

# Giving

[2 Corinthians 8:1-9; Mark 10:21]

#2 in our Lenten series following CMCC's own LENT devotional.

From this week: THANK YOU

1. Todd Johnson, for the challenge to give generously and quietly; to be noiseless givers whose motivation is to serve you and your people.
2. Matthew Saowapon, for reminding us about our choices – what lasts and what doesn't; what is beneficial to our spiritual life and what isn't. *How many answered his question: When it comes to living for heavenly rather than earthly treasure, how do you keep yourself from being sidetracked?*
3. Emily Buller, for your affirming words of thanks to us, your church family! Your encouragement to us to express our gratitude for all that we have freely received by freely giving to one another.
4. Janet, for thinking through the meaning of Jesus words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive", and using the example of Hannah to illustrate both receiving and giving with an open hand.
5. Geoff & Heather Wilson, for illustrating this last point from the experience of Chinese Christians involved in the relief efforts following the Sichuan earthquake.
6. Sandra Scofield ...someone who describes herself as "of a generally practical mind", for your description of "Extravagant giving".
7. Richard Piet, for sharing Paul's example of generously self-giving to God and his service as an extravagant yet appropriate response to God's giving himself to us.

## **READ 2 Corinthians 8:1-9**

The vision statement of CMCC:

***"Embracing our world with the heart of God."***

...that's a giving heart

...that's a generous heart

...that's an extravagantly generous giving heart!

Mary got the point – and she responded with an appropriately extravagant gift!  
Paul got the point – and he responded appropriately describing his life and impending death as an extravagant gift to the Lord.

**Do you and I get the point?**

- That God is a giving God, and that insofar as we reflect the heart of God we reflect a giving heart;
- that Jesus whole life was identified by giving, and inasmuch as we demonstrate the authentic life of Jesus in this world we demonstrate focused and costly giving;
- that when the Spirit of God moves upon us he will lead us in the way of cheerful and gracious giving.

The passage that we read from 2 Corinthians 8 – the first part of 2 chapters about giving, Paul puts the whole basis for this church's giving in the threefold nature of God:

1. The giving of the Macedonian churches was because of **the grace of God. V.1**
2. **The Spirit of God** delights in generous giving, and "Giving" can be a gift of the Spirit – a "charisma": **v.7** "But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see also that you excel in this *grace of giving*." [See also Romans 12:8 – in the middle of a list of the gifts of the Spirit: "...and if it is in contributing to the needs of others, then give generously."
3. **The cross of Jesus demonstrates the giving heart of God:** "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

Chapter 9 ends with this summary verse: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" How do you describe the indescribable? I turn to poets to help me there!

## Mary's Song

Blue homespun and bend of my breast  
 keep warm this small hot naked star  
 fallen into my arms. (Rest...  
 you who have had so far  
 to come). Now nearness satisfies  
 the body of God sweetly. Quietly he lies  
 whose vigour hurled  
 a universe. He sleeps  
 whose eyelids have not closed before.  
 his breath (so slight it seems  
 no breath at all) once ruffled the dark deeps  
 to sprout a world.  
 Charmed by dove's voices, the whisper of straw,  
 he dreams,  
 hearing no music from his other spheres.

Breath, mouth, ears, eyes  
he is curtailed  
who overflowed all skies,  
all years.  
Older than eternity, now he  
is new. Now native to earth as I am, nailed  
to my poor planet, caught that I might be free,  
blind in my womb to know my darkness ended,  
brought to this birth  
for me to be new-born,  
and for him to see me mended  
I must see him torn.

By Luci Shaw [from *The Poetic Bible* p. 113]

### **“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”**

#### **READ Mark 10:17-22**

The rich young ruler wanted to have eternal life. *Jesus own definition of eternal life is: “knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” [John 17:3]*

Jesus taught, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” [Matthew 6:19-21]

So Jesus, looking at this rich young man and loving him, saw his heart...and said what was necessary for him to do if he was to know life with God: “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

So Jesus, looking at this rich young man and loving him, saw his heart...and pointed out what was incompatible with his present state and his stated ambition of inheriting eternal life (*knowing God and knowing Jesus*) – “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

In other words he was saying: “Your heart is owned by what you possess, and as long as it remains that way, there is no room for loving God and living His way – his generously giving way. You can’t serve God and all your possessions! Free your heart from it’s shackles; release yourself from what binds you; set yourself

free by GIVING IT ALL AWAY, and come follow me and learn what it is to have a generously giving heart in the image of God," says Jesus.

This is the calling of the disciples of Jesus: to follow him who GAVE himself wholly and completely, and who calls us to lose our lives too, and to walk in the same way and to live the same life of SELF-giving.

How is such a transformation possible? Who can turn someone around like that? Jesus can. Jesus was in the process of turning Peter around! So when Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, we have left everything to follow you!" "I tell you the truth," was his reply, "no-one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life." [Mark 10:29&30]

How is such a transformation possible? What is impossible for man is possible for God! [Mark 10:27] We need to be born again! We need a new heart, a heart that reflects his God's generous giving heart...For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

This rich young ruler needed a heart change as foretold by the prophet Jeremiah [Jeremiah 31:31 & 33]:

*"The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, **and they will be my...generous hearted, giving...people.**" And Jesus made that new covenant, that new way – the way to know God through a change of heart. That is why Jesus died on the cross, and when God raised Jesus from the dead, that was his declaration to the world that a new era had begun – one in which man could know God by a change of heart.*

**What can 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 tell us about being God's generous hearted, giving people?** A lot actually! Paul devotes an extraordinary amount of space to writing about a collection from the churches in Greece for the impoverished churches in Judea, and it's all very practical:

- Proportionate giving. 8:12

*Giving "according to what one has". In Acts 11:29 it's written: "Each according to his ability", and in Acts 2&4 it is giving to "each according to his need."*

*Karl Marx called for a society which would demonstrate "from each according to his ability" "to each according to his need." **It was nothing new!***

- Responsible giving. 8:13&14

*"...that there might be equality"*

*"Then there will be equality..."*

*Our AIDS ORPHANS EDUCATIONAL FUND is a good example of this. I remember meeting a little Afghan boy dressed very scruffily*

*selling green tea in Abbottabad. He was smart! In a short conversation he was learning English words! I remember thinking, "Where would he go if he had the opportunity?" → Brain surgeon?! Education = equality through equal opportunity!*

- **Accountable giving. READ 8:17-21**

*Handling money is a risky business! Paul was determined to do right and to be seen to do right!*

**OFFERING:** *How is this counted? How is it managed?*

*Cheques; signatures; receipts; church treasurer reports; auditors – **it all matters!***

- **Competitive giving! READ 9:3-5**

*Paul had been boasting to the churches of northern Greece (e.g. Philippi) about the eagerness of the churches of southern Greece (e.g. Corinth) to give, and this enthusiasm had stirred the northerners into action. Now Paul is sending the brothers already mentioned to Corinth to ensure that his boasting does not prove hollow, and that they will be ready with their gift as they said they would be!*

*We can be stimulated to greater generosity by hearing about the generosity of others.*

- **Regular & consistent giving. 9:7a**

*"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give."  
CMCC offering envelopes – helps us to budget and to plan!*

- **Cheerful giving 9:7b**

*...God delights to give and "God loves a cheerful giver."!*

I and my family have lived by faith for the last 30 years. In lieu of earning money we have given ourselves to serving God and relying on the freewill donations of churches and individuals for our support. We have had many special experiences of God's provision...from people responding to God's prompting, sometimes different people simultaneously → God's provision for me and my family. May God give me a similarly sensitive and generous heart to give according to his prompting! The outcome of such giving is thanks and praise to God...

→ v.11 *"...your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."*

→ v.12 *"...this service that you perform...is...overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God".*

→ v.13 *"...men will praise God...for your generosity."*

→ v.15 *"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"*

**"Embracing our world with the heart of God." Let's be:**

*Generous with love  
Generous with forgiveness  
Generous with mercy*

*Generous with compassion*  
*Generous with thankfulness*  
*Generous with gratitude.*

A little boy was asked by his Mum to clean her shoes, ready for going out later that day. He really made those shoes shine and so Mum gave him 2 x 10 Baht coins for a job well done. Later when she went to put the shoes to go out there was a lump inside one of them – it was the coins wrapped up in a little piece of paper. On the paper were the words, “I done it for love.”!

**“I done it for love” is the mark of the followers of Jesus, the followers of Jesus who make it their aim to “Embrace their world with the heart of God.”**

**Let’s go do it! For His glory. Amen.**