

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

The Discipline of Giving
2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-8

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.
2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)
3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Before the day of worship (or during the previous week's worship), contact those who attend and make arrangements take a collection of imperishable food donations for a local food bank. If possible, make arrangements to volunteer either for a portion of a day, or set up a continuing volunteer relationship. Your people may need to be reminded a second time to bring their items. (perhaps a day or two before the session)

Prepare a basket or container to collect donations as people enter for worship. Set the container in a conspicuous area of the room.

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The Discipline of Giving – 01-02-05-en

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Prepare the words to the song or chorus you will sing if they are unfamiliar to the worshippers.

Obtain a small piece of paper for each person who attends. On each piece of paper write the question: ***“The one thing in the world that would be the most difficult for me to not ever have or not ever do again would be: _____”***

Allow space at the end for at least a sentence to be written.

This will be used in the **Gathering Time** and the **Worship Time**.

Bible Study Leader:

Worship Time Leader:

Worship Time: Prepare the words to any music you may use in the worship services (see music resources).

Music Sources:

“Light the Fire Again” Words and music by Brian Doerksen. Mercy Me/Vineyard Publishing, 1994. Great theme song for the unit on disciplines. From the song *“I need Your Discipline”* From WOW Worship Songbook. Integrity Inc., 2000.

“We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise” Words and music by Kirk Dearman. John T. Benson Company, 1984. From Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book (2nd Expanded Edition). Maranatha! Music, 1990.

“To God Be the Glory” Words by Fanny J. Crosby and music by William H. Doane. Public domain.

“Lord I Want To Be A Christian” Public Domain.

“More Precious Than Silver” Words and Music by Lynn DeShazo. From Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book (2nd Expanded Edition). Maranatha! Music, 1990.

“Seek Ye First” Words and Music by Karen Lafferty. Maranatha! Music, 1986. From Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book (2nd Expanded Edition). Maranatha! Music, 1990.

1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

The Discipline of Giving

Focal Text

2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-8

Background Text

2 Corinthians 8-9

Main Idea

Giving ourselves to the Lord leads us to give ourselves and our material possessions to minister to other people's needs and to advance the work of the gospel.

Questions to Explore

What does being a Christian have to do with giving?

Teaching Aim

To lead the group to express the Christian attitude of giving by contributing generously to God's work.

Gathering together:

Preparation: Before the day of worship, ask people attending to bring donations of food for a local food bank. (See preparation).

Assign one person (perhaps a married couple) to greet people as they arrive. As they enter, show them the food collection container for their donations. Give each person the piece of paper with the question "**The one thing in the world that would be the most difficult for me to never have or do ever again would be _____.**" (see preparation). Also give each person a pencil. Ask worshippers to think about their answer.

As people arrive, you can set the mood by softly playing some Christian music.

Sing one or two hymns or choruses as a signal that the Gathering Time is beginning. Perhaps use some music that is very familiar to the group and that they enjoy singing.

If the group is small enough, have each person say their name clearly and distinctly for the sake of newcomers. Also have each person give a response to the question on the piece of paper.

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Leader, ask each person to take the piece of paper with the question and their response and put it in a safe place for later.

First thoughts:

Leader: Read aloud 2 Corinthians 8:1-5:

¹And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

A church had been praying for several weeks that God would show the leaders of the church which families should receive the bulging food hampers at Christmas time. The church had been collecting foodstuffs and toys for weeks. The members had been very generous during the season. The pastor joined with the leadership of the project to determine who should receive the hampers. They began the meeting with prayer. The pastor was shocked to hear some of the names that were mentioned. Several were members of the church yet the pastor had no idea of some of the difficulty that was being faced. The names were selected and the task of delivering the hampers divided up. The pastor was not prepared for what he was about to discover through the words of a young girl in one of the homes.

The group loaded the hampers for those they were assigned. As they arrived at the home of one, the children in the front yard welcomed them warmly. They were active members of the church who had lost jobs and savings due to a family illness not covered by insurance. The mother was a bit surprised and a little embarrassed but deeply grateful for the hampers. The hampers were unloaded into the nearly empty cabinets and pantry. The group was very glad that someone had paid attention to the needs of this family. The little girl suddenly shouted with glee. "Look Mom, here is the package we gave to the church." It was then that a lesson on giving was learned by all. This mother with little in her own cabinets had given out of her meager means to meet the needs of others.

When the pastor arrived home that night, the smells of a grand Christmas meal were already beginning to drift through the air. The Christmas tree had been almost obscured by the gifts for all the family that would gather the next day. But all he could think about were the words of joy that came from that little girl who had participated in meeting the needs of others.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Like so many things in our lives, the discipline of sharing with others what God has given to us—needs to be better understood, regularly encouraged, planned ahead, and then carried out abundantly and efficiently. In our study and worship today, we will work toward all of these things.

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

The Discipline of Giving

Focal Text

2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-8

Background Text

2 Corinthians 8-9

Main Idea

Giving ourselves to the Lord leads us to give ourselves and our material possessions to minister to other people's needs and to advance the work of the gospel.

Questions to Explore

What does being a Christian have to do with giving?

Teaching Aim

To lead the group to express the Christian attitude of giving by contributing generously to God's work.

Introduction to your personal study:

The Christmas season wouldn't be complete around our house unless we watched some version of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" and Dr. Seuss' "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." Each of these stories tells of a mean, miserly fellow who has no place in his heart for Christmas, and as a result is greedy, stingy, and a real problem to be around. In each story the main character is touched and transformed and becomes a joyful and giving person in the end.

Our passages today speak of generosity and giving as thermometers of the spiritual warmth present in the Christian. A heart that has been truly touched by God's grace will show it by a generous and giving attitude. The example of the Macedonian Christians is one for all Christians to follow.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

Paul had written earlier to the Gentile churches of a special offering to be taken for the poor Christians in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1). A series of famines had struck Judea, and the persecuted Christians in Jerusalem were suffering terrible economic conditions. God sent a warning (Acts 11:28) that helped the church through the first famine (around A.D. 46-47), but the second famine was devastating for them. The Jerusalem Christians were persecuted and poverty stricken; many of them had lost jobs and some their lives because they dared to follow Jesus. Paul was moved with compassion for his Christian brothers and sisters. He sought to stir up this kind of love, caring, and sacrifice in the Gentile believers for their needy brethren. The Gentile churches were to remember their spiritual indebtedness to the believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26-27), because it was Jewish Christians who first brought the gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul spoke several times of this offering and the spirit of generosity (e.g. Galatians 2:10). He asked the Corinthian Christians to put a certain amount aside regularly so that the offering would be ready when he arrived in Corinth (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). They had already given generously, but now Paul was thanking them for their gift. Paul also encouraged them to give even more because the needs in Jerusalem were still great. Second Corinthians 8 and 9 deal with the subject of giving. Paul spent much time with this subject because giving is like a thermometer measuring the spiritual warmth in a person.

Focusing on the Meaning:

2 Corinthians 8:1-9 God's Grace of Giving

vv. 1-2 The province of Macedonia was located in the most northern part of the Greek peninsula, some 300 kilometres (200 miles) northwest of Athens. Macedonia included the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. These Macedonians were extremely generous because "the grace that God had given" stirred up their generosity. Persecution and severe trials often brings on bitterness, and poverty many times makes people selfish -- but not with the Macedonian Christians. Though persecuted for their faith (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14), God's grace turned their trials into opportunities for service. The greater their poverty, the greater was their generosity. The Macedonians gave with "overflowing joy" and "rich generosity". True giving overflows from the heart, hearts that have been warmed by God's love. True giving is not pried painfully from unwilling wallets; rather it flows freely from a gratitude for what God has done. Churches do not have financial problems, only spiritual problems. God has placed

plenty of money in the pockets of his people, and those who are grateful for His blessings will freely let it go.

vv. 3-4 The Macedonians did what was expected of them ("as much as they were able"), and even more than could reasonably be expected of them in their dire circumstances ("and even beyond their ability"). They gave voluntarily, and even begged Paul for the opportunity to share with their needy brethren in Jerusalem. Such was their sacrificial giving. Macedonia was a poor province, and apparently the Christian community there was quite needy themselves, yet they freely gave. God commends sacrificial giving as an act of love (Mark 12:43-44), especially as a response to the tremendous level of sacrifice He gave for us (John 3:16).

v. 5 Unless the Macedonians dedicated themselves to the Lord first nothing else mattered. God owns the entire world (Leviticus 25:23) and does not need our money, but he desires our selves as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Those who give themselves to God are completely at His disposal, giving Him the right to direct the area of ministry. The Macedonians wanted to be Paul's partners for any Christian service necessary. Having given themselves to the Lord, they were ready to follow God's will, even if it cost them financially.

vv. 6-7 The Corinthians should follow the example of the Macedonians. Titus would come to Corinth to complete the collection begun for the Jerusalem Christians. Having already been touched by God's grace ("faith, speech, and knowledge"), the Corinthians should now "excel in this grace of giving." A selfish Christian is an immature Christian. Paul described generosity as a "grace gift" from God. As such, charity and an unselfish nature are abilities that God gives, marks of maturity for those who display His character.

v. 8 Paul used the example of the Macedonians as a gauge to measure the quality of the Corinthians' own love. Genuine love gives generously. Good works display one's faith. Paul wanted the Corinthians to give spontaneously out of sincere love and not out of a sense of duty. The Macedonians clearly demonstrated God's grace in their lives. How well were the Corinthians doing?

v. 9 Christ's example should be all the motivation a Christian needs to give generously. This verse displays the essence of the gospel message: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" was poured out on sinful people. Christ extended his unmerited love towards all sinners. "Though he was rich," that is, he shared in his Father's glory before the world was created (John 17:5). "Yet for your sakes he became poor," for our sakes he temporarily laid aside his glory and humbled Himself to become a man and to die on a cross for us (Philippians 2:6-8). "So that you through his poverty might become rich," those who believe on Him might become children of God (John 1:12) and heirs of His kingdom (Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:29). Christians should have the same attitude as Jesus (Philippians 2:5) and the willingness to follow His example (1 Peter 2:21). Because He gave everything for us, then we should count it a joyous privilege to give to

others in return. Christians who are deeply in love with Christ will give like Christ gave, sacrificially and gladly.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 – God Loves a Cheerful Giver

v. 6 Paul used a well-known principle of the harvest (cf. Proverbs 11:24, 25; 19:17; Luke 6:38) -- a person reaps what they sow; what one gives is what one receives. Investing generously in God's kingdom will reap generous rewards, because putting our resources into God's hands means that we trust Him to take care of our needs. In God's economy generous giving is an investment that pays richly.

v. 7 "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give." Giving should be a free and deliberate decision for each person, whether to give and how much. "Not reluctantly or under compulsion," no anxiety or outside coercion should be involved in giving. Giving should be the natural outflow of a heart that has already given everything, including the money, to God. Reluctant giving releases each penny grudgingly. Outside pressures to give such as threats, guilt trips, or even peer pressure may raise money, but these offerings do not truly come from the heart. "For God loves a cheerful giver." God loves all people, even selfish sinners. But God especially approves of those who display His generous character. Giving should be an expression of joy, not of pain. We should not give until it hurts but rather give until it feels good! Our heart is part of the offering, so our attitude matters to God. Without the heart, the offering is merely a donation.

Paul does not mention how much God's people should give. The Old Testament required a "tithe" (one-tenth of one's income), and then free-will offerings were given only after the tithe was given (Leviticus 27:30-32). The New Testament states no fixed amount. Instead, we are told to give as God has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2). We are to give what our love for God dictates. If Jesus is our Lord, he is also Lord over our bank account as well, and we are merely caretakers of his wealth. Because of his love for us we are now rich, and we should follow the leading of his Spirit in determining the right amount to give. For some that will mean a tithe, for others it will mean much more. Regardless of the amount, the offering should be a free expression of one's love and come from a joyful heart.

v. 8 God's part in our giving should not be overlooked. All of our resources come from God, and "God is able" to increase our ability to give. Therefore, everyone can afford to give. God expects every Christian to pass on blessing to other people. We are not to keep his blessings for ourselves. God will provide all the resources necessary for every action that he expects. "Having all that you need," means that there is a difference between a person's needs and their wants. A generous person will never be in need, because God will always supply their needs (cf. Philippians 4:19). The Corinthians wondered if they could make ends meet if they gave generously to other people. But as God's people trust him with their resources, he is always faithful to provide. "You will abound in every good work." God does not bless his people for their own wealth or personal pleasure; he provides the resources necessary to do his work.

Teaching the Passage:

These Scripture passages point to the subject of stewardship. This means that God owns everything we have, and we should use all of it as he deems fit. Paul pointed to the example of the Macedonian Christians who gave generously in spite of hard times. Their giving was an expression of their love for God and for their fellow believers. The ultimate example of giving, however, is the example of Christ who gave everything for us so that we might have everything.

Giving should be the natural outflow of a grateful heart. It should be an act of joy, not of pain. Seen another way, giving to God's work is an investment in eternity that will pay rich dividends. We will never be poorer, because God will always give us everything that we need.

For Personal Reflection:

- 1. What have I learned from this study?**

- 2. What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

- 3. What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

The Discipline of Giving

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc. Children who stay with their parents in the Youth/Adult study should have the material on worship as suggested in **The Children's Corner** at the beginning of this **Unit** of studies. (Ask your leader who downloads the studies for those suggestions).

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-8

Background Text

2 Corinthians 8-9

Main Idea

Giving ourselves to the Lord leads us to give ourselves and our material possessions to minister to other people's needs and advance the work of the gospel.

Question to Explore

What does being a Christian have to do with giving?

Teaching Aim

To lead the group to express the Christian attitude of giving by contributing generously to God's work.

Connect with Life:

Ask: "How many of you consider yourselves rich?" Statistics show that:

❖ If you own more than one pair of shoes you are wealthier than two-thirds of the world's population.

- ❖ If you have eaten a meal in the past 24 hours you are wealthier than one-third of the world's population.
- ❖ Even if you have some food but no shoes, there are many people with less than you have.

State: "Most of us, then, would be considered wealthy compared to most of the people in this world. What, then, do you think God expects for Christians to do with the wealth he has given to them?" In other words, "What does being a Christian have to do with giving?"

Let's see an example from the Christians in the first century A.D.

Guide the Study:

Give a brief mini-lecture (taken from the study guide) to explain the historical background of the passages to be studied today. Be sure to cover these topics:

- ✓ The dire situation of the Jerusalem Christians.
- ✓ The special offering Paul was taking for them.
- ✓ The debt of gratitude the Gentile Christians owed their fellow Jewish Christians.
- ✓ The basic message about giving found in 2 Corinthians.

Have someone read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

As this person reads, have the rest of the group list everything they can learn from this passage about the Macedonian Christians.

Ask: "Why would these Christians give so generously?" (God's grace)

Ask: "According to verse 5, what was the first offering that they gave?" (They gave themselves first to God.)

Ask: "How does someone `give themselves to God'?"

State: "After seeing the example of the Macedonian Christians, let's see what Paul wanted other Christians to learn from that."

Have someone read 2 Corinthians 8:6-8.

Ask: "Had these Corinthians already received grace from God? If so, what kind?" (Faith, speech, knowledge)

Ask: “What kind of `grace’ were the Corinthian Christians expected to display?” (The grace of giving)

State: “Let’s look at the ultimate example of love and giving.” Have someone read 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Point out what Christ did on our behalf:

- He was rich.
- He became poor for our sakes.
- So that through his poverty we might become rich.

Ask: “How have we become rich through what Christ has done?”

Ask if anyone would like to give a short personal testimony of how Jesus has made his or her life rich.

Ask: “What should Christ’s example compel us to do?” (Give ourselves to him and to others)

Have someone read 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. Make sure they understand the principle of the harvest, that giving is an investment, not a donation.

Ask: “What principles of giving can we glean from verse 7?” (Free and deliberate decision, no reluctance or compulsion, cheerfully) Be prepared to explain (from the study guide) if someone asks the question about how much Christians should give.

Ask: “According to verse 8, why should Christians not fear for their own needs if they give generously to God’s work?” (God is able; you will have all you need.)

Ask: “What is the difference between `needs’ and `wants’? For which one does God promise to provide?”

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to go away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Use some or all of the following questions to spur discussion:

1) According to this Bible lesson, what can we say about how God expects his children to handle their finances?

- 2) What are some ways that we can use our resources to further God's work?
- 3) Where are some places we can invest in his kingdom?
- 4) What are some ways we can give ourselves as well as our money?
- 5) Are there some people you know who could use a touch of God's love through you?
- 6) Is any cost too high? Was it too high for Jesus?

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

The Discipline of Giving 2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-8

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

The Easiest Road to Faithful Tithing

Do you have a regular paycheck? An allowance? Occasional money earned from odd jobs? All of these give you the opportunity to begin the life-long, joyful experience of giving back to the Lord a portion of what He has given to you.

Ok! Everyone stand up and stretch!!! – first with hands up high. Then reach down and place your hands on the floor with your legs still straight. Ask yourselves, “Is this easier for me or for my parents to do?” “Is it easier for me to do once-in-a-while – or easier if I discipline my body by stretching regularly?”

Both questions also apply to our relationship to God in regard to “our” money.

Sometimes youth feel that parents give for the whole family. Not so! Youth can learn responsibility for tithing from their own earnings. In fact, it is much harder to start tithing when you are an adult. Those who begin tithing as children or teens find it really simple to just keep on doing it as adults. The discipline of regularly tithing 10% of what we earn becomes such a part of life that we will find it strange that others have difficulty doing it. Begun as teens, tithing becomes easy, then fun, and finally flat-out, heart-racing joyful!!!!

God blesses faithful giving at any age.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***The Discipline of Giving***
2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-8**Beginning the Service:**

Sing (or play a recording) of “**Light the Fire Again**” as people sing-a-long and as latecomers gather for worship from Bible studies. You may wish to choose other music at your discretion.

Worship leader: “Our worship theme today is the discipline of giving. Giving is an act of surrender to God. Since the Lord already owns everything we have, we are more returning to God than giving to God.

Praise and worship belong to the Lord. Let’s begin our time of worship with a sacrifice not of money or things, but of praise...”

Sing either “To God Be the Glory” and/or “We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise” or another appropriate song of praise.

Sing “Seek Ye First.”

Praying for the World and our Offering:

Worship Leader (or designated person) say: Like the early Christians, we know other believers who are in physical need. Ask for prayer requests for either fellow believers who have a physical need or a fellow ministry that is in need.

Pray for those Christians who may not have as much as we have been given. Ask the Lord to show us how we can help to meet a portion of that need. Pray for the offering that is received today that it will fulfill God’s will for the ministry of our church this week.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God’s call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader

may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Introduction:

Matthew 23

²³“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

In this passage Jesus has just confronted the Pharisees regarding a number of issues where they had missed the mark. The Old Testament had taught them that the tithe (1/10 of one's income) was the standard of giving (Leviticus 27:30-32, Malachi 3:10-11). It was to be brought to the central storehouse in order to care for the needs of those in the community. These Pharisees had practiced this discipline to such an extent that they even tithed on the herbs and seeds that came from their garden. They gave exactly what was required but they missed the mark. They forgot about justice, mercy, and faithfulness. They were right to give of everything they owned but the personal legalistic application of the requirement had caused them to forget about the greater needs that were around them. As we have studied today in our Bible study, there are new characteristics about giving that reveal the life that is changed by Jesus Christ. Paul uses the Macedonian Christians to refocus our giving on the reason for giving rather than the act of giving. Let us examine the characteristics of giving for the Christian.

Key Truth:

The pattern of our giving reveals our relationship with Jesus Christ

The testimony of Macedonian churches is recorded in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. We see revealed these characteristics:

2 Corinthians 8

¹And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

1. There is An 'Overflowing Joy' in Giving.

There is no group who understood more the poverty and pain of hunger and persecution than did the Macedonian Christians. Yet, they are characterized by this overflowing joy. They had refocused from that which they did not have (money, freedom, food, land) to that which they did possess (the grace of God). We often look at our circumstances as obstacles to participation in the work of God. We see the lifestyle we desire, or have attempted to acquire, on one side of the scale and we see the resources we possess on the other. The scales are probably already tipped in the direction of our desires or our unpaid bills. Then along comes the needs of others and sadly we walk away. The focus of our life has been on that which we do not have or that which we think we “need”. When Christ comes into a life and becomes our Shepherd, the focus changes to “I shall not want” (Psalm 23). My true needs have been met - the need for forgiveness, love, acceptance, and purpose. Now as I approach those scales, although the resources may be small, my requirements are smaller. In my heart there is joy at the opportunity to participate in the work of my Lord who has met my needs.

2. Rich Generosity Characterizes our Giving

When I hear the word “rich”, I see big houses, fancy cars, new clothes, and a multitude of other ‘things’. Those that are rich can give great sums of resources to meet incredible need. Some have given without even touching their true wealth. They are called generous, kind, and benevolent.

But when one takes on the attitude of Jesus (Philippians 2:5), who gave the gift of life at the cost of His life, that is rich generosity. We often ask how much? We are looking for a standard to measure our gift. Is it enough? Is it my fair share? Will it meet the need? These are all good questions but should they ever set the limits of our gifts. How do you measure the gift of life that you have been given in Christ? His gift is priceless! Such a lavish gift should be shared with those who come across our path in life. That generosity should be a pattern in our life.

3. “Beyond their ability...!”

The story in our devotional thought today and the biblical story told in Mark 12:41-44 illuminate the truth of this characteristic. They went beyond expectation.

Voluntary Seeking To Participate In The Meeting Of Needs

Giving should be the choice of the individual. It should never be mandated by the standards of another. It is a voluntary choice not under compulsion (2 Corinthians 8:7).

Giving is the natural thing to happen when a need is discovered. We often see the world create schemes to raise money for all types of causes or groups. But in this case, these Macedonians had heard of the need in Jerusalem through the preaching and teaching of Paul. They came to him and pled for the opportunity to participate. They

were not coerced and made to feel guilty about a lack of sensitivity. Those suffering people in Macedonia asked on their own volition to participate.

Our giving should come from our own heart that has been changed by an encounter with the living God. There was a corrupt tax collector, Zacchaeus, who met Jesus. The change that took place in his life as they talked over dinner resulted in an immediate action of giving (Luke 19:2-9). He paid back with interest everything he had stolen. Jesus never personally instructed him but he chose an appropriate response to the forgiveness and new life he had found.

4. Total Surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ

Those Macedonians had not found something to add to their life, they had found a new source for life. Paul teaches us in Romans 12:1 that we are to **“offer your bodies as living sacrifices”**. This is called an act of worship. We are to place ourselves and all that we own at the feet of Jesus for Him to use in any way that He sees fit.

Often we self-centeredly attempt to please God with our service. We think that by following the rules and doing good deeds that we will be found pleasing to God. Therefore, we will be rewarded with blessings and forgiveness. We could not be further from the truth. It seems good but like all plans of man, **“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death”** (Proverbs 14:12). It is not my performance that is pleasing to God. It is my faith and trust in Him alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is faith that allows me to put all possessions and my very life at His feet for His use.

Sometimes the guilt of my past will lead me to action that looks good. I feel that I must do something to make up for my life. I make choices motivated by guilt. Those choices that were designed to get me closer to God only result in greater distance because I continue to look for the reward of peace that He should give for my good service. Bitterness will slip into my heart instead of peace as my actions are used to try and tip the scales of heaven in my favor. There will never be enough done. It was all done on the cross when Jesus said; **“It is finished.”** It is that finished work of sacrifice by my Saviour on my behalf that opens the doors of heaven to my pleading empty heart. It is the cleansing action of forgiveness that gives me the courage to yield everything to Him.

When I have given myself to my Lord there is a freedom that must be expressed. Giving is the expression of my changed life.

Call to Commitment:

Today, how does your giving reveal your relationship with God? Have you laid your life and your possessions at the feet of Christ? Is there a personal desire to participate in meeting the needs of others? Is there a rich generosity that characterizes your giving? Is there an overflowing joy that sees the opportunities instead of the obstacles? If the answer to any of these questions is no, begin where our passage says to start.

“And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will” (2 Corinthians 8:5).

Concluding the Service:

(Worship Leader:) say: “You received a piece of paper when you arrived today. On that paper you wrote the ‘one thing that would be most difficult for you to never have or do ever again.’ Please take that piece of paper and look at it one more time. If the Lord asked you, would you be willing to surrender that thing or activity to the Lord.”

“Now, take that piece of paper and tear it into tiny pieces so that only you and the Lord will remember what was written there.”

“We are going to take up another offering. As the offering bucket passes you, I ask you to place those scraps of paper in the container as an act of surrender to the Lord. Between you and the Lord, will you consider having to make the most difficult sacrifice that you can think of?”

Second Offering

Have a person trusted by the congregation receive the second offering. Set the bucket where everyone can see it until it is disposed of or burned (if you have a fireplace).

While this offering is being taken, sing “Lord, I Want to Be A Christian”.

Closing Benediction

Ask the group to stand and bow their heads.

Say: **“May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”**

(Hebrews 13:20-21)