

One BRMC Small Group Study

Giving in Grace

Leader's Guide

Please note that this study guide accompanies the pulpit sermon on 2 August 2020. The suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study.

Scripture Passage:

Focus verse: 2 Corinthians 8:4 (NIV)

Complementary verses: 2 Corinthians 8:1-12 (NIV)

Context:

Last week, we were reminded of what it means to steward what God has given us, which is the value of our lives. This week, on the occasion of Pledge Sunday, we are encouraged to dedicate our pledges to the Lord, as we bring these commitments seriously before God, in stewardship of all that God has given us. This commitment should be an outflow of our prayerful and sacrificial obedience to God, to return a small portion of what He has abundantly bestowed on us. It is also a significant opportunity to participate in God's work in our community, nation and the world.

Introductory

1. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-12, why did Paul share about the condition of the Macedonians and what they were doing?
 - Paul was raising funds for the church in Jerusalem: "the collection for the Lord's people" (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). He wanted to challenge the church in Corinth, and was using the Macedonian church as an example for the church in Corinth to model after.
 - Paul was reminding the Corinthian church about their previous commitment. (v6) The year before, they had been the first to desire to give and to give. (v10)
 - Paul was urging them to complete their pledge according to their means. (v12)
 - Paul was administering a "test" of "the sincerity of [their] love by comparing it with the earnestness of others."(v8)
 - Paul highlights certain specific issues that led the Macedonians to desire and beg to give:
 - o the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches (v1)
 - o even in the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity (v2)
 - o they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own (v3)
 - o they understood the principle of the grace of giving.

2. Paul sets out (v4-5) key reasons why the Macedonians were able to urgently plead to give beyond their means? What is your view on these key reasons and do you think these key reasons are applicable today?

- Paul says the Macedonians understood and practised (v4):
 - o Privilege (or grace) – *charis* - of giving, and
 - o Sharing (or fellowship) – *koinonia*
 - o in the Service (or ministry) - *diakonia*
- Paul emphasised that “they gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to [them]” (v5)

a. *Charis*: the privilege or grace of giving as a response to God’s sacrifice and grace.

- Pastor Jeremy (sermon on 2 August 2020): “Don’t be mistaken, Paul was not using the Macedonians as an example of moral virtue. But rather, he was using them as an example of the grace of God. Paul was challenging the Corinthians to experience afresh what Christ has given to them and done for them through His Sacrifice on the cross. We too should remember that like the Corinthians, we have been given much, and I’m not referring to material gifts, but we have been given the riches of salvation, and we have been qualified, because of Jesus, to share in the inheritance of the Kingdom (Col 1:12). ... Give as one who has received the grace of Christ and in thanksgiving, respond to God’s sacrifice.”

b. *Koinonia*: it is in communion (or fellowship) that we share.

- Pastor Jeremy (sermon on 2 August 2020): “I speak not just of the Holy Communion, which certainly reminds us of our inseparable bonds of kinship in Christ, but also of **the spiritual fellowship with Jesus and with one another that we share.**”

“When we pledge, we are not just giving to the poor, as we all should, we are not just giving to good causes, as we all should as well, but we are giving to the body of Christ, of which you and I are a part of. You are giving to family.”

“[O]ur communion with one another is not built on shared values or common interest. The communion that we share is one that we have through participating in Christ Jesus. So our pledges and gifts to the church are not because the church runs great programmes or you have close friends in the church, or just because you are a member, but because we share together in the communion of Christ Jesus.”

c. *Diakonia*: it is our commitment to Serve.

- Pastor Jeremy (sermon on 2 August 2020): “God has given you your possessions, materials resources, and even your time and energy for you to steward it for the mission of the Gospel. ... [W]e pledge and give in grace to the church, because we are committed to the mission of the Gospel. **The church exists for no other reason,**

than the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the earth and your gifts and pledges are a sign of your commitment to this mission.”

“We are transformed by the love of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit to bring the truth and love of the gospel to our nation, the region and the world. And you **give because God has called you to participate and commit to serve in this mission.**”

Reflection

3. The Corinthian church was apparently a wealthy church, and was the first to have the desire and to actually give, yet they may have had concerns and were therefore not fulfilling their original pledge. The Macedonian church was in the midst of trial, yet they were more than willing - they urgently pleaded to give.
 - a. Do you identify more with the Corinthian church or the Macedonian church? Why?
 - This question does not intend to suggest that one church is bad and another is good, but given that Paul uses the testimony of one church to challenge other churches, that same challenge can also apply to us. The question is intended to provide opportunity to reflect on where each person is currently at, in terms of the grace of giving.
 - This is an opportunity to invite your group perhaps first to share whether they made a pledge in 2019. Some may not have made a pledge and there is no need to ask them why, but if they wish to share, perhaps re-emphasise that the group must be a safe place and that everything shared within stays within.
 - A useful follow-up question for those who did pledge, is whether they have fulfilled their pledge (i.e. given the amount pledged or given even more than what they pledged). This is something to share, to encourage and build up the group.
 - b. Is there something positive that you can learn from either or both churches? How would this integrate with your understanding of giving as an act of grace, fellowship, and service?
 - The Macedonians were able to have such conviction because:
 - o The Macedonians had overflowing joy which combined with their extreme poverty to produce rich generosity. (v2)
 - o The Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord. (v5)
 - o They may have remembered with more grace, the grace given to them, i.e. the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake, He became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (v9)
 - The Corinthian church was quick to respond to the challenge to give, they were the first to desire to give and to give.
 - Both churches would appear to have believed in the cause to give, had the faith to respond, and were perhaps at different points in their faith journey.

- It may be useful to lead to the issue of where we place our trust. First, we have to reflect on the notion or principle of giving (Question 2) and whether we agree with the principle of giving; then we might consider the conviction to pledge, which leads to the next question ...
4. Do you feel the need to give to our local church – BRMC? If you don't, would you share why? If you do, how would you determine the amount to give?
- The first part of this question is an opportunity to reflect and share on what may have been alluded to in answers to the questions above. But perhaps to allow for more specific sharing on why they would or would not give to BRMC. It is an opportunity also to return to the key reasons for giving and participating in the "grace of giving".
 - Not out of obligation, not out of appreciation for the work done or the programmes.
 - A reason why some may not pledge to give to our local church is because they feel they are contributing to God's works elsewhere, such as God's work with the migrant workers or the homeless. It is, of course, excellent to give to all or any of God's works and for the end of poverty and the service of justice. Yet, if it was not already discussed above, perhaps allow for some discussion on the giving to BRMC as our family and community. BRMC is our local body of Christ, the community and family that we belong to.
 - The second part of this question refers to the prayerful consideration of how much to give. The Macedonian church even in their extreme poverty, gave generously (v2), and Paul testified they gave beyond their ability (v3).
 - Paul challenged the Corinthian church to "excel in this grace of giving" (v6).
 - Paul reminds the Corinthians that what is important is their willingness, and that the gift is acceptable according to what they have, not according to what they do not have. (v12) It may be suggested here that there is a need to caution against recklessness – and to anchor our decision on a consultation with our Heavenly Father, who is the source of all our provision.
 - We can also be reminded that we give out of our abundance, that all that we have belongs to God, and Jesus' words: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required." (Luke 12:48b)

[Gentle reminder to create an atmosphere of love and care. Don't judge if someone is giving a smaller portion of his income but recognise the willingness, commitment and faith he is showing.]

Application

5. Are there hurdles to you prayerfully offering your pledge to God? What steps might you take to live as the Macedonian Christians did – "In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity"?
- The reality of life is that there will likely always be hurdles and challenges to giving. This may be the reason that Paul chose to highlight the works and faith of the Macedonian Christians.

- The root issues should have already been discussed in the questions above. The opportunity here is to allow the members of the group to pen steps that they can take to live out their role in the body of Christ and the mission of the Church through our church.
- The question also provides a slightly different perspective ... PRAYERFULLY offering the pledge. Do members of the group prayerfully commit or consult with God before they decide to give? How much do they feel the need to consult God or do they rely primarily on their own "wisdom"?
- Another opportunity is for the group to bear witness for one another. As Paul was able to testify to the faith of the Macedonians, so too we can bear witness to the expression of faith in our group. For example, where the group prays together and the Holy Spirit impresses on them what they should give. This would be an incredible testimony.
- Remembering that we can always communicate a change to our pledge at any time with the BRMC church office.

Prayer

6. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session.

(a) What is in your heart for yourself?

- Perhaps you need to confess that you have fallen short in your confidence in the Lord and to affirm your desire to draw near to God:

God our Father,
 Your Son accepted the mission You gave Him
 and fulfilled it to the end.
 It has cost Him everything He had and was,
 but it also gave Him everything:
 the lasting glory of the resurrection
 and the gift of life for all of us.
 We thank You
 for the supreme revelation
 of Your love in His death.
 We ask You in His name
 to be drawn to Him
 and to be pulled out of our selfishness.
 Give us faith in the fruitfulness of His way of life.
 Teach us to live love
 not as an easy word
 but as a genuine, costly deed.
 Thus may His mission
 come to fulfillment in each of us,
 today and every day, for ever and ever. Amen.

Taken from: Certain as the Dawn (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, Inc., 1980) p106-107.

(b) What is in your heart for others?

- Perhaps you feel led to pray for those who are struggling under these difficult times. Give them to the Lord and pray also for ways in which you can provide practical help:

“Merciful Father, I thank you for *(name/s of family and/or friend/s)* Lord I trust that you are Sovereign over their life. I commit *(name/s of family and/or friend/s)* urgent needs to you and rely on Your promise that You will cause all things to work for the good of those who love You and are called according to Your purposes. Give me wisdom as to how to minister to them and show them how much You love them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

- It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.