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THE GRACE OF GIVING part two

Greetings my fellow saints and heirs of the kingdom!

We pray that each of you are having a great start to this new year and are experiencing all the fullness of God in your lives!

I wanted to take a moment to thank all of you out there who have supported Living Logos Ministries over the past year! We are so thankful for our partners and for all who gave into our ministry over the course of 2014! I truly believe that your gifts have made a huge impact on God's everlasting kingdom! So I want you to know that as you sow into our ministry, you are sowing into good ground and our prayer is that you will receive a good harvest as a result.

Always remember this: **When you sow good seed into good ground, you will reap a good harvest.** There is just no other way around it... When we sow the right kind of seeds- that is, gifts that are generous and given with the right motives- we are on our way to reaping a good harvest. But this predominantly occurs when these good seeds are sown into the right kind of ground- that is, into people and ministries that God inspires us to give into and that are doing His will and fulfilling His purpose. So when good seed is sown into good ground, a harvest is right around the corner! Praise the Lord!

So, again, a big thank you to all of you "good sowers" out there! This "good ground" thanks you ☺!

Well, we began a teaching last month along these same lines on the subject of financial stewardship where we gleaned several different truths from 2 Corinthians chapter 8 concerning the laws that govern giving...

We learned, first of all, that in order for us to fulfill the admonition of being givers, we evidently must first be receivers. In other words, in order for us to give, we must have something to give. Therefore, the will of El Shaddai- the God who is more than enough- must be for us to have more than enough! Amen? We also learned that a spirit of giving comes more easily and readily when we have a revelation of the grace of God- which is God freely giving to us. Why? Because when our heart truly sees God's giving nature, it will reflect in us having a more giving nature. Praise God! And we also talked about several other principles of giving that I do not have time to recap here. So if you did not get a chance to read last month's Living Logos, I recommend you go to [www.treydickerson.com](http://www.treydickerson.com) and download it free of charge.

So this month, I would like for us to pick up where we left off and look at one more verse in 2 Corinthians chapter 8. Let's begin by looking at 2 Corinthians 8:12...

### THE GOD OF PERCENTAGES

In verse 12, Paul reiterates the key issue of our giving being our willingness (see last month's Living Logos) when he says, *"For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have."*

What Paul was saying here is that our willingness to give is the key issue- not necessarily the size of the gift. I like how the Contemporary English Version puts this verse. It says, **"It doesn't matter how much you have. What matters is how much you are willing to give from what you have."**

Do you remember how Jesus commended the widow who sowed her two mites? (see Luke 21:1-4) He said that she gave more than all the other people who were giving around her. Why? It was not because she gave more than they did. In fact, she likely gave less than everyone else. No, she gave more in God's sight because she gave more willingly and sacrificially than all those around her.

You see, when it comes to our offerings, **God does not look at the amount we give; He looks at the amount**

**we have left.** In other words, He focuses more on the percentage than He does the amount. How do I know this? Well, consider the tithe, which literally means the “tenth” (or 10%). He didn’t tell all of us to give a specific amount; He tells us to give proportionally to our income. For example, for a millionaire to give \$1,000 is not as impressive to Him as someone who has \$1000 to their name and gives \$100. Why? Because of the percentages! The millionaire actually gave less than 1% of what he had and the other individual with only \$1,000 to their name gave 10% of what he had. Therefore, the poorer individual gave more in God’s sight because he gave a higher percentage of *what* he had.

And why does God give more focus to the percentage that we give? It is because this oftentimes is a reflection of the heart. You see, as a general rule, someone who gives a larger percentage of what they have is giving honorably. And in many of these scenarios, these are thinking more about the recipient of their gift than they are of themselves since there is more sacrifice involved. Now I understand this isn’t always the case because sometimes people give larger amounts simply to be recognized or with some other ulterior motive. But, as a general rule, when people give higher percentages, they are giving more in love and more in honor than those who give lower percentages.

### GIVING ON PURPOSE

So now let’s skip ahead to 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and see what other principles we are given by the Apostle Paul concerning our giving....

In verse 1, Paul begins to recap what he said in the previous chapter by saying, “Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you.”

What he was saying in this verse is when it comes to serving the body of Christ through our giving (i.e. ministering to the saints), it was unnecessary for him to continue writing on this subject. Why? Because as he goes on to say, the Corinthian church was already willing to give and zealous about giving. In other words, he didn’t have to necessarily motivate this church to partner together with him; they were self-motivated.

So the question then is, why did he just spend an entire chapter teaching this church about the attitudes they should have regarding giving? Well, the answer is- just because you are already a giver does not mean you do not need to be taught how you can give more efficiently and effectively. Yes, you might be a tither already, but are you giving with the same motives that the Macedonian churches were giving with?

Now this is my point- we can always be better givers by both increasing the size of our offerings and making sure our motives are pure. And we *all* can do this, saints! This is why, contrary to popular opinion, we *do* need to hear teachings on the subject of financial stewardship on a regular basis.

Then in verses 2-5, Paul tells them why he felt compelled to remind them to prepare their gift beforehand... He felt it necessary to get them to go ahead and prepare their gift because, as I made the point of last month, sometimes when we make a pledge to give, we can either be unprepared or become disinterested after time passes. Herein lies a great principle concerning the stewardship of our finances...

You see, many do not give a lot of preparation or forethought to their giving. They give on the spot, when the preacher presents the need and opportunity. But, my brothers and sisters, **we need to plan on being a blessing!** What I mean is: we need to think about and make the necessary preparations on how we want to give beforehand. This is just natural wisdom.

You see, we plan for what’s important to us! So when we receive our increase (i.e. our paycheck), it is honorable in the eyes of the Lord for us to go ahead and set aside our tithe and offerings before we do anything else. This is why He gave us the principle of the tithe. It was to show us the importance of giving God the first “tenth” of our increase. Why? Because we are showing Him that He is *the* most important person in our life and that we are seeking first *His* kingdom. If you get nothing else out of this teaching, get this- because honoring the Lord with the first-fruits of your increase (see Proverbs 3:9) shows God the giving heart He is looking for. He wants to be first in our life- and this certainly includes our finances.

But the issue that the Apostle Paul was trying to prevent was them not being prepared to give when those arrived who were there to collect their offering. In other words, if they didn't make the necessary preparations and did not set aside some to give when they had it, they might have already spent it and would have nothing left to give.

But what would happen if we prepared our offerings ahead of time? As he said at the end of verse 5, "it would be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation." If we would plan ahead of time and become more strategic in our giving like Paul was describing here, this compulsive giving we see far too often in the body of Christ would run less rampant.

You see, our giving should never be done because we feel compelled to give or because we have been manipulated into it. This is why the Apostle Paul went on to say in verse 7: "*So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*"

Paul here basically summarizes all of his exhortations and admonitions regarding giving into one statement when he says to give as we purpose in our heart. I would call this: "**giving on purpose.**"

What does this mean- to give as we purpose in our heart? It means to plan ahead and be prepared to give. But it also means that we are to give how much and where our heart tells us to give. And, friends, the good news is if we give like this, we will find that we will reap much more than we have in the past. Why? Because our heart will be more in our giving! Therefore, we will be giving in a more willing and loving manner which is the key to reaping. Always remember: **Since love never fails, if we sow in love, our reaping will never fail!**

You see, giving as we purpose in our heart is an extremely important principle regarding giving because God always wants our heart to be in our actions. Above all else, God looks at the heart, and this includes our giving. Therefore, Paul admonished us to be methodical in our giving through...

- a) Giving thought beforehand to where and what we are going to give.
- b) To follow our heart and give where we feel impressed to give.

### **SOB STORIES & ARM TWISTING**

This kind of purposeful giving is obviously the exact opposite of how he told us not to give in verse 7 when Paul said, "*So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity...*" isn't it?

You see, the word "grudgingly" describes giving "out of sorrow, grief, pain, or annoyance." I believe the Message Bible describes this best when it translates this word as "sob stories." In other words, giving grudgingly would describe this emotional kind of giving that is a result of the sob stories that some people will give. For instance, this could be someone telling you a sad story in an attempt to get your emotions all stirred up to give.

Saints, **we are not to be emotion-led in our giving; we are to be Spirit-led in our giving!** This is yet another reason why it is so important to prepare our offerings beforehand as we purpose in our heart and not at a church meeting where we might be put in position to give "grudgingly."

Next, the word "necessity" literally means to give "by compulsion." You see, sometimes a person might compel us to give by giving us ultimatums. They might say, "If you don't give, we are going to go off the air (i.e. television)!" or "If you don't give, you will be cursed!" God never wants any of these types of things to be our motive for giving. As we have seen, love is to be our motive!

Again, I like the Message Bible's translation of this word; it uses the phrase- "arm twisting." Saints, we should never give when someone is twisting our arm! On the other hand, we *should* give when our heart tells us to twist someone else's arm to give. What I mean by that is we should give when our heart is so inclined to support something or someone that we are super enthusiastic about the opportunity to give!

You know, you do not have to look very far to find these ministries and organizations that use unethical methods of raising money. Now the major issue with this is these people are not concerned with *you*. More times than not, these methods of fundraising are only focused on their needs, what's best for their ministries, or are even ways to pad their own personal pockets even further. I am firmly convinced that if the church would stop supporting all of these ministries who use all of these unethical methods of fundraising and just give to the ones that are actually bearing fruit, then most of those illegitimate ministries would shut down and the ones that are actually furthering the kingdom would flourish. Amen!?!

Now there is certainly a time for a minister or ministry to make their needs known. Don't get me wrong. The Apostle Paul did this. He let his churches know of the needs of those in Jerusalem and invited them to partner together with him to help these saints. So taking up an offering or inviting people to partner with their ministry is not wrong if it is done in love- meaning, either out of love for the people their ministry is helping or out of love for the people doing the giving because of how it benefits them to give. What is wrong, however, is when the minister tries to play on the emotions of the people to give- manipulating them into one the following motives:

1. Compassion- There are ministries who will use the power of pictures to play on the tender hearts of God's people. They will flash pictures of hungry orphans in Africa or destitute widows in India. They do all of this in an attempt to make God's people feel bad and then give out of those emotions that they were manipulated into having.
2. Greed- There are ministries who will overemphasize the benefits of giving in an attempt to get people to give to their ministry out of their greed for what it will do for them. Oftentimes, these ministries make outlandish promises that "If you give 'x' amount to my ministry, the Lord will give you 'x' amount in return!" While there certainly are laws of sowing and reaping, making promises to people that if they just give to them, they will receive a certain amount in return is not true because, as we learned last month, if you give with the wrong motive, you can lose your reward.
3. Fear- There are ministries who will use fear tactics from Old Testament Scriptures to manipulate people into giving. They will talk about how we are "robbing God" if we do not give our tithe and offerings. They will even say that if we rob God, He will take it out in doctor's bills! They do all of this in an attempt to make people give compulsively even though they really do not want to.

## BOUNTIFUL BLESSINGS

So what should be the motive behind our giving? If we are not to give out of fear, greed, etc. then what should be our motivation to give? Well, let's back up to verse 6 and see what the Apostle Paul said our motive should be...

2 Corinthians 9:6 says, "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Here, Paul lays out the law of sowing and reaping to us. He says that the manner in which we sow is the manner in which we will reap. Specifically, he said if you sow sparingly you will reap sparingly and if you sow bountifully you will also reap bountifully. So what does this mean to sow "sparingly & bountifully"?

Well, to sow "sparingly" literally means to give "stingily." This would describe someone giving very little because they do not want to let go of what they possess, which is obviously rooted in selfishness. So what this Scripture is saying is that when you sow in this stingy way, you will reap in the same manner. In other words, when we are not generous and hold on to our assets, we position ourselves to receive very minimal help from God when we have a need. Now that sounds pretty serious to me, doesn't it to you?

But the good news is that you can flip that truth... The Apostle Paul goes on to say that when you sow "bountifully" you will also reap "bountifully." The Greek word used for "bountifully" literally means "upon blessing." What does this mean? It describes giving that is based upon blessing people. In other words, **we are to sow "with the purpose and intent of being a blessing" to those we sow into.**

You see, we have been given the blessing of Abraham, and part of that blessing is that we would be blessed to be a

blessing! In other words, while we have that same blessing of Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob which causes us to be blessed- to inherit wherever we set our feet and to cause everything our hands touch to prosper- there is a purpose to this blessing. And the purpose is so that we can be a blessing to others.

And this verse is saying that when we sow with the intention of being a blessing (i.e. that is our true, heart motivation) we will find that we are opening ourselves up to the floodgates of heaven- that is, being bountifully blessed in return! That's awesome, isn't it!?!

Now just think about this for a moment... It would not be such a bad thing for our extremely blessed and wealthy Heavenly Father to give "stingily" to us. For if He is the owner of the cattle on a thousand hills, then for him to give sparingly would not be so bad. Why? Because our needs can still be met with just the scraps from the Master's table! But what about if our rich God gives "bountifully" unto us? What if He purposes in His heart to be a blessing to us? Praise God! That is what I expect to see in my life! And I can assure you, when God gives with the purpose of being a blessing, you will know it and so will all those around you, for you will be bountifully blessed! Glory!

So this is to be our motive when we give- to be a blessing to the recipient of our gift! And, you know, this should actually be our goal in all we do- to be a blessing! Yes, our aim should be to bless people in all of our words and actions. For what greater joy could there be than making others happy! I see this as the epitome of godliness, for God Himself is a blessing!

### WHAT GOD REALLY LOVES

So what conclusion can we come to regarding this? I believe what Paul says at the end of verse 7 is the perfect summarization of this teaching- God loves a cheerful giver!

Friends, this is what God desires! This is the kind of giver He is looking for! He loves a cheerful giver! And notice that God doesn't just approve of this kind of giver; He doesn't just like this kind of giver; God **loves** this kind of giver!

Now our Father God loves everyone. Of this, we have no doubt. He loves all the givers and non-givers alike, for He is no respecter of persons. So if this verse says that God loves a certain type of believer, you have to know that this is referring to more than just that love that He loves us all with. No, we are talking about some serious excitement in the heart of God here! Therefore, this must be a very important characteristic and trait for God to show such emotion over it. And why? Why does God love a cheerful giver so much? It is because this characteristic perfectly reflects His nature! He is the Cheerful Giver! To me, this is such an awesome part of God's nature!

You see, He did not give us the gift of salvation because He had to. He does not meet our every need because He feels sorry for us. He does not give us richly all things to enjoy because He feels compelled to. No, God gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness because He wants to! He gave us all that He has and all that He does *cheerfully!* **The Lord loves to give because He is love and because love gives!** Praise the Lord!

So, it should go without saying that He loves it when His children demonstrate this same quality! Yes, He loves it when we, His sons and daughters, begin to act like "Daddy" and get excited about giving! It doesn't make Him happy when His children give because they fear negative consequences or because they will feel bad if they don't. No, he doesn't like this because these motives are almost always rooted in self-centeredness. Therefore, they are not gifts given in the agape love of God.

Saints, God wants us to give because we want to give! He wants us to desire to give- where we do it cheerfully, happily, and excitedly! When we give like this, we put a big smile on the Father's face! Amen!

### THE END RESULT

Now let me conclude this teaching by looking at what the Apostle Paul considered to be the end result and greatest benefit of living this lifestyle of giving...

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What would you consider to be the greatest benefit of being the kind of giver Paul just described in 2 Corinthians 8&9? Sure, it increases the fruits of our righteousness. Sure, it puts that spiritual law of sowing and reaping into effect in our lives. Sure, it fosters the joy of the Lord in our hearts and minds. Experiencing the grace of giving will produce many wonderful benefits like these, but do you know what one of the greatest benefits of giving that Paul gives us is? Let's look ahead at verses 11&12 and find out...

2 Corinthians 9:11-12 read: "while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God."

Notice that verse 11 begins with "while you are enriched in everything for all liberality." This reiterates to us the purpose for our prosperity... The Lord wants us to be "enriched in everything" for the purpose of "all liberality." In other words, **He wants us to have an abundance in everything so that we can give liberally to everything.**

And look at what this will cause... Paul goes on to say, "which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God." Do you see what this is saying!?! It is saying that when we give like these two chapters exhort us to give, it will result in an abundance of thanksgivings given to God! Hallelujah!

Can you think of any greater benefit of being a giver than this right here? Just the simple fact that those whom you give unto will begin to lift up their hands and voices and thank God for meeting their needs and blessing them! Wow! Saints, we can actually increase the glory given to God here on the earth- and we do that through being honorable vessels used to meet needs and grant heart's desires. Therefore, we can be used by God to bring many more praises and thanksgivings unto Him! That is so awesome to me!!!

Listen to the Living Bible's paraphrase of verses 11&12... It says, "Yes, God will give you much so that you can give away much, and when we take your gifts to those who need them they will break out into thanksgiving and praise to God for your help. So two good things happen as a result of your gifts—those in need are helped, and they overflow with thanks to God." Praise God! I like that! Don't you?

So, saints, let's become that chosen generation, that royal priesthood, and that holy nation that the Apostle Peter referred to in 1 Peter 2:9. Let's be that special people that proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light! How, you ask? Through being the kind of givers that 2 Corinthians 8&9 speak of- because when we give liberally like this it will certainly result in the proclamation of His praises throughout the earth! Let's give glory to our giving Heavenly Father today by being givers ourselves! Amen!?!

Until next month... Maranatha!

Victoriously,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Trey', with the date '3/20/2' written to its right.