The Secret to Generosity
2 Cor 8:1-9

If today is your first Sunday with us, or first in a while—we are about halfway through our series on our new church covenant. A church covenant is an *intentional* commitment you make to God *and* to one another—to real people in a particular local church.

If you choose to follow Jesus along with us, here is what we do:

1—**We devote ourselves to Jesus daily**

2—**We gather weekly**

3—**We walk together as brothers & sisters**—and we walk slowly (Chip)

4—**We purse peace with one another**—we want to create a culture peace in the church; a safe place, a trusted place; a place we can find rest and healing.

5—**We give faithfully, gladly, generously**—our time, money, skills, gifting.

But here's the thing: *generosity* does not come naturally to us. In our fallen condition, we are bent more toward *getting* than *giving*. More toward greed and selfishness; when it comes to money/possessions, we are deeply broken.

> We get the birthday check in the mail from our grandparents—then immediately become possessive of that gift… which we didn't earn or deserve. We even presume on that gift year after year.

That tells you how **distorted** we are! When it comes to money, wealth, and possessions—we need God's grace. We need to learn fr other Disciples…

> True generosity is a work of GRACE. And you won't learn it from the world. Philanthropy… maybe. Charitable contributions to non-profits… possibly. But true, gospel motivated generosity… only one place for that.

The secret to true generosity! It's found in my fav passages on giving in NT.

THE SET UP (vv 1-3)

Let's start in v. 1— **read v 1**

When Paul says **grace of God** here in v. 1 he is not talking about salvation. He is talking about human generosity—which Paul views as a gift of God's grace. In other words, when people are generous with their money or possessions that's evidence of the grace of God at work in *and* through them.

> This offering becomes "a visible sign of an invisible grace." (N.A. Dahl)

v. 2—read it

The generosity of the Macedonian Christians becomes all the more compelling when we realize the context of their giving. They were not wealthy. Not at all.

In fact, they had reason not to give. Notice the language of v. 2:

> "Severe test of affliction" = probably refers to persecution from the surrounding culture.
>
> "Extreme poverty" = they were struggling to even survive financially

In the past, some commentators argued that the Macedonian Christians never had wealth or prosperity. It was just a depressed area. But what we now know is that they were actually a prosperous city. Which leads Craig Blomberg—highly respected scholar—to conclude that their economic crisis was probably form of persecution. This was first century cancel culture…

So, on hand you have the self-centered Corinthian church whose disunity was hindering their mission to world—on the other hand, the Macedonian Xns suffering persecution keep looking outward; want to support Paul's mission of church strengthening / church planting (esp in Jeruslaem). The Kingdom of God has captured their hearts! They gave sacrificially ***"Beyond their means!" (v 3).***

This proves again what we learn in the gospels—"**that those who have the least often give the most."** Remember the widow with two small coins?

Why do those with the least often give the most? Because they are learning to treasure God himself more than the things they don't have.

> *Where your treasure is, that's where you will be also.*

THE SECRET (vv 5, 9):

Now we come to v. 5—and find the secret to generosity. What is it?

> [READ v 5]
>
> **Secret:** *they consecrated themselves fully and freely to the Lord; they became an offering before giving an offering.*

What does the Bible mean when it speaks this language? To give yourself to G.

> It's the idea of a sacrifice or offering; like when a worshipper would bring their sacrifice to the temple.
>
> > Like **Abraham** was ready / willing to sacrifice his Son, Isaac on…
> > Like **Aaron** the H Priest would offer the lamb for atonement.
> > Like **Jesus** who would offer himself as the once and for all sacrifice… to purchase our redemption and bring us back to the F.

Drop down to v. 9—the most impt. verse in these two chapters on giving…

> For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2 Cor 8:9)

So, the secret to generosity works like this: I come to faith in Jesus X and I am so moved by his grace toward me that I just want to give myself fully in return.

> This is what **Jesus** was calling us to in the Gospels… **Mark 8:34-36**
>
> > It's what **Paul** has in mind… **Rom 12:1-2**

Trans
So, we have the **set up**… the Macedonian Xtns (their example); then we have the gospel **secret**—following Jesus into his life of full surrender for us; and out of all that, flows **the habit of generosity**.

THE HABIT:

Read vv. 6, 7, 8—this is the language of faithfulness / intentionality.

Readiness to give / *faithfulness* in giving / and *generosity* are all over these two chapters (8-9). Generosity with our money/ possessions; our time / energy.

So, places like this in the NT lead us to include the habit of giving and generosity as one of our main commitments in our **member covenant.**

Here is what habit # 5 says:

> **We give faithfully, gladly, generously**—
> of our time, money, skills, and gifting.

We give:

Faithfully (2 Cor 8:11-12)	both *readiness* to give and *faithfulness* to complete it = signs of God's grace in you
Gladly (2 Cor 9:7)	read v. 7
Generously (2 Cor 9:6)	read v. 6

Close:

So, I want to close this message with a story about generosity—from my new favorite novel—*Theo of Golden*. If you have not read it—**NO Spoliers**…

[SLIDE]

Theo is an 86 yr old man who moves from *NYC* to a fictional southern town named *Golden* in Georgia. First day there he finds a coffee shop on main street. Great coffee but it also has *portraits on the wall by a local artist*. Charcoal sketches / brilliantly done.

But **Theo** finds out no-one seems to buy the portraits. He thinks that's a shame! Because the quality of the art is so good… so, he comes up with a plan to purchase these portraits / make contact with the person in the picture / and hopefully give it to them as a simple gift.

But this presents some problems: he's new in town / doesn't know how to get in touch with people; and isn't it strange for an old man you never met to set up a mx w/ you to give you something? Who trusts a person like that?

Theo purposes to do it anyway: kindness/generosity are worth the risk.

As the story unfolds, **we learn to trust Theo**… as do the people to whom he wants to give a portrait. The first bestowal is to a young lady—a 30 something CPA. Her name is Minette (listen to this):

[Scene— pp. 34-37]

There is so much **generosity** at work here:

Generosity in his *disposition*; in his *words*; in the gift of the *portrait* itself; in the moment of the *bestowal*; and *giving of himself in relationship*.

What you will love about Theo is that he is **constantly giving himself away.**

Just like the Macedonians… who gave themselves first to the Lord… then to us.

And even more importantly… Theo reminds us of Jesus Christ who so freely and willingly gave himself away.

Read it again: 2 Cor 8:9!