

"YOUR BLESSINGS DETERMINE YOUR GIVING"

II Corinthians 8:1-12

A man called a church one day and asked if he could speak to the Head Hog at the Trough. The secretary said, "Who?" The man replied, "I want to speak to the Head Hog at the Trough." Sure now that she had heard correctly, the secretary said, "Sir, if you mean our pastor, you will have to treat him with more respect—and ask for 'The Reverend' or 'The Pastor.' But certainly you cannot refer to him as the Head Hog at the Trough." At this, the man came back, "Oh, I see. Well, I have \$10,000 I was thinking of donating to the Church." Said the Secretary, "Hold the line—I think the Big Pig just walked in the door." (James Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited*) Now I've told Judy Bailey, our Administrative Assistant, that if anyone calls the church with that kind of a donation they can call me anything as long as they don't swear.

This morning I want to talk about another window- the window of stewardship from a biblical perspective.

Many times when churches discuss the topic of stewardship it sounds something like this: "Folks, we know you love the Lord and this church, but as many of you know, we are quite a bit behind in our giving. If every family in our church would just contribute a little extra money this month, we could be right on budget." Now that doesn't sound all that bad especially when the church needs to meet budget. And yet this is not the patter that God wants us to use to establish our giving. This is not the model God would want us to follow and one could even say this common approach is based on an unbiblical worldview.

A question: do you think the Bible gives us an exact dollar amount that we are to give back to God? NO. So it would be unreasonable to come out and say to an entire congregation, "if everyone would give X amount each week our church would be financially fine." I mean "one size" doesn't fit all, and besides this is not the way God works.

And, to let you in on something else- God doesn't ask us to give to a church or to a budget. What God asks us to do is to give from what He has given to us. Now that is a different way of looking at it, isn't it? This is a totally different approach to giving. So when we get involved in a stewardship discussion we need to keep in front of us that our blessings determine our giving. Let's talk about this truth.

Our passage today finds the Apostle Paul using the church in Macedonia as an example as he discusses giving with the Corinthian Christians. He speaks of a right attitude and a right way to respond to a need. Paul's emphasis is on the fact that the believers in Macedonia gave, verse 3, voluntarily according to their means. And **they gave proportionately, in other words they dedicated a percentage of their gross income to the Lord's work.** Now there is the Biblical concept of the tithe, or giving 10% to the Lord's work. You can read about the tithe in various passages of the Bible. That is a benchmark to shoot for and, folks,

you can go even higher. And yet maybe that is not possible for you right now at this time in your life but that could be the goal that you try and achieve. The important thing to do is **pray about what you give back to God**. The emphasis is **proportionately giving back to God**. And this proportionate giving is based on, verse 1, **giving according to the grace of God**.

Let's take a closer look at these 12 verses from II Corinthians 8 as it relates to proportionate giving. First, **the grace of God brings forth generosity** (vs. 1). These people in Macedonia had been touched by God and they gave because God, through Jesus Christ had ministered to them and they were changed people.

But there was more than just grace. Second, **it was because of affliction** (2). Now how can one's affliction or suffering influence one's proportionate giving? Verse 2 says, "For during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of

generosity on their part.” Friends, there is an important point that I don’t want us to miss and that is that **people (the Macedonian Christians) did not give as they were able. People gave as they believed**. Paul brings together suffering and giving- how do they go hand-in-hand? There is a contrast that Paul draws upon. **Their circumstances seemed to increase their generosity**. Paul probably had in mind that the Corinthians could come back and say, “There are limits to giving; others can give more because they have more to give.” But Paul had already countered this when he spoke of the extreme poverty of the Macedonians. Friends, it is difficult to imagine but in contrast to their severe trials and extreme poverty, the Macedonians’ response to the need was an overflowing of joy and generosity to the Church in Jerusalem all because they were suffering. Instead of holding back and becoming tight-fisted, which is the natural response, they gave far and beyond what anyone would have expected. What Paul is talking about seems nonsensical, anti-logic, but then when we think and act

in Godly terms it seems foolishness to the world. And so we need to look through a different window, a different perspective, a Biblical worldview. My friends, the Macedonian Christians' giving was radical, and so their gift given was in proportion to their thankfulness to God and it went beyond their circumstances.

As we approached this past November's Church Stewardship Campaign I have to be honest, I was a bit nervous given the economic forecast and ever since then the economic crisis. But I am elated to report that given all of this, we have seen an increase in pledging where at this time last year the pledges were \$239,767 and this year they are at \$245,566. Now I am not saying this is a Depression but going back the Great Depression of the 1930's when things were so bad there is example after example of how people worked together, supported and cared for one another. They survived on what they had and one of the things they had was, each other.

Friends, during the Depression, just as in Paul's day, believers didn't have much but what they did have they held out with open hands before the Lord.

Let me stop right here and ask you if this statement rings true- **the more we have, the harder it is to let go?**

The churches of Macedonia were looking through a different window, were they not? Look at verse 3 where we read, "For as I can testify, they [the Macedonian Christians] voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means." Some translations read, "according to their means" or "according to their ability." I went back and looked at the original Greek and the Greek word is *dunamin* which means **power** and so it really should be translated "according to their power." These people gave more than they were able and out of their limited resources. Folks, these people were not put on a guilt trip or manipulated to give but there was a new mindset and they were empowered to give based on their ability to give, even though their resources were limited.

There is something else about proportionate giving and we read this verses 3-5 where it say, "They voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly of the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints." Friends, these people **begged to give!** Friends, **proportionate giving is according to spiritual service.**

Through their giving they were coming to the aid, the relief of the Jerusalem church- it was their spiritual service to other believers.

Look with me to verse 5 it says, "and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God to us." Who did they give themselves to first? To the Lord, and because they gave themselves first, to God, **they responded to the need out of their relationship to God.** They gave in proportion to their thankfulness and gratefulness to God.

But there is something else- **they gave as a result of their commitment.** In verses 7-9 Paul builds the Corinthian Christians up by

telling them how they excel, he says (verse 7), "in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in love for **us** -" Paul is building them up and as a result of their commitment he says to the Corinthian Christians at the end of verse 8, "so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking." He wants them to let their faithfulness be reflected in their giving.

Look at verse 8- **Paul is not commanding them to do this out of a sense of duty but he is testing the genuineness of their love for the Christ who, as verses 9 suggests, gave His all for us.** That is why Paul says in verse 9, "our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." Christ became poor, not financially, but in the fact that He gave up His glory to leave heaven to come to earth to be like us. And in so doing He died so that we might become rich- gain glory.

Paul then tells the Corinthians in verses 10-12 to **give proportionately according to one's possessions**. Give according to your means and to give on the idea of what we can give not on what we can't give. That is the beauty in verse 12- if there is a willingness to give, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not to what one doesn't have. And this, my friends is a built in Tums for our tummies to all who feel guilty in their giving back to the Lord. If we don't have it we don't have to feel guilty but if we do have it and are holding back, well..... God is calling us to give proportionately based on our resources and according to our need. Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to give generously but not at the expense of those who were depending on the giver to put food on the table and a few clothes on the backs of their family members. So we could give until it hurts but as long as it doesn't hurt those depending on us. That is why he says in verse 13, "I do not mean that there should be relief on others and pressure on you, but it is a question of fair balance...."

So what does all of this say to us? The question or issue is not how much money we should put in the collection plates but what percentage we should return to the God who gave it to us in the first place. Think of it this way, folks, **the issue is not how much of our money we will give, but how much of God's money we will return.** This is a different way to approach the issue of giving; it is a different worldview, a Biblical worldview.

I want to share some statistics with you as it relates to Christians giving to churches in the United States today. **About 1/4 of Christians give back 10% of their income to the church.** Friends, a pastor once declared, "If every Christian tithed, every congregation would be free of financial worries and could begin to be 'salt and light.'" Another statistic is that **almost 1 out of every 3 people give less than 4%.**

How are we looking through the window of giving back to God? Do we have a Biblical worldview or a secular worldview? I want to challenge each of us to seriously look at our giving and become percentage givers and when

we talk about the tithe that can certainly be a percentage we are growing towards. Maybe if we should think of it this way- we keep 90% and we give back to God 10%. But remember this, the New Testament doesn't give a specific amount but there is a Biblical principle set forth. And the point is this- our blessings ought to determine our giving. Amen

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Introduction: A man called a church one day and asked if he could speak to the Head Hog at the Trough...

The window of Stewardship

Does the Bible give us an exact dollar amount that we are to give back to God?

The Macedonian Christians **gave proportionately...**

Verse 1, **giving according to the _____ of God**

Proportionate Giving

The grace of God brings forth _____ vs. 1

There was more than grace; **it was because of _____ vs. 2**

People did not give as they were able, people gave as they _____; their circumstances seemed to _____ their generosity

This Past November's Church Stewardship Campaign

Does this ring true- the more we have, the harder it is to let _____?

These people _____ to give! Proportionate giving is according to _____ service

They responded to the need out of their _____ to God vs.5

They gave as a result of their _____ vs. 7-9

Vs.8- Paul is not commanding them to do this out of a sense of _____ but he is testing the genuineness of their love for Christ

Vs. 10-12—**give proportionately according to one's _____**

The issue is not how much of our money we will give but how much of God's money we will return

About _____ of Christians give back 10% to the church; almost ___ out of every ___ people give less than 4%

Conclusion: our blessings ought to determine our giving