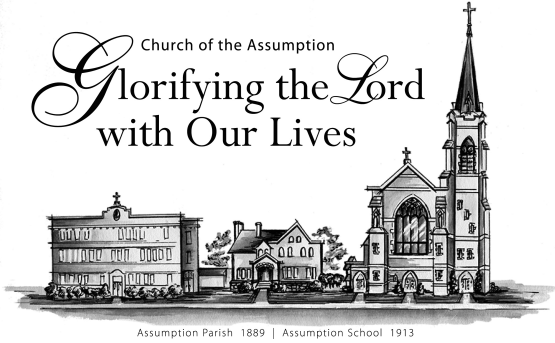


Church of the Assumption
Glorifying the Lord
with Our Lives



Assumption Parish 1889 | Assumption School 1913

THIS GRACE OF GIVING

Giving is a grace that is essential to the Christian life. It is not an extra or special quality reserved for a few “super saints,” for it is the grace that ties us most closely to our Lord.

The Grace of Rich Generosity (II Corinthians 8:1-5)

“And now brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.”

In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he pours out his heart about several topics related to the Christian’s deeper walk with the Lord, one of which is the grace of giving. It appears the Christians in Jerusalem were suffering extreme poverty, and several churches started by Paul on his missionary journeys were collecting money to send for their relief.

Enabled by the grace of God, these Macedonian churches gave beyond what was expected or even deemed possible. You could call this “sacrificial giving.” Their generosity came not from their abundance but from their poverty, even extreme poverty. There is nothing about poverty itself that makes us generous. For that matter, there is nothing about having an abundance that makes us generous. Generosity is an attitude of the heart, not a condition of the checkbook. In a time of great affliction, they were still concerned about giving to others.

The grace of giving is not something we do entirely on our own. It is giving our full consent to God, allowing Him to accomplish His purposes through us. We acknowledge that God provides all our abilities and resources. Even more, this grace of giving is dependent upon our proper attitudes, as well as upon God for wisdom and strength in the use and distribution of our gifts.

The Macedonians especially wanted to give themselves first to the Lord. When we do that, money is no longer an issue. Actually giving money was the outward expression of having given themselves first to the Lord. And then, their giving was in obedience to the divine will of God.

The Proving of Love (II Corinthians 8:6-9, 24, 9:1,2)

6-9 – “So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

24 – “Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.”

9:1-2 – “There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.”

In II Corinthians 8:6-9,24, Paul commends them for their positive spiritual depth and experience (faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, and love), then his attention focuses on their excelling in this grace of giving. How do you know when you have excelled in this grace? These other graces he mentions (faith, etc.) cannot be measured. There is no scale to determine our level of faith. Is there a way to tell if we excel in our giving? Certainly! We can measure our growth in this area by examining the extent of our giving.

In the Scriptures, we are never encouraged to compare amounts, but we are encouraged to compare the extent of the sacrifice. Equal sacrifice, not equal giving.

The ultimate comparison, of course, is with the sacrificial gift of our Lord Himself. All our giving wanes in comparison to His. Not only did He die for our redemption, His example shows us the extreme and inescapable incentive of all Christian generosity – “so that you through His poverty might become rich.” If we must compare our giving to our Lord’s, then we too are to sacrifice of our own personal good so others might become rich in their relationship with God.

Faithfulness, Willingness, and Equality (II Corinthians 8:10-15)

“And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: “He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.”

The church has suffered too often by those who start in a flurry of good intentions, and then falter by the wayside when the extent of their character runs out. Sometimes emergencies do interfere, and God knows about those. But to simply lay our commitment aside when the motivation is no longer present and the circumstances make it tough to fulfill a promise is to betray ourselves and the integrity of our character. The Psalmist declared, “Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them” (Psalm 76:11). And Solomon emphasizes “when you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it” (Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5).

Does that mean we are not to make vows to God? Certainly not! We would be anchorless without our commitments to and relationship with Him. The emphasis here is to consider seriously the vows and purpose, and then be faithful in fulfilling them.

Our means will certainly affect the extent of our giving. But an even greater influence on our giving is our willingness to do so. It is the willingness to give, not just our ability to give that will determine the acceptability of our giving. God knows that we cannot give what we do not have, but He also knows we can give what we do have. We are not judged by what we are unable to give, but by what we are able to do. So those who are giving their full potential should take encouragement from the God who sees and knows all.

What a picture of the unity of the Body of Christ – the Church. While some may be able to give more than others, and they need to, the others will contribute to the support of the Body in other ways. But whether the amount is great or small, everyone can participate in this “grace of giving.”

And as we obey God’s revealed will in our giving, we will experience both joy in Him, and the thrill of freedom from this world’s possessions.

Open your heart to hear God’s will for you.