the



pinnacle of God's creation, man and woman in this world, I should give to them because I'm honoring them. So the same word for the first point, honor God by giving, that's an act of love. Honor people by giving. They're worthy of your giving because they're made in the image of God. Okay.

Secondly. Second Corinthians Chapter 8 is where we are. Matter of fact, I already quoted verse 17 of First John Chapter 3, and that is if there's a need, meet it. There is something about the fact, like I can quote Psalm 50 as it relates to God. God doesn't need any animal sacrifices. He doesn't need any fruit sacrifices. He doesn't need any barley sacrifices. Wheat sacrifices. He doesn't need any of that. Okay. But my neighbor, if their house floods and they don't have money for an apartment or, you know, a hotel room that night, well then they have a need. And so the Bible is very clear, like in Romans Chapter 8, the Christians in Jerusalem have a need. You have some money, you Corinthians, give money to meet a need. So that's the second thing. My act of love towards someone I hope should be easy as I think about they have a need and I'm meeting the need by my giving, right? They're there without a car, you throw them your extra car keys and you say in your small group, hey I want you to use it. They're moving. You don't say I don't want my truck all scratched. No. Do you want to use my trunk? Use my trunk. They're struggling. They lose their job. They need a few bucks, whatever, and you say I want to help. The generosity of saying I'm meeting a need is a satisfying thing. As Jesus says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The blessedness is even in just knowing I'm meeting a need. That's a good thing.

So I love because I honor people. I love because I'm meeting needs. Right? And that's an act that draws love out of me. And then the third one, look at Second Corinthians Chapter 9, the next chapter, verse 12. Second Corinthians 9:12, "For the ministry of this service." Okay? You are doing what I've asked you to do to give to the famine relief of the church in Jerusalem, "is not only supplying the needs of the saints," it's very practical. They can pay their mortgage, they can buy their food. It's going to help them meet the needs. "But is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God." Okay.

When do you overflow with many thanksgivings to God? Not when you're sad. Not when your kid is in the ICU. Not when you lose your job. You overflow with thanksgivings to God when your needs are met and you're happy. When you get everything that you need to make it, you're like God, thank you. And it's not just thankful to God, right? Even though it is to God. There are thanks all the way across the board, as Paul often brings thanks like he did in Philippians Chapter 4 and elsewhere. When people give to him, he's thankful. There's something about the happiness of getting needs met, the security of knowing that there are people who care enough to lend me their car when I really need one, to help me through this tough month when I'm struggling. All of that horizontal giving is really just like the third one to God. I'm seeking God's happiness in my giving. I'm seeking the happiness of people. You want to love someone just to make them happy, right? You give gifts to people in your immediate family I trust to make them happy and you give for that purpose. And that's part of it. You want to tap into giving as an act of love, predicated on love and as an expression of grace. Then it's honor and practical needs and happiness for people and for God. It's honor, gratitude, and happiness. Do you see the paradigm there? I think that's helpful.



Numbers Chapter 28 verse 2 by the way. I didn't even mention that one, did I? Did I turn you to that one? He says, "Command the people of Israel and say to them, 'My offering, my food for my food offerings, my pleasing aroma.'" So he's saying, my food offering is my food offering. You bring food, it's my food offering and it's pleasing to me. Well, we already know unlike the pagans bringing, you know, vegetable baskets to the idols, we know that God doesn't eat anything. He doesn't eat anything, he doesn't need anything. But he says I'm taking it personally and I'm pleased by that. And we please people by giving. We please God by our giving. And that definitely should be something so key.

Now Second Corinthians Chapter 8 verse 9, back to our passage. I know that was a bit of a sidebar but it is important for us to understand love as a motive and grace as an expression both vertically and horizontally, and I hope that helps somebody. Second Corinthians Chapter 8 verse 9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," we're talking about grace, we're talking about giving predicated on love, that's the motivation, the genuineness of love. He loved us. We know that. "That though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." He came and did something hard and costly and sacrificial for your benefit, for your good. And our bad was bad, right? We were going to be judged by the tribunal of God's justice and Christ was sent to suffer so that we could be exonerated, so that we didn't have to hear, "I never knew you; depart from me." That is a paradigm that strikes to the heart of Christianity.

It's one thing to say, yeah, God said we ought to love him and love other people. That already strikes to a core virtue and if you're not a generous person then where's that? Secondly, our leader was all about that. Think about it, Matthew Chapter 20 verse 28, "I came not to be served but to serve, and to give [my] life as a ransom for many," a financial term, by the way, ransom for many. My life is like a payment. My life is giving, sacrifice. You guys know what it's like to pay someone for something to release them from some debt. If you did that, that's a ransom and that ransom is what my life is like. Our leader is a giver. And you need to know that that's how our minds should focus. Paul is introducing this to get them to think Christ, Christ, Christ. He's going to end the whole ninth chapter with a reprise of this theme. It's about Christ. Remember Christ. He's the giving one, and he's our leader.

Number two, "Focus on Christ's Generosity." And I mean that. If you have your small group on Thursday nights or Wednesday nights, please spend a day or two just thinking about Christ's generosity before you ever get to thinking about your next steps. This is clear. It is the motivation. If we were following a quote-unquote prophet from the sixth century and we said I want to be like the prophet, right? If he's a marauder, a raider, a warrior, you know, a fighter, well then I guess if you're a fundamentalist follower of that person, that should be reflected in your character and sure enough, hey, read the headlines that's exactly what we have. But if we're following Christ, he wasn't known for taking a sword out and advancing his theology by fighting. He wasn't a marauder. He wasn't a raider. He wasn't a fighter. He wasn't a warrior. No, that's not what he was. Sure, he contended with people in logic and persuasion in conversation, but he was known as a giver. That was the whole point. God so loved the world.



The Father loved us and gave. The Son says in John Chapter 15 verse 13, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

This passage, by the way, we should turn you there, it's such a great passage, Matthew Chapter 20 just to tie this together. Verse 28 is what I quoted, "Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a," payment, "a ransom for many." The context of this, if you look up further in the passage, they're talking about leadership and they say don't be like the Gentiles because the higher they climb in the status and pyramid and org chart of their thing, they just want more service, more servants, more people serving them. He said don't be like that. It's Matthew Chapter 20 verse 26, "It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant." Let them serve. Okay? That's the word we transliterated into the word "deacon" in the New Testament. Someone who like in Acts Chapter 6 you wait tables, right? The picture of service.

Then, Matthew Chapter 20 verse 27, whoever would be first among you... Do you really want someone to be the guy you admire as the leader among your band? Well, he needs to be your "Doulos." We go from "Diakonos" to doulos. He "must be your slave." I mean, we go from a guy who's just willing to, you know, pour your water and bring out your hot dog. Now we're talking about someone who's willing to, like be your slave. I mean, that's what it's all about. And that's why Matthew Chapter 20 verse 28 starts with the word even, "even as the Son of Man." I mean, he says elsewhere, when you look at greatness and you think I'm great, you 12 apostles, I'm among you as one who serves. But you just need to know Christianity is all about our leader being a servant, our leader being a giver, our leader being sacrificial, the incarnation is sacrificial, death on the cross is sacrificial. He is sacrificially giving. Do you want to be a Christian? Do you want to reflect his character, as it says in First John Chapter 2, which I think I make you turn to in our discussion questions this week? If you say you abide in Christ, well then you "ought to walk in the same way in which he walked," you ought to live as he lived, and he was known not as a warrior, not as a selfish person, not as trying to get so many people to serve him. He was about serving, giving, generosity.

He gave willingly. John 10:17, at least jot it down. "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." I know in the garden you see him wrestling with not wanting to be strung up naked on a cross and being beaten. Of course he doesn't want that, he asks to "let this cup pass from me." But not my wants, but your wants be done. "Not as I will, but as you will." So he's willing to take his want and say what I want is to do what God wants and what God wants, God so loved the world that he gave, I'm ready to give. And he says I willingly give. And that's why duty, you can act on duty, but it's better if you don't act on stewardship, you act on love. Love is a catalytic motive. Grace is an expression that mirrors God's giving. And that's what I want to do because that's what our leader is all about and I want to be like our leader. He gives sacrificially, he gives willingly, and he gives for our good. He sees a need and he meets it. That is the picture of Christ.

It's also the picture of my first cousin, thinking of my first cousin. She happened to marry a man she found out later has bad kidneys, kidney disease. Matter of fact, his kidneys are



shutting down. And so she goes, well I love my husband. I don't want him to die of kidney failure. Renal failure. I have two kidneys, I guess I have an extra. Now I'm thinking to myself, I don't have an extra. I have a spare and I guess if one goes wrong I'd just like both my kidneys. Right? I just would like both my kidneys. But I'm thinking to myself here is someone willing to say, yeah I'll lie on a table. You can mark me up, cut into my side and get my kidney and give it to him because I know he needs it. And I'm taking the security of having a backup kidney and I'm giving it to him because I love him. Right?

The picture of Christ giving is precisely that, right? It's him saying you have a need. I am willing for your good to go poor so that you can get what you need. And he says that's the core of Christianity. And you can see why I'm not really interested when someone walks by and says I need a kidney, can I have yours? I'm like, oh, I don't know. I kind of like both of mine, right? But if it were my wife or my kid, do you see how that changes everything? And what is that need? What is the "x" in that algebraic equation? It's love. Love has to be there. If love is not there where's the motive to give away something so costly? And that's why we just giving a little token of our giving to God, and our little token of our giving to others never affects us, never sacrificial, right? It's why my cousin is such a great example of this. It would take a lot of love to take my organs and start giving them away. If you just get a greater focus on God's costly, redemptive work, I think we become much more generous and sacrificial givers.

Second Corinthians 8 verse 6. Let's get back to the beginning verse in this section because that's where he says, okay Titus is going to pass the plate, and here's how he put this. "Accordingly," we looked at the Macedonian Christians, okay you Corinthians, "we urge Titus." He's coming with this letter. He's sitting in the front row. You're reading it in church, right? "That as he started," he talked to you about this last time a year ago, "so he should," here's a keyword, "complete among you this act of grace." Now, "act of grace" has two parts. You have to intend to do it. You have to decide to do it. And now he's saying you have to complete it. Now there's a year gap between these two for the Corinthians. But Paul says now it's time to complete it, as he says in Second Corinthians 8 verse 8, "to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine," the genuineness of your love. It's time to do it. It's time to do it now. Okay,

I hope in this series there'll be a lot of cogitation on being generous. I want you to be a generous Christian. That's the right thing to do. And there's a lot of payoffs. There's a lot of blessedness to giving, right? The joy of generosity. That would be great if this were a component part of your life. Not because it's extra credit, because it's essential. It's the "transmission" of the Christian life, and you have to have it. But I hope as you think this through that all the thoughts you have sitting in a sermon, discussing it in a small group, going over the passage, going over your discussion questions, all of it doesn't just become this exercise in thinking. It has to be completed. There has to be that completion of it. Number three, let's put it this way. You need to choose to be generous. That is a choice. And some of you have it even now. Even last week you had it. But then you have to follow through. Number three, "Choose to be Generous then Follow Through." You have to follow through because it's not enough to intend to do it.

Online shopping was created for men, it has to be. I know women do it more than men, but man, what a good thing to not have to go to the stinking store, isn't it? I'm grateful for it. And one thing I've learned about the way my wife shops versus the way I shop online is that she's often putting things in her digital shopping cart and they sit there for a long time. And there are a bunch of different things, like if she's looking for some, I don't know, tablecloth there are like eight tablecloths in her shopping cart. And if ever I happen to go over her shoulder, she's sitting there with the computer on her lap, why do you have eight tablecloths? I mean, do we need eight tablecloths? No, I'm just going to buy one. Well, you have eight of them in your shopping cart.

Now that influence has at least started, I must admit I've done it a few times, but most of us men, we're only putting something in the shopping cart if we intend to buy it, like right now. That's how this works. But I have learned just by watching the habit of my wife that occasionally I might put something in my digital shopping cart. But you know what? That's an intention, especially for men. That's my intention. I thought of something that someone needs and I'm going to buy this for them. Let's just say it's an act of giving. And it's not the Christmas list compulsion and I have to buy something for my mother. No, it's I want to give this to... I'm willingly wanting to express my gratitude and I'm going to give this. I can put it in the cart and that's a great start. The Corinthians had that in their digital shopping cart for a year. And Paul's going you have to hit that orange Buy Now button. You have to do it now. You have to complete it.

Because here's the thing about my gifts for other people, right? To put it in my digital shopping cart is a decision. It's a resolve. But it hadn't happened yet. Nothing happens until I hit the Buy Now button. And this is the problem with so many things in the Christian life. I quoted First John Chapter 3 verse 16 and I referenced verse 17. If you see your brother in need, you have to give. The next verse, First John Chapter 3 verse 18 is this, right? You can't love with just words. There's a paraphrase. You can't love in words, right? What does that do? You have to "love in ... deed and in truth." And truth means I'm truing up the intention with the action. Or to put it in the words of James in James Chapter 2, he says this, if you see your brother in need, "poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled.'" Let you be warmed and be filled, it may even be on a DaySpring greeting card, I hope you get through this trial in your life. I'm praying for you. Okay? Here are the inspired words of God. "What good is that?"

It's like putting it all in your digital shopping cart. Oh, you know, I'll be good, I just, I really care. I hope God meets that need. I'll throw a few thoughts your way. I'll pray God meets that need. What good is that? He goes on to say, in the same way, "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Don't tell me you have faith if you don't have any works to back it up, right? If you have faith, it's going to produce works. And let's put it this way, if you love people, it's going to result in giving. If you love God it's going to result in giving in the mandated way God says you're supposed to give to your church just like you gave if you're in the tribe of Issachar to the tribe of Levi. That's how God set it up. If you love God then you give, if you love people then you give, and you don't just intend to do it. I hope those words resonate. "What good is



that?" And most of us say, oh, that's a really nice thing to say. And some of you have been in need and had people say a lot of nice things, but they're not willing to do anything about it. God wants us to be men and women of action. You have to do something. This is the key.

I'm only happy with my car when all the major component parts are working, right? And I'm honest, I don't expect perfection. I want it, but I don't get it. I just need all the essentials to be working on my vehicle. And I think some of us think that giving and generosity are just a cracked rearview mirror or maybe a dent on the bumper, but it's the transmission of the Christian life. The expressions of love are shown by our giving. If you love God you give. If you love people you give and you do. You just do. And Paul started with the first excuse that everyone has, I can't afford to, and he's saying look at the Macedonians they couldn't afford to, but they really loved these people. Love finds a way and it's not by end-arounding the commands and the duty. It's about fulfilling the duty because I love.

Jesus didn't obey partially. He didn't give when it was convenient, and he certainly didn't stop short of the cross. He gave sacrificially, willingly, and he did it because he cared. He loved. I just want us to remember this is the core of the Christian life. We follow a king, a master, a Lord who is a giver. He gives. He gives to the extreme. And I'm just saying we probably have some room to grow in this area. And so I want this series to make a marked difference in our lives in two directions, vertically and horizontally. Our love and giving to God, and our love and giving to one another. It starts with love. It works through grace. It results in a lot of things. Honoring, meeting needs, showing our gratitude, and making God and people happy. I think we can all use a little bit more of that in the circles we run in.

Let's pray. God, this topic I know, I hope it's not true in this room, but certainly on the radio elsewhere, I know people think it's very... they think cynically about it just like we could have in the Old Testament about giving to the temple or giving to the Levites and all the distrust and all the rest. But God, I pray that we get past all that and be able to say no, I know there's something to be had in being a Christian who loves in tangible ways, and not just in ways that are convenient, but ways that are costly and sacrificial. God, there are so many great things to come in this text and so many in the next chapter for us to get to in the seven-part series. But may these first two installments just help us to think about the concept and the motive in a way that will teach us that this is just the reflected heart of the Father, the reflected heart of the Son, and certainly empowered by the Holy Spirit who wants us to walk as he walked.

So please God, I pray we'd make progress in this, that you would be pleased to get involved in our church, in our small groups and in our sub-congregations and our ministries to where everyone in this church is taking two, three, four steps forward in being the kind of generous Christians who make you proud, who make you happy, where you say attaboy, attagirl. That's the way I intended it to be. That we'd be like Barnabus, not worrying about our reputation like Ananias and Sapphira did. That we'd be people who just say we want to give because we love. We pray we do that more profoundly, more consistently, more sincerely.

In Jesus' name. Amen.