

TAKEAWAY:

Christian generosity is not produced by pressure; it is produced by grace.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

What has generosity looked like in your life? Either on the receiving end or the giving end? (It is ok to share and not sound puffed up and prideful. To stir one another up for generosity is a good thing, not a competition.)

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

- How did this sermon help you better understand this passage of scripture? Is there anything that was mentioned during the sermon that stuck out to you?
- Did you find it fascinating that the Macedonians had joy that overflowed even in a test of affliction? How do you handle tests of affliction? With joy? With generosity? Or with fear? Trembling? Anger? Doubt?
- Have you ever given generously during a difficult financial season? What motivated you, and what did it produce in you?
- The Macedonians are described as giving beyond their means and doing so voluntarily. What does that kind of giving reveal about what they believed about God?
- What is the difference between giving because you feel pressured and giving because you feel compelled by grace? Have you experienced both? What did each feel like?

APPLICATION:

- When you hear the question "Lord, what would generosity look like for me?" what is your honest first reaction? Excitement? Anxiety? Resistance? What does that reaction tell you?
- Are you waiting for better circumstances before you practice generosity? What would it look like to give faithfully right now?

GO DEEPER:

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material.

You can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of our text from this week. Here are two "Going Deeper" discussion prompts

that build upon the above provided questions without repeating them:

Paul's Paradigm for Generosity (2 Cor 8:9): This verse moves the motivation and cornerstone for generosity away from humanitarian ethics and philanthropy and anchors it directly in Christology, establishing the incarnation and the crucifixion as the absolute models for human stewardship.

- How should our understand of the ongoing process of sanctification that is anchored in being united with Christ in his death and resurrection inform and empower our prayers and actions with respect to giving.
- If Christ's self-impoverishment was a voluntary act of grace rather than an obligation, how should this shape a modern believer's approach to self-denial and financial sacrifice?
- How does the concept of believers becoming "rich" through Christ's poverty apply to spiritual wealth, and how does this directly challenge the modern prosperity gospel's focus on material accumulation?
- What are the practical, daily implications of rooting financial generosity in Christology and the gospel narrative rather than in a "have to" verses a "get to," philanthropy, or social ethics?

The Macedonian Paradox: Joyful Generosity Amidst Affliction: The Macedonian churches—Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea—serve as Paul's primary and most compelling exemplar of generosity. Despite enduring a "great trial of affliction" and experiencing "deep poverty" (the Greek word *ptocheia*, indicating poverty "down to the abyss"), their abundance of joy overflowed into a wealth of liberality (the Greek word *haplotēs*, meaning sincerity or singleness of heart). The historical reality of the Macedonians dismantles the pervasive modern myth that one must attain financial security before practicing generosity.

- The text highlights a profound paradox: their poverty was abysmal, yet their generosity was "extravagantly rich". They gave "according to their ability, and beyond their ability," voluntarily begging Paul with many appeals for the "favor" (grace) of sharing in the ministry to the saints.
- The Macedonian believers gave joyfully out of "extreme poverty" (*ptocheia*). How does this historical reality challenge the common notion that one must achieve financial security before being generous?
- C.S. Lewis argued that charitable giving should "pinch or hamper us" and affect our standard of living. What does this level of sacrificial giving actually look like in a modern, consumer-driven context?
- How does the intersection of deep affliction and overflowing joy produce a desire to give away resources, rather than the natural human instinct to self-protect and hoard?
- John Wesley exhorted believers to "gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can." How can the first two rules be practiced diligently without violating the ultimate purpose of the third?
- In what ways does waiting for "better financial circumstances" to practice giving mask an underlying mistrust of God's character and ongoing provision?
- What specific role does the Holy Spirit play in transforming the natural human inclination toward scarcity into a supernatural, joyful posture of abundance, even in times of economic distress?

QUOTES:

- **Stanley Hauerwas:** "Materialism in America functions as a false religion because it promises a security that only God can provide. Paul's theology of giving in 2 Corinthians turns this on its head. Christ's poverty is our wealth; therefore, the church's strength is found not in its financial endowments or political influence, but in its capacity to practice radical, sacrificial sharing."
- **John Piper:** "2 Corinthians 8:9 is the ultimate foundational argument against the prosperity gospel. Jesus did not become poor so that we could buy mansions and luxury cars in this life. He emptied Himself of heavenly glory to make us spiritually rich in God. To use Christ's poverty as a license for American consumerism is a tragic inversion of the text."

- **Randy Alcorn:** "Giving is the only antidote to materialism. Giving is a joyful surrender to a greater person and a greater agenda. It dethrones me and exalts Him." He also states, "Too often we assume that God has increased our income to increase our standard of living, when his stated purpose is to increase our standard of giving."
- **John Chrysostom:** "There is but one owner of all things in the world – God Himself... Everything is God's except the good deeds of man – it is the only thing that man can own."
- **John Stott:** "The grace of giving flows directly from the grace of the Incarnation. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul presents the ultimate paradox: the rich God becoming a poor man to make poor men rich. In a culture saturated with competitive materialism, the Christian community is called to be a counter-culture marked by lavish generosity."

GROUP PRAYER: Pray the following aloud, "Lord, what would generosity look like for me in this season?", and then allow silent prayer time for the group to respond to the Lord. Ask a member of the group to close in prayer after a few minutes.