



# Biblical Foundations

## Excel in the Grace of Giving

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*Now we make known to you, brothers and sisters, the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia, that during a severe ordeal of suffering, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in the wealth of their generosity. For I testify, they gave according to their means and beyond their means. They did so voluntarily, begging us with great earnestness for the blessing and fellowship of helping the saints. And they did this not just as we had hoped, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and to us by the will of God. Thus we urged Titus that, just as he had previously begun this work, so also he should complete this act of kindness for you. But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in all eagerness and in the love from us that is in you—make sure that you excel in this act of kindness too. I am not saying this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love by comparison with the eagerness of others.*

—2 Corinthians 8:1–8 (NET)

When God's people are in need, God's church responds. An eagerness to give cheerfully has characterized the church from the beginning. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul tells the story of the generosity of the Macedonian churches. In doing so, he hoped to inspire the Corinthian church—and us!—to adopt the same mindset and “excel in this act of kindness.”

As Pastor Chuck Swindoll writes of this passage, “This specific case leads to a rich discussion on the overarching principles of giving applicable to us today.”<sup>1</sup> Paul identifies four key characteristics of excellent giving that can guide our own actions.

### Excellent giving is grace-filled.

Paul mentions “the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia.” Their giving was empowered by grace and conducted with grace. This means it wasn't done with a sense of obligation. He goes on to say, “They did so voluntarily, begging us with great earnestness.” Their giving was voluntary and eager.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: New Testament Commentary*, 1 & 2 Corinthians (Tyndale House Publishers, 2017), 403.

The Macedonians did not give because they felt that they had to. It wasn't about checking all the boxes and doing everything a good Christian should do. They gave willingly, with hearts of love and abundant joy.

### **Excellent giving is sacrificial.**

Paul clarified the circumstances in which this gift was made: “during a severe ordeal of suffering, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in the wealth of their generosity. For I testify, they gave according to their means and beyond their means.”

These early Christians could have put together a meaningful gift that was both comfortable and affordable for them. Despite their own suffering and poverty, they chose to step out of their comfort zone and give in a way that perhaps didn't make logical “sense.”

Have you ever given beyond your means in a way that brought you to God in prayer and dependence? Notice that despite their sacrifice, the Macedonians experienced “abundant joy.” The philosophy of the world teaches that we can derive happiness by attempting to garner more and more for ourselves. In God's economy, however, we experience deep joy by doing the very opposite—giving to others. And, ironically, the degree of sacrifice can sometimes even deepen the joy we experience.

### **Excellent giving is worship.**

We read that “they gave themselves first to the Lord.” This gift began with God and grew out of a heart for God. The Macedonian Christians understood that loving God is our top priority, and one way we can demonstrate that love is by caring for his people.

This gift was not mere philanthropy. This was not about giving for the sake of giving, or giving to feel good about themselves. At its very heart, this gift grew out of their deep love and adoration for their Father God, a response to his grace, generosity, and sacrificial love.

## **Excellent giving is loving.**

Notice again Paul's words: "but they gave themselves first to the Lord and to us by the will of God"; "I am testing the genuineness of your love by comparison with the eagerness of others."

Giving is not merely transactional. The real aim is to make a difference in the lives of others. It provides a way for us to live out the second commandment, to love others as ourselves. The Macedonian believers saw a need among their brothers and sisters, and their eager response was to meet that need. For them, doing so was a "blessing and fellowship."

Paul wanted his readers to excel not only in faith, an edifying message, diligence, and love, but also in giving. Their giving was a test of their love.

The example of the Macedonian believers inspired Paul's first readers, the Corinthian church—and it can inspire us, too. Let us excel in the grace of giving. By doing so, we may inspire others to do the same and thereby multiply the blessing still further. Where can we invest our resources to meet the needs of God's people all around the world?