

# The Overflowing Grace of God (Pt 1)

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well as we've been saying the theme of our service has been the grace of God that we see in Christ. We've just sung of God's grace, God's generosity in providing for all His creation. Now we're going to look further at the God's grace, God's generosity to us.

If you turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 8, we'll look at verses 1 to 15. 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 1 to 15. We want you to know brothers about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty has overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly we urge Titus that as he had started, so he should also complete among you this act of grace. But as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of grace also. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

And in this matter I give my judgement. This benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work, but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completion, completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased, that you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness, your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need. That there may be fairness, as it is written, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.

Well over the next two Sunday evenings we are going to be looking at two Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9. And this evening we are going to think about what is the natural effect of God's grace when it is poured out on God's people. And we know well in Scotland that when heavy rain falls on the mountains, it leads to streams and swollen rivers, and that all eventually flows into the sea. But what is the natural effect when God's grace is poured out on his people, on the church? If you were to read through Paul's letters to the Corinthians, one and two Corinthians, you would see all the ways in which God's grace overflows in the life of the church. It naturally leads to the building up of his church, whether people coming to Christ or disciples growing in maturity, and leads to proclaiming, the proclaiming of the Gospel. And now in chapter 8 of two Corinthians, Paul is introducing another way in which God's grace should impact and overflow in the lives of his people. And that is in the grace of giving. God's grace should naturally overflow in generosity. The input is, we'll see, is the grace of God in Christ. His death for sinners is, you might say, the rain that falls on the mountains, or the spring that wells up from the ground. And downstream, that should lead to a mindset shift of surrender.

[ 3 : 53 ] One of realizing that, all I am and all I have belongs to God. And earnest love for God for his people should well up in our lives, and that should pour out in open-handed generosity.

That's what we'll see as Paul's point. The grace of God should naturally overflow in the grace of giving in generosity. That's the main point of the passage. And I hope we'll see tonight how every single one of us is a recipient of God's grace. The question we all need to ask then is, what does it ask? Does God's grace just come to us and stop?

Or does it naturally overflow in our lives, especially to those most in need? And just to be clear from the start, while the particular application to the Corinthians was one of the financial giving, this isn't just a sermon about money. The Bible speaks of generosity in far bigger categories, far more challenging categories, actually, I would say. For God doesn't just call us to be generous with our money, a small portion of our lives, but with every part of our lives, with our home, with our talents, with our love, and maybe most challenging of all, with our time. So let's dive into the passage and look at the example first of the Macedonians and see how God's grace, see God's grace at work. So our first point, let's look at God's grace at work flowing through the Macedonians. The church in Macedonia is the perfect example, you might say, of God's grace at work. So if we just read verses one to four, I'll show you. Paul says, we want you to know, brothers, about the grace of

God that has been given among the churches in Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. So the background to all of this is that Paul, maybe about a year before writing this letter, had begun making a collection for the churches in Jerusalem and Judea that were much starving and in dire poverty because of a famine probably in the area. And he had been going around encouraging the churches to be saving up for this collection and he was going to come by and he was going to pick it all up later. And in verse four, we read that the Macedonians, so this is all Greece and Turkey area if you're thinking on the map, modern day Greece and Turkey. The Macedonians, that's the east side of Greece, they begged earnestly to be part of this collection. And Paul is holding them up now to the Corinthians as an example, an example of the effect and power of God's grace in ordinary Christian lives. First let's see the source of that generosity. That's all in verse one. Just look at verse one again. He says, we want you to know brothers about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. Notice his focus is on God's grace.

God's grace is the fount, that's the focus here. This is all about what God has done. Before he's even going to talk about the Macedonians, he's saying the focus is on God. That's why I shied away from calling this point the model Macedonians because their attitude to generosity is something that's really, really important, a real example. But more than that, first and foremost, they're a display, an example of God's grace. To just illustrate this, I was thinking, it's in some ways like one of those really impressive LEGO models you see.

[ 7 : 40 ] I've never been to a LEGO convention or one of these LEGO land or something like that. But I've seen the photos. You see the massive battleships that are built, or whole cities, castles, massive models. There's even life-sized car that you can drive made out of LEGO. These models are super impressive. I'd love to be able to build one of those. But even as you admire the model, what you admire even more is the people that designed and built it.

That's in some ways a similar way in which we're meant to admire God's grace in this passage. Because it's God who put all those Macedonian pieces together and he made them this wonderful, this amazing, marvelous model of God's grace in action. I guess we could call them the model Macedonians, really, but only if we realize that they are a model not of themselves, but they're a model of God's grace at work. And they are an amazing model, aren't they? I mean, just look at it. Look at verse 2, that they have joy in the midst of affliction. In the midst of extreme poverty, they are overflowing in generosity. These paradoxes can only be explained by God's grace being at work in their lives. This isn't natural in some ways. I mean, it's maybe natural for God's people, but these paradoxes show that God's grace must be at work in their lives. This severe test of affliction, these guys were probably as poor as the guys in Jerusalem, but they heard a collection was going on and they wanted to take part. We read that they were afflicted. They were also undergoing un-persecution, but that didn't make them turn inwards and think, I'm just going to think about me, myself, and the lion trying to guard my borders and protect themselves.

Even in the midst of that affliction, they are overflowing with joy. They're wanting to still bless others, even Christians they don't know as far as Judea. They're generous in the midst of the depths of poverty. They're overflowing with joy in the midst of affliction.

God's grace is at work in their lives. And look at the words that Paul even uses to press that point home. He's over verse 2, they overflowed with a wealth of generosity. Verse 3, they gave beyond their means. They begged us earnestly, verse 4, for the favor of taking part. You could imagine Paul visiting Macedonia and he's trying to talk about something else with them and they're like, no, no, no, just tell us about the collection. We want to be part of it. Yeah, yeah, I know we don't have much money. I know we don't have the base limit. I know we can't even give per year how much the Corinthians might be able to give in a month, but we want to be part of it. God's grace is at work in their lives.

In many ways, the Macedonians are a perfect picture of one of the major themes in two Corinthians, one of God's power, that God's power and glory are best seen in our weakness.

[ 10 : 44 ] In chapter four, Paul powerfully explains that and he gives a picture. He says that Christians are like jars of clay, like a paper bag, like a reusable plastic bag if you like, that contain the treasure of the gospel. The paper bag doesn't have much to look at, but it's inside that matters. That's what Christians are like, Paul says, treasure of the gospel inside jars of clay. And Paul says that's actually a really good thing. Why? Because it means that, well, it's obvious. When we're weak, it's obvious that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. So God's glory is seen and he gets the praise. And that's exactly what we see with the Macedonians, isn't it? They're impressive because of their God.

All of everything they do, everything that they say points to their God, points to the God of grace. And their poverty and their affliction don't limit their work either. It magnifies God's grace. You know, sure they might not have been able to give as much as the wealthy Corinthians, but instead of being impressive themselves, you know, you might say that they're a sculpture of God's grace. The Corinthians might have had big fat wallets, but actually, God, we look at the Macedonians, you know, they're like the Michelangelo, so whatever, statue of David, not because they're powerful, not because they're wealthy, because they're a sculpture of God's grace. And I'd just like to just say to you all, even just on this, we don't need to be great to be of great use in God's kingdom. We don't need to be great to be of great use in God's kingdom. Maybe that's a challenge to some of us. Maybe we're tempted to think, you know, I've got all these gifts, I've got all this energy, I've got these talents, and, you know, we're tempted to think that we're more important because of that.

That was the Corinthians temptation. They thought because they are talented, they were of more use in God's kingdom. Maybe this can be an encouragement, though, to some people as well. An encouragement to those of us who look around and think, I don't feel as talented as these other people. I don't feel like I've got as much to give. But what we see here is what matters isn't the wealth or greatness or power or knowledge or any of those seemingly impressive things. What matters is whether we humble ourselves before God and ask and allow ourselves to be a channel of His grace to others. Whether we say, whether we give all of ourselves and say, here I am, Lord, use me. God is by His grace has blessed us all in so many ways that we can give generously back to Him. You know, yes, with money. Yes, we've been blessed richly with finances that we can use in so many ways. We can pour into renovating this church to make it a better place, a more useful place for gospel ministry, but so many other ways as well. God has given us homes that we can share with people. He's given us families that we can welcome into, those who are alone, those who are lonely.

He's given us time, time to talk to people, to listen to people, to love people. God has given us so much, I could keep going on. It'd be a great thing to talk about, talk about other things. What has God given us that we can overflow in generosity to others?

One thing I really found striking was in that first reading we had in 2 Corinthians chapter one, did you notice how Paul talked about God's comfort and suffering there? Essentially, he was making the point that even our Christian experiences, even our sufferings, God can use those to be a channel of blessing to other people. He says, God comforts us in our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in affliction with the comfort which we have ourselves, with which we ourselves are comforted from God. I don't think we naturally think like that. I don't normally. That all the experiences, even the worst ones from God, God can use to be a blessing to others. That's God's grace overflowing. We see that in the Macedonians and it should overflow in our lives as well. That brings us to the second point, to excel in the grace of giving, that we would overflow in the grace of Christ.

[15:10] The grace of God naturally overflows in the grace of giving. We saw that in the Macedonians and the Corinthians really needed to see that. That was a lesson they really needed to learn, not because there was no sign of God's grace in their lives, but because this particular act of grace, this generosity was just conspicuously absent. It was unnaturally absent. If you look at me with me at verse seven, you'll see that. Paul says, but just as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of grace also. So the Corinthians were in some ways like a, I don't know, a half trained football player. They could do fancy dribbling. They could do great tackling. They could do accurate shooting, but they couldn't for the life of them pass the ball. And Paul's saying, you're doing well. You're clearly Christians. You're clearly overflowing in all these areas, but it's also clear there's something missing.

God's grace overflows into generosity in Macedonian's lives, and there's just no sign of it with you guys. You know, they might be, they're like a, you could describe them as a shower head, and you could see there's water coming out of quite a lot of the holes, but there's clearly one or two that are blocked. There's something wrong. Just a quick application here. Do we view generosity as an integral part of the Christian life? Do we view it as integral as, you know, as every other part of Christian maturity? Do we treat the absence of generosity in our own lives? Are there lives as, as severe as if we're lacking self-control, or if we're lacking holiness? Do we, do we strive after generosity the same way which we strive after the other fruit of the Spirit? Patience and kindness and love for others?

Because Paul did. He knew that this, this lack of generosity in the Corinthians was a sign that something wasn't right. That something wasn't right in their hearts. If you were to read through the whole of two Corinthians, you'd learn that while the Corinthians had originally started a collection, actually you could see that in verse 10, they'd started the collection a year ago, they'd stopped. And the reason was that they got seduced by these false teachers, these so-called super-apostles who were much more, they were more powerful in speech, in action than Paul. And actually that meant that the Corinthians started getting, you know, looking towards them and wanting to have more and more to do with them and giving their money to these super-apostles and starting to kind of put Paul away to the side and put weak-looking Paul and his weak-looking gospel of Christ crucified to the side. And so Paul spent the first seven chapters of two Corinthians trying to help the Corinthians to get their hearts right. That's the big issue in this letter, but they'd generosity in some ways. You might say it was like the litmus test of where their hearts were. They were given, they had been seduced by these super-apostles and that's where the money was going. And Paul says, you can follow the trail, you can follow the money, you can see where their hearts lie. And now he wants, as their hearts turn, as their hearts come back to the gospel, he says, well, let your giving, let your generosity be a litmus test of that. We might think it's strange for Paul to talk of generosity as a litmus test of where someone's heart is at, but Jesus actually says the very same thing, doesn't He, in Matthew 6, in the Sermon of the Mount, He speaks of laying up treasures in heaven versus treasures on earth. And He says, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. In other words, our generosity does show and demonstrate where our love is. Okay, we're not just talking about money, but it's worth asking ourselves. Let me ask you, have a chat with your spouse or a close friend. What does my generosity say about where my heart is? What does my generosity say about what my priorities are in life? What does it say about where my hopes are? Or about where my allegiance is? It might be just worth asking the question, if we're not generous with all that God has given us, why? What does that reveal about our understanding of God's grace? You see, maybe this is a chance to realign the priorities in our hearts in some ways, because that was Paul's hope and prayer for the Corinthians. He wasn't trying to guilt trip them and manipulate them into giving again. Rather, He's just saying, look, you guys are recipients of God's grace. Look at everything God has given you. Now is your chance to overflow. Now is your chance to give out from all that God has given you. Now is your chance to be a conduit, a channel of His grace, as you are meant to be. In all this, the motivation is really important, because do you notice in verse 8 Paul says, I say this not as a command. That's really important. You see, these super fossil, these false teachers, you know, are definitely just money laundering off the Corinthians. Paul's nothing like that. He's saying that all my giving should be motivated by grace, and that's why he turns in verse 9 to the supreme example of grace, to Jesus Christ. Let's just read that again. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. I've heard grace helpfully explained by the acronym God's riches at Christ's expense. And that's exactly what we see here, isn't it? In Christ, exchanging the glory of His heavenly existence for the destitution of earth, so that all who trust in Him might receive every spiritual blessing at the heavenly realms. You know, we thought about that humiliation this morning, didn't we? Christ didn't cling to His rights, but He became man. He took on human form and He

suffered and died, ultimately bearing the punishment of God's wrath on sinners. And do so, Christ created the greatest exchange in His street, didn't He? Look at verse 9.

Though he was rich, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. Through his death, he takes the sins of all who trust in Him. Christ takes the sins, bears the punishment in our place, and instead he gives us his righteousness, all who trust in Him. That's the great exchange. He gives us righteousness. He gives us forgiveness, full forgiveness for all our sins. He gives us the right to be called children of God, to call on God, the God of the universe's Father. He gives us his spirit, to change us from the inside out, to make us more like Him. As much more we could add, but that's the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. So He said, well this morning, high to low, so that we could be raised up. All we have comes from Christ. All we are comes from Christ. And that should motivate our generosity. If we look at our lives, if we look at our hearts, we've received forgiveness, relationship, children of God, we've got spirit, eternal life in Him. And so much more. Think of all the material things God has given us. Feel homes, possessions, families, energy, ability to work, money that we earn. All of these things come from God. And because it all comes from God, well, that means it's not ours really anyway. It's so easy. It's so tempting to think that, you know, the money I earn is my money. You kind of think about that as a kid when you get your pocket money, you know. This is mine. I mean, actually you don't earn it when you're a kid. Remember when you get your first job. I've worked hard. I've worked these nine hours and I'm getting that eight pound an hour or whatever I earn. This is my money. But actually God tells us that everything we have, all of our material possessions, all of our intellect, all of our gifts, that all comes from Him. And so it all belongs to Him. And the grace of Christ then should motivate us. We should follow us. We should, it should motivate us to follow His example in giving all of that back to Him. If we want a template of generosity, we can look at Jesus. There are no conditions in His giving where there are no limitations.

[ 23 : 23 ] He wasn't reluctant. He was all voluntary. You don't have to twist Jesus' arm to ask Him to forgive you. Jesus gave that all freely of His own accord. It's all motivated by love.

So the question is how will the Corinthians respond? How will we respond? We're going to zoom in particularly to the practice of generosity and giving more next week. But for now just some questions to get us thinking. Do we recognize the grace of God in us? Do we see the rich blessings that we have in Christ? It's so easy to look at ourselves and think, I don't really have much. Whether we look at our bank accounts or whether we think about our time, we count the hours in the calendar or all other things. It's so easy to think I don't have much to give. So often our generosity comes from forgetting, from forgetting all that Christ has given us. One thing that we can just do to start that ball rolling is to pray, to think and to thank God for all that we have. And the more we thank God for what we have, the more we realize what He's given us that we can give back, that we can overflow to others. It's been wonderful just over these past months seeing generosity in action. Seeing the way in which God has so blessed our efforts to do this refurbishment. We give thanks to God because we recognize that's, yeah, people might be giving money, other people might be giving money, but we thank God because we recognize it's all from Him, don't we? We recognize that God has poured out and given all of this. It's worth us always checking our motivation. Do we give as an overflow of grace or do we give because we feel obliged? It's worth even before we give asking ourselves that. Am I giving because I think I have to? Or do we meditate first on Christ and think

I want to give as an overflow of what Christ has given to me? That's how God wants us to give. What about our attitude in general? Does our open-handedness mirror? Does it resemble that of the Macedonians? I love the fact that the Macedonians were open-handed to believers that they had never met. I think that really challenges me because I just think, do I even have a fraction of that attitude towards people I know? So many people I know and yet I think so often I'm more stingy with how I give out my time and my love for people and money and everything. Macedonians didn't even know that people in Jerusalem were generous. Let's ask ourselves all today, who is God placed in our lives that are less fortunate than us? That we can bless and what God has given us? We've all been given so many things by God. They're all people in our lives. Locally, globally. We've just been thinking about steadfast global. We live in this globally connected world and we can't give to every single thing that pops up on the internet. So it's worth thinking. What particular thing is that we link to as a church? Ways in which we can give, maybe nationally, there's things like in the women's permission. We saw all kinds of efforts there, steadfast global. In my abundance, where do I see myself as a potential channel of God's grace to those who are lacking?

That's what I encourage you to think. How could we be a channel of God's grace to others? And that's what I want to close with because I think that really summarizes quite perfectly what God's vision is of grace for us. That we should be a channel of his grace to other people. And of course summarizes that in verses 13 to 15 really. He says, for I don't mean that others should be used and that you should be burdened. But as a matter of fairness, your abundance at the present time should supply their need so that their abundance may supply your need, that there's fairness. As it is written, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, whoever gathered little had no lack. God's aim is that there's no lacking. That's the point of the Old Testament quote, that those blessed with much, those blessed with much supply those with little. If you think of it like a reservoir, we're not meant to be just reservoirs that fill up and up and up and the dam stays shut. God gives us much.

But the reservoir fills up so that in dry seasons, the water can pour out and supply the need there. If we thought about ourselves like that, God's intention for you and me is that in our abundance, God might use us to supply those who are lacking. If we're financially comfortable, it might be precisely because another brother or sister isn't. If we've got lots of energy or time or family, that might be because some other people don't.

[ 28 : 36 ] God's intention is to supply their needs through us. We shouldn't be self-sufficient and self-reliant. We're put in a church family so that our abundance can supply other people's needs in every area of life. That's what the Macedonians did. That's what Christ did. So let's pray that as a church, let's pray that God will give us that same attitude to generosity, that same attitude of open-handedness and that in our weakness, that as God's grace overflows through us, that His grace will be magnified, that He will get all the glory. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the grace of Christ, that though He was rich, He became poor so that through His poverty we might become rich. And tonight, Lord, we simply pray that that would overflow into our lives. That as we meditate on the gospel and Your grace, as we recognize all You've given us, that we would each one of us overflow in the grace of giving and generosity to our church family, to others in need. Lord, we pray most of all that we would overflow in speaking of this grace, in living out and sharing this grace of Christ, His death on our behalf with others. And we pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.