

12. Following the example of the Great Giver

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Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 00] Well, good evening, friends. We're continuing with our studies in the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians, and perhaps we turn with me now to chapter 9, and you'll find this on page 968 in our church Bibles, if you have one of those. Two Corinthians, chapter 9, and this is the second of two chapters, 8 and 9, in which Paul deals with the important question of the collection of money that he's wanting the Corinthians and other churches to gather together for the sake of the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

So chapter 9 and verse 1. Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.

But I'm sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove vain in this matter, so that you may be ready as I said you would be. Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you're not ready, we would be humiliated, to say nothing of you, for being so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

The point is this. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

[1 : 43] Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

As it is written, he has distributed freely. He has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. Amen. This is the word of the Lord and may it be a blessing to us this evening.

[3 : 26] I'll do let's open our Bibles again at 2 Corinthians chapter 9 on page 968. And let's again bow our heads for a moment of prayer.

We remember, dear Father, that the Apostle Paul greatly encouraged his younger friend Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel and not to be ashamed of Paul either.

And we acknowledge that your servant Paul wrote your words and speaks your words to us. And therefore we pray that you will give us open ears to understand what he was saying to the Corinthians and indeed what his message means to us today.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to be putting 2 Corinthians to bed for a few weeks after tonight.

But God willing, I do hope to return to it a bit later in the summer for the final four chapters, 10, 11, 12, and 13, which really form a section within the letter. And they pack a bit of a punch as well.

[4 : 48] So we have something I hope to look forward to a little bit later on. But as I said earlier, this chapter 9 is the second of two chapters which form this section on Christian giving.

And in particular, I say this really for those who perhaps weren't here last week, Paul has been concerned for many years for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea who were poor,

financially poor.

And what he's doing here is teaching the wealthier Christians of a city like Corinth, but there were other Gentile cities to whom he brought the same message. He was teaching them to dip deeply into their pockets and get together a substantial sum of money, which Paul and his companions could then take to Jerusalem and give to the Christians there to make their lives more comfortable. And part of Paul's reason for doing this is to do with Jews and Gentiles within the Christian church. He wants the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians in the various churches to realize how deeply they belong to each other, that there's only one church of Christ, not two churches.

There was a certain pressure in those days to keep the two groups apart. He wanted them to realize that there's one family, not two families of Christians. And therefore, the Gentile Christians can show their unity with the Jewish Christians by supporting them financially in a time of need.

[6 : 12] And Paul envisages a time in 2 Corinthians 8 when perhaps at some future point the Gentiles might need to be supported by the Jewish Christians if the Gentiles became poor. Now, before we get into the details of chapter 9, let me point out something lovely about the way in which Paul teaches his readers to be generous in their giving.

He doesn't say to them, be generous because I command it. What he says is, the Lord God is extraordinarily generous himself.

And our job is to follow him and imitate him. In other words, Paul grounds his ethical teaching not so much in his own authority, but in the goodness and kindness of God himself.

Now, we have a prime example of this in chapter 8. If you just glance back to chapter 8, verses 7, 8, and 9. In verse 7, chapter 8, verse 7, Paul has said, see that you excel in this act of grace also.

And then in verse 9, he says, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich.

[7 : 28] And why does Paul say that? Because the example of Jesus is the example to follow. Paul is saying, look at the amazing, gracious behavior of Jesus towards us.

How he was prepared to lay down all his riches for our sake so as to make us rich. He has pioneered the way. He's shown us how to behave, how to lay aside riches and give them up for others.

So let's follow his example. Now, this is consistently Paul's way of teaching Christian behavior or Christian ethics. He draws attention to an aspect of the gospel or an aspect of the character of God or the behavior of Jesus.

And he then says, brothers and sisters, because God is like this, we are to conform to his example. Because Jesus has behaved like this, let's follow his example.

Just to give you another example from Paul's teaching from a different area of ethics. Do you remember the way he speaks to Christian husbands in Ephesians chapter 5 and teaches them how to behave towards their wives?

[8 : 33] He says this, husbands, love your wives. So we might say, well, on what grounds? By what authority? He says, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

So Paul doesn't command Christian husbands to love their wives on the ground of his own authority as an apostle, but rather on the basis of Christ's behavior. Now, that makes the ethical teaching infinitely stronger and more lovely and more attractive.

And we'll see in a moment how Paul does a similar thing here in 2 Corinthians chapter 9. If the authority for ethical behavior is based merely in human forcefulness, it doesn't carry anything like the same weight.

You'll remember, well, you won't remember, but you'll remember of it. You won't remember unless you're very, very old. But there was a famous poster that was displayed all over the country early in the First World War.

And it was a poster designed by the government to attract new recruits into the army. and it showed the face of General Kitchener, Lord Kitchener, the commander-in-chief of the British Army. And his finger, I think, was pointing out of that poster and he was saying to the reader, your country needs you.

[9 : 51] And Kitchener, you may remember, had a massive bristling mustache on his face like a pair of squirrels. And that seemed to add to his authority. Now, Paul doesn't issue commands from behind the bristling mustache of his human authority.

Paul, of course, had great authority, but that's not the way he does it. He turns instead to the love of God and the grace of Christ. Christian behavior, he is saying, will always be a reflection of how God has behaved towards us.

God is the generous giver with a capital G. That's why we too can be and should be generous givers. And this is really the way Paul frames his teaching in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

Why does God love a cheerful giver? To use that phrase from verse 7 here, a cheerful and generous giver. Surely because he himself is such a gracious and lavish giver.

As verse 8 puts it, you Corinthians are able to abound in every good work because God makes all grace abound to you so that you have all sufficiency in all things at all times.

[11:02] or look at verse 10. You can sow and harvest lavishly and abundantly because God is the one who supplies seed to the sower and bread to the eater and he's not stingy.

So we're able to follow his example. And then look at the very last verse of the chapter, verse 15.

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift by which Paul probably means the gift of the Lord Jesus and all that comes with that gift.

Salvation, redemption, forgiveness, the promise of eternal life and so much as well. So Paul's point is that God is the giver.

God is always the giver. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. So as we get into the details of chapter 9 this evening, let's see those details in the light of Paul's big theme.

Verse 8, God is able. Paul, verse 10, God supplies. Verse 15, God gives a gift so great as to be inexpressible.

[12:08] We learn to be givers because God has given and because God continues to give lavishly and Paul is teaching his readers, ancient and modern, to follow the Lord's example.

We're now turning to chapter 9. I want to take it in three more or less equal sections, verses 1 to 5 and verses 6 to 11 and finally verses 12 to 15.

First of all then, verses 1 to 5 where we see gentle provocation from the pastor. Gentle provocation from the pastor.

Real love wins the right to do a little bit of teasing. I think we see a little bit of teasing here. You don't dare tease people with whom you have a stiff and starchy relationship.

But real love welcomes teasing and gentle humor. And although Paul's subject here is so serious and so pressing, I think we can feel his gently provocative tone.

[13:06] Look at verse 1. Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints. Superfluous. That means over the top or unnecessary.

It's quite unnecessary, my friends, for me to write to you about your gifts to the Christians of Judea. Nevertheless, I have just spent 24 verses of chapter 8 writing about it and I propose to give you another 15 verses now in chapter 9 just to make sure because I'm perhaps not quite convinced that you are entirely persuaded that this is a good thing to do.

Then the gentle teasing goes on in verse 2. For I know your readiness. Now that word, I think, is a teasing word. In fact, he's used that word back in the previous chapter, chapter 8 verse 11.

Just look back there. So now finish doing it as well. You've been desiring to do it to get your collection ready. Now finish doing it as well so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

So he's saying readiness to give this money is one thing but completing the task, actually doing it, is another. It's like the difference between promise and performance.

[14:21] performance. It's one thing to promise something or to assert that you're going to do something. It's another matter to actually do it. Hillary, are you ready to climb Everest?

I am. Well then, son, go and do it. Now look at the way Paul writes in verse 2 about the Corinthians' readiness to collect their money for the poor Christians in Judea.

I know your readiness, he says, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia. Now just think geography for a moment. Macedonia is the northern part of Greece and Philippi was one of the leading cities up there and one of the main churches that Paul would have been at and probably he was writing to the Corinthians from Philippi up in the north.

So he's telling the Corinthians in this letter how he's talking them up to the Macedonians. So he's obviously saying to the Philippians regularly, do you know, brother Philippians, brother Macedonians, what a wonderful bunch they are down in Corinth.

Oh, they're generous, they're warm-hearted and loving. They'd give you the shirt off their back if they could. And they've been in the starting blocks of readiness to give. Oh, since last year. [15:37] They can't wait to get going. They're just waiting for the starter to fire his pistol, then they'll be racing off down the track getting their money together. Now back to verse 2. I've been saying such nice things about you, brothers, and your zeal for this project is infectious because it's stirring up most of the Macedonians now to follow in your footsteps.

Now notice the but in verse 3. But, despite my boasting of you to the Macedonians, I am going to send the brothers to you at Corinth so that our boasting about you may not prove vain as, may not prove vain in this matter so that you may be ready as I said you would be.

And then we have verse 4 which is all about potential egg on faces. If some of the Macedonians were to come with me to Corinth and find that you weren't after all ready to give your money, we, I, Paul especially, would have egg on my face and you would even more.

You'd be humiliated and I would have to regret being so confident of your willingness to give. The whole thing would be terribly embarrassing, brothers. So, verse 5, I've made sure that the brothers are going on ahead to make certain that your gift is ready.

We don't want that kind of embarrassment, do we? And it needs to be ready not as an exaction but as a willing gift. Now let me point out something else here which may bring a smile to our faces.

[17:09] In these first four verses of chapter 9, Paul is telling the Corinthians about how he has been boasting of them to the Macedonians.

But if you look back to the first few verses of chapter 8, you'll see that there he was boasting of the Macedonians and how generous they were to the Corinthians.

So in chapter 8, he was saying to the Corinthians, our Macedonian brothers have been unbelievably generous. So imitate them. And in chapter 9, he's been saying to the Macedonians, our Corinthian brothers have been ready for the starting guns since last year.

So imitate them. So he's praising each group up to the other so as to stimulate their enthusiasm not to be outdone by the other group. He's stirring up their zeal by means of comparisons.

Now a cynical reader might want to say, come on, Paul, that's a bit sneaky, isn't it? A bit underhand. You're playing off one group against the other. That's not really very straightforward. Now if we said that, I don't think we'd be understanding Paul correctly.

[18:19] Let me suggest a simple parallel by way of illustration. Just imagine for a moment that you were the chief executive officer or whatever the top man is of the Scottish Rugby Football Union.

Now if you were in that position, head of the RFU in Scotland, you would want to stimulate all the top teams to do as well as they possibly could and to do better than they are doing.

So on one occasion, you might journey down to Hoyk in the Borders where they have a strong rugby team and you might gather them together and say to the players, do you know what they're doing up in Glasgow these days?

They've got a new program of training and it's really improving their stamina and their fitness. Let me tell you all about it because I think if you were to take it on, you too would be much the better for it.

And then shortly afterwards, imagine him visiting Glasgow and telling the Glasgow rugby players about the improvements in administration that he'd noticed at Hoyk when he went down there and how their club is making great progress as a result of their new administrative setup.

[19:22] Now if you did that, praising the one club to the other, you wouldn't be playing off one group against the other. You'd simply be enthusing each group by reference to the other. You'd be helping both because you've got the interests of both clubs at heart.

Now surely that's what Paul is doing here. He has got the interests of both the Macedonians in northern Greece and the Corinthians in southern Greece at heart. He wants to see each group learning generosity as they follow the pattern of generosity set for them by the Lord.

He loves the Corinthians and he loves the Macedonians and he loves the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem as well for whom this money is intended. So let's allow Paul to speak to both ends of Greece simultaneously without suspecting him of unworthy motives.

In the most loving way and with this touch of provocative gentle humor, he's stirring up both ends of Greece. And it's lovely to read what Paul wrote to the Romans.

I think I quoted this last week but it's worth quoting again. He wrote this to the Romans about a year after writing to Corinthians. This is Romans chapter 15. I'm on my way to see you as soon as I can but at present I'm going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.

[20 : 43] For Macedonia and Achaia Achaia really means Corinth for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

Now that proves that the Corinthians did get off the starting blocks and they got their money together so their promise in the end was matched by performance. And Paul's gentle provocative tone with them issues from the love in his heart for both of these churches.

And like everything else in Paul it's something for us to imitate not least when we talk about money. In fact I think we had a good example of this in this very hall in this very spot four evenings ago at our church meeting when we looked back and looked forward.

You won't all have been there but let me just tell you what happened there. Our treasurer stood here on this very spot and she spoke briefly about the state of our finances and our giving. And amongst other things she said do you know I realized the other day that I hadn't reviewed my standing order in favor of the church for something like three years.

Now she didn't slap herself on the wrist but what she was doing, what she was saying was really I've been somewhat remiss. I should have increased my giving a year or two back but I never got round to it but I'm going to get round to it now.

[22 : 01] And then she said I might just not be the only one that's in this position. Now my guess is that the result of that brief, gentle, provocative, humorous, self-deprecating speech, I reckon the result of that will be that many of us including I must say yours truly are also reviewing our giving to the Lord's work at the Tron church.

If Paul can stir up his brothers and sisters in Corinth and Macedonia to be more generous then it's certainly right that we should do the same to each other. So there's the first thing, gentle provocation from the pastor and he does this because he loves them and he loves the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

Now Paul is only able to do this because he knows about secondly the abundant provision that comes from God. And here we'll look at verses 6 to 11.

You'll see he introduces the theme of God's rich provision in verse 6. The point is this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

So he dips here into the world of agriculture or horticulture and he states what is obviously a law of agricultural productivity. Sow sparingly, reap sparingly, sow plentifully, reap plentifully.

[23 : 33] It looks obvious but Paul is aware that the Corinthians need to learn that principle just as I'm sure we do as well. Just to illustrate this, I'm very much an amateur gardener but for years now I've been growing potatoes in pots.

What I've done is to take a large plastic pot, my pots are about that deep I guess, something like that, and quite big around and I filled these pots with compost or soil right up to the top and I've taken one seed potato and I've stuck it in only about three or four inches below the surface and I've covered it up and watered it and all the rest of it and then we get some potatoes.

I was over in Ireland last summer and I got talking to an elderly man who is a very keen and very experienced gardener and I was telling him rather pleased with myself about my method and he looked at me as if I was a total ignoramus and he said to me, one potato, only one, what you need is three or four potatoes in each pot and don't plant them up near the surface like that, stick them down towards the bottom and as the little green shoots come up cover them with compost or soil gradually and tease them up to the top of the pot till eventually they come out of the top, he said you'll have so many potatoes you won't be able to carry them into the kitchen.

So this year I'm following his method. Now it's only the second of June and it'll be July or something before we're ready so I might tell you about that later. Or perhaps I won't tell you, I'll have to see. But I think his point was you put plenty in and you'll get plenty out. Now with Paul you see this is obvious isn't it? Sow bountifully and you will reap bountifully. So that's Paul's point in verse 6.

[25 : 20] Obviously he's talking here about money and not potatoes and he's telling us that if we give generously our giving will be very fruitful and very productive. In other words it will achieve great results and bring great blessing to others.

Now if verse 6 gives us what you might call a law of sowing and reaping, verse 7 is about the giver's attitude as he opens his wallet or rings up his bank to change his standing order.

So look with me at verse 7. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver.

Hasn't that verse saying that there are two ways to give? One is reluctant and stingy. You sign your check with gritted teeth and even with tears running down your cheeks and say I don't want to do this.

It hurts me too much. But the other way is cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver. In fact the Greek word that Paul uses here is the word *hilaros* from which we get our word *hilarious*.

[26 : 33] God loves a hilarious giver. In other words a giver whose heart is warmed with pleasure as he writes his checks and makes his standing orders. Pleasure because he thinks of the happy fruits of his giving.

He can say to himself this money is now going to help bring the gospel to more and more people. Which is better? To shell it out for the sake of the gospel or to leave it sitting in my bank account where it's only going to prosper the bonus culture of the banking industry?

Now it's at verse 8 where Paul the wise pastor shows just how much he understands the human heart. He's just written verses 6 and 7 sow bountifully and give cheerfully and he knows how the typical human heart is going to respond to that namely with fear and trepidation because the human heart says if I sow bountifully and give cheerfully might I not run short?

Don't I need to keep as much as I possibly can against a rainy day? What if my health were to break down? What if I were to lose my job? What if my pension providing plans were to be scuppered?

Now those are the anxious questions which Paul answers in verses 8 to 11. In verses 8 to 11 he's saying to the Corinthians trust the Lord God to provide for you.

[28 : 02] you can because he has unlimited resources. God is able. Those are the first words of verse 8. God is able.

And they sum up everything that Paul is about to say. It's because God is able to make all grace abound to you so that and notice the *alls* here so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times you may abound in every good work.

In other words you can give freely and without worry because you can trust God not to let you go under financially. And then in verse 9 Paul quotes from one of the Psalms.

He is distributed freely. He is given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. Now when you first read that quotation you think it's a description of the Lord. But it's not.

When you read the Psalm itself you find it's a description of the man or woman who fears and trusts the Lord. It's a Psalm about the godly life. It's a description of the life which is characterized by enduring righteousness.

[29 : 09] And the Psalmist says that the godly person distributes freely. Freely picks up the ideas of bountifully and cheerfully from verses 6 and 7. And this freely given distribution of money is a hallmark the Psalmist is saying of the kind of life that pleases the Lord.

God. And Paul picks up this theme of righteousness or godliness in verse 10. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase notice this the harvest of your righteousness.

And what Paul is doing there is opening out the theme of sowing and harvesting from the narrow focus of financial giving to the broader focus of the whole of our lives.

Paul's point is that God is very generous and he is going to multiply all your resources, money and time and energy and talents and everything else and the fruitful godliness of your life will be wonderfully increased and extended.

So what he is saying is that our financial giving is only one element in a much bigger view of the fruitful Christian life. Paul is concerned for much more than just the Corinthians financial generosity.

[30 : 29] He knows that if they can learn financial generosity it's going to benefit the godly fruitfulness of their lives in many different directions. And this means for us that if we can learn to be generous and cheerful in giving our money our generosity in money terms will act as a key that unlocks the growth of godliness in many other parts of our lives as well.

The Christian who serves the Lord wholeheartedly and trusts the Lord wholeheartedly and gladly expends lots of time and energy in the Lord's service will inevitably grow into a generous giver as well.

He or she will be a cheerful person as well as a cheerful giver. It's the tight-lipped person who is likely to be tight-fisted. Generous giving becomes part of a generous character.

That's why Paul goes on to say in verse 11 you will be enriched in every way for all your generosity. It's not simply that the Lord will look after you financially. Your whole life in all its dimensions will be enriched.

So learning to be generous is part of learning to be godly. We are neither generous nor godly by nature. But by God's grace we can learn these things and our lives will be very much enriched by them.

[31 : 52] Now here's a question. Does Paul mean us to understand that if we're generous in our giving we'll never be short of money or food?

The answer I think is clearly no. Because Paul himself was often close to the bread line and was sometimes well below the bread line. just look across to chapter 11 verse 27 where he's describing some of the realities of his own life.

11 27 Here is Paul. It was often like this for him. In toil and hardship through many a sleepless night in hunger and thirst often without food in cold and exposure.

That was the reality for him. Paul's income his financial income came from two sources as far as we know. First he was supported by the churches particularly the Philippian church and secondly he supported himself to some degree by his manual work as a leather worker and a tent maker.

But despite that he was often without food especially I think we're meant to understand when he was on his long journeys. So his deep understanding of generous giving and his practice of generous giving did not ensure him against financial hardship and yet his experience was that the Lord brought him through all his trials.

[33 : 26] He discovered that it was possible to be generous even when he was relatively penniless and the reason why he was able to be generous was because he discovered that in the words of chapter 9 verse 8 God was able to give him all sufficiency in all things at all times.

And in the words of verse 10 that the one who supplied seed for the sower and bread for food would sustain his life in every part. So we need to bear that in mind and see what Paul is saying in the context of his own life which was sometimes a life of shortage.

So there's the second thing. It's the abundant provision from God that sustains Christians and enables us to be generous. And this divine provision producing Christian generosity leads to the third thing which is a grateful response from the Lord's people.

Verse 11. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. Now what he means by through us is that the Corinthians' generous gift is going to be transported by means of Paul and his companions to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. And the thanksgiving to God will arise in the hearts of the poor Christians in Jerusalem as they see with amazement what the Corinthians have sent them. Just look at this Granny Solomons, this great sum of money and it's come all the way from Greece.

[35 : 00] Greece. Praise be to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What Paul is highlighting in verse 12 and 13 and 14 is the sense of wonder and joy that he anticipates is going to be felt in Jerusalem when Paul gets there with the money.

He just can't wait to see the faces of the Jerusalem Christians lighting up. It's like when you take a special gift, a costly gift, and give it to a friend and you can't wait to see their face light up as they unwrap the paper and see what you've brought them.

The importance of thankfulness in Christian hearts is never far from Paul's thinking. Verse 11, your generosity will produce thanksgiving to God.

Verse 12, this service, that means this gift of money, is not only meeting human need but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. And he develops his thought further in verse 13 where he pictures the Jerusalem Christians approving of the gift and glorifying God.

Glorifying means well it's a mixture of thankfulness and amazement and joy at God. Why? Because of, and this verse needs a bit of looking at, verse 13, because of the Corinthians submission flowing from their confession of the gospel.

[36 : 23] And that means the Jerusalem Christians will look at each other and they will say, these Gentile Greeks, these Corinthians, really are converted, aren't they?

They're not just superficially professing to believe the gospel of Christ. This money they've sent shows that they're really submitting to Christ. Their submission, their knuckling down and living out the Christian life and sending us this generous gift proves the soundness of their confession.

And Paul anticipates yet another lovely consequence in verse 14. He pictures the Jerusalem Christians longing for the Corinthian Christians, longing to see them, longing to talk to them and eat with them and enjoy fellowship with them and wanting to pray for them as well, wanting to call a prayer meeting so that they can pray for their brothers and sisters in Corinth and ask God to bless them as they have blessed us.

So you can feel something of Paul's excitement as he relishes the prospect of taking this money to Jerusalem and seeing how the money and the generosity that lies behind it knits together the hearts and the prayers of the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

And then finally, in his joy, he blurts out the last verse of the chapter, thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. It may be that he's turning his thoughts to Jesus at this point, Jesus the greatest gift of all that God has given to the world, or possibly the verse is best translated in the way that J.B. [37 : 56] Phillips does. Thank God then for his indescribable generosity to you. What message is Paul putting into our hearts through this chapter?

I think it's this, that God is the great giver, God is the fountainhead of all generosity. If I can put it like this reverently, generosity is his middle name.

He loved the world so much that he gave. And his people reflect his character and his characteristics. So whatever the size of our financial resources, let's be generous.

Our human nature, Paul is battling with this here, our human nature will cry out, be cautious, remember the rainy day, remember your retirement.

But Paul says, our God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

[38 : 59] Therefore, the message is we can trust him. That's Paul's message. Let generosity become the habit of a lifetime. Let it be the hallmark of the life of God's children, just as it is the hallmark of their heavenly father.

And then we shall discover, in the words of verse 12, that generosity not only supplies the needs of the saints, it also overflows in many thanksgivings to God.

Let's pray together. Your gift, dear heavenly father, and your generosity to us is the things inexpressible.

We can't put it into words. We stand so entirely in your debt, and yet you have so lovingly dealt with us beyond our deserts. So please have mercy upon us and help us to think in the way that the apostle Paul thought.

Help us to learn the things that he taught the Corinthians, and help us to see the great blessings that flow from Christian generosity with the thankfulness that it brings from so many hearts.

[40 : 14] And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.