

## Lesson 3

### The Generous Church Member

1. **Objective:** To consider and meditate upon what it means to live generously as a member of God's family, the church. This will be done by looking at a key passage on generous living, namely 2 Corinthians 8-9. To define and consider what it means to be a generous steward at Redeemer Presbyterian Church.
  
2. **Some Definitions of Stewardship**
  - a. **CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes** – The Lutheran Church: Missouri Synod
  
  - b. **CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP is grateful and responsible use of God's gifts in light of God's purposes revealed in Jesus Christ** – Episcopal Church USA
  
  - c. **GENEROUS CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP is joyfully giving away in abundance our time, talents and treasures for God's glory and his Kingdom purposes in the world. It is about living generous lives in response to God's overwhelming generosity to us in Jesus** – adapted from 'Stewardship: Planting a Church with a Generous Culture' BY Tom Wood
  
3. **Living as a Generous Member of God's Community Seen Through the Lens of 2 Corinthians 8.1-15; 9.1-15**
  - a. **Background – Paul's Collection for the Church in Jerusalem**
    - The Apostle's request to Paul – *'Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do'* (Gal. 2.10)
  
    - Paul's Strategy – *'Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches in Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of the week, each of you is put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those who you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me...at present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints...Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and present offerings.'* (1 Cor. 16.1-4; Rom. 15.25)
      - A Strategic Sign of Family Solidarity
  
      - A Strategic Call for Generous Giving
  
  - b. **The Text**
    - The God-given Grace of Generous Giving (8.1-7)

***Let me tell you, my dear family, about the grace which God has given the Macedonian churches. They have been sorely tested by suffering. But the abundance of grace which was given to them, and the depths of poverty they have endured, have overflowed in a wealth of sincere goodness on their part. I bear them witness that of their own accord, up their ability, they begged us eagerly to let them have the privilege of sharing in the work of service for God's people. They didn't just do what we had hoped; they gave themselves, first to the Lord, and then to us as God willed it. This put us in a position where we could encourage Titus that he should complete the work of grace that he had begun among you. You have plenty of everything, after all – plenty of faith, and speech, and knowledge, and all kinds of eagerness, and plenty of love coming to us from you; so why not have plenty of this grace too?***

      - The fact that the Macedonians gave was a testimony to God's grace...it was the result of what God was doing in and through them. They gave generously even though they were extremely poor (8.1-4)

- Giving generously has its priorities – first to God and then to others (8.5)
- Will you in get in on this grace? (8.6-7)
- The Motive and Power of Generous Giving (8.8-15)

***I'm not saying this as though I was issuing an order. It's a matter of putting their enthusiasm and your own love side by side, and making sure you genuinely pass the test. For you know the grace of our Lord, King Jesus: he was rich, but because of you he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. Let me give my serious advice on this: you began to be keen on the idea, and to start putting it into practice, a whole year ago; it will now be greatly to your advantage to complete your performance of it. If you do so, your finishing the job as you are able will be on the same scale as your eagerness in wanting to do it. If the eagerness is there, you see, the deed is acceptable, according to what you have, not according to what you do not have. The point is not, after all, that others should get off lightly and you be made to suffer, but rather that there should be equality. At the present time your abundance can contribute to their lack, so that their abundance can contribute to your lack. That's what makes for equality, just as the Bible says: 'The one who had much had nothing to spare, and the one who had little didn't go short.'***

- The motive and power of generous giving is the grace of Jesus (8.9)
- Be eager/ready to give generously as Jesus was eager/ready to give generously to you (8.9-12)
- There should be equality/fairness within the Church (8.13 see also Acts 2.44-45; 4.32-37)
- Radical dependence upon God good; Greedy Hoarding bad (8.13-15)
- Your life is more than your stuff (8.15)
- Fulfilling the Promise of Generous Giving (9.1-5)

***When it comes to the service you are doing for God's people, you see, I didn't need to write to you. For I know your eagerness, and indeed I boasted about it to the Macedonians, saying that Achaia had been ready since last year. Your enthusiasm has stimulated most of them into action. I have sent the brothers so that our boasting about you in this respect may turn out to be true – so that you may be ready, just as I said you were. Otherwise, imagine what it would be like if people from Macedonia came with me and found you weren't ready! That would bring shame on us in this business, not to say on you. So I thought it necessary to exhort the brothers that they should go on to you in advance, and get everything about your gracious gift in order ahead of time. You've already promised it, after all. Then it really will appear as a gift of grace, not something that has had to be extorted from you.***

- Not fulfilling your promise will bring shame (9.4)
- See it as a willing gift, not as something extorted from you (9.5)
- The Result and Goal of Generous Giving (9.6-15)

***This is what I mean: someone who sows sparingly will reap sparingly as well. Someone who sows generously will reap generously. Everyone should do as they have determined in their heart, not in a gloomy spirit or simply because they have to, since 'God loves a cheerful giver'. And God is well able to lavish all his grace upon you, so that in every matter and in every way you will have enough of everything, and may be lavish in all your own good works, just as the Bible says: They scattered their seed, they gave to the poor, Their righteousness endures***

forever. *The one who supplies 'seed to be sown and bread to eat' will supply and increase your seed, and multiply the yield of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way in all your single-hearted goodness, which is working through us to produce thanksgiving to God. The service of this ministry will not only supply what God's people so badly need, but it will also overflow with many thanksgivings to God. Through meeting the test of this service you will glorify God in two ways: first, because your confession of faith in the Messiah's gospel has brought you into proper order, and second, because you have entered into genuine and sincere partnership with them and with everyone. What's more, they will then pray for you and long for you because of the surpassing grace of God has given you. Thanks be to God for his gift, the gift we can never fully describe!*

- Negative Result: Scarcity because of meagerness (9.6)
- Give cheerfully trusting God will provide (9.7-10)
- Thanksgiving to the glory of God is the goal of generous giving (9.11-15)

#### 4. Living Generously at Redeemer

##### a. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

- What does this mean at Redeemer?
  - By **Being a Worshipper** yourself. The most important facet of the Christian's life is gaining a God-centered, worship-centered vision of life.
  - By **Serving** in Redeemer's ministries through **prayer, time, and talents**. There are numerous areas and plenty of needs for you to involve yourself. It is an expectation that our members will serve...
  - By **Giving** financially to the Vision of Redeemer. While the NT makes no command of the tithe, it expects each person in Christ to sacrificially contribute to the local church. The tithe of 10% of one's income is surely a great beginning point of learning the responsibility of giving. We require all elders and deacons to be committed to a principle of a minimum of 10% tithe to Redeemer.
  - By **Extending** the Vision of Redeemer. Each of us is responsible to '**Bringers**' and to seek to share Christ with our friends, neighbors, and family members. Redeemer is committed to an organic and relational approach to outreach. This means that we must self-consciously seek to invite folks to come and to tell people about what Redeemer is all about.

#### 5. A Challenge to Hear, Questions for Reflection, a Prayer to Pray and a Benediction to Receive

##### a. A Challenge to Hear

- 'See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in the work of his own destruction. But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the loved of God forever and ever. I will thank you forever, because you have done it. I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly (Ps. 52.7-9)

'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (the actual term is 'mammon,' the God of money' (Matt. 6.19-21; 24)

##### b. Questions for Reflection

- Would your lifestyle as well as your checkbook reflect that you are a generous giver to the Lord, his people and his cause? If it doesn't, why doesn't it?

- Do you give to Redeemer? Is it more or less than 10%? Why is this? Would you consider this sacrificial giving? Why or why not?
- The Apostle Paul urges us in Romans 12 to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. Included in this is not only our bodies, but our whole selves...our time, talents, and treasures? Have you and do you do/done this?
- Do you beg God to be able to give more than you do right now? Do you have a goal in mind with regard to how much you would like to give?

**c. A Prayer to Pray**

- Yours is the sky with its water, Yours is the land with its plants, Yours is the deep earth with mineral resources, Yours...and we arrive each day like gaping little birds...with hungers we cannot satisfy, with thirst we cannot quench, with deep inhaling of the gift of your breath, with safety we cannot generate, with rest we can only receive. You give and give and give...a gift that keeps giving. And we? We receive grace upon grace, bread endlessly, water without which we die, we receive occasionally imagining we possess. But mainly we receive and discover that the dialect of your conversation is all about gift and grace and gratitude. We take a deep breath – of your breath – and yearn to speak your idiom, because the rest is gibberish. Amen (Brueggemann, Walter. Inscribing the Text, 40)

**d. A Benediction to Receive**

- God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen (Phil. 4.19-20)