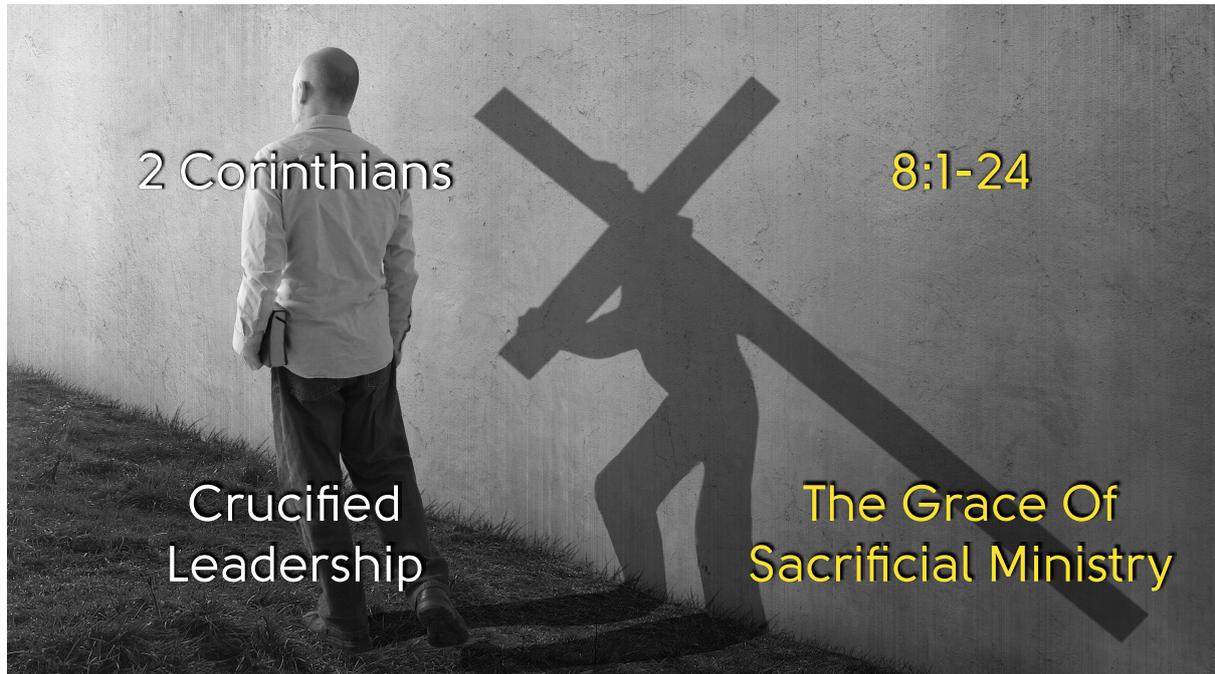


**The Grace of Sacrificial Ministry**  
**2 Corinthians 8:1-24     September 18, 2022**



In my time as a pastor – I have had many in this church ask to see me.

You always wonder what is coming – a confession, a theological question, a request for counsel, a complaint.

But one really common question is this – Pastor, how do I know if I am really saved?

When I read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, I am fairly sure that if you asked the Apostle Paul that question – there is a good chance he may well respond like this:

You want to know if you are saved? Fine, then run me through exactly how you are doing in your stewardship of God's resources. Let's start with this – run me through exactly how you are spending God's money?

I am not just talking about how much you give. Stewardship includes our motives – why you gave, our actions – was it sacrificial and our testimony – did we do right before God and man.

Without doubt – money is a barometer of our heart.

Luther said this – the last part of a person to be converted is the wallet.

Jesus Himself spoke more about money more than any other subject.

Giving generously and sacrificially is incredibly hard.

Look, I can't prove this – but I suspect that money is so important to many of us that the reality is we would rather die than give sacrificially. I have wondered what many would do if they had this choice:

Give 80% of our current assets to the work of the church and missions – as well as 50% of everything we earn for the rest of our lives.

**Or** die a martyr's death.

I think too many wealthy western Christians would say – if that is really my choice – better send me into an Iranian mosque with the gospel.

They would rather die and go to heaven than live a much more modest life here.

Stewardship **is** one of the great tests of our faith.

Throughout the book of 2 Corinthians Paul has been testing the faith of the Corinthians.

In fact, at the end of the book in 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul says:

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test.

Here in chapters 8 and 9 – at the heart of the book – he gives an immensely practical test.

How do I know I am saved? **Do I give like a saved person?**

How we use the resources God gave us stewardship over – time, talents and money – is a reflection of whether the Spirit of God is actually at work in our hearts.

We are working our way through the book of 2 Corinthians.

Paul wrote this book because a group of men – self-styled super apostles – turned up in Corinth declaring they were the right ones to lead that church not Paul.

They taught a false Jesus and a false gospel – so the stakes were enormous.

2 Corinthians is Paul's defence of his ministry and pleas for the church in Corinth not to move from the true gospel.

I have titled the series on this book – **crucified leadership**. And I want to sum up this book this way:



**A saint with character shaped through adversity is a saint God can use.**

**A saint with character shaped through adversity is a saint God can use.**

In this book, Paul gives the Corinthians and us a long series of:



**Marks of crucified leadership.**

Leadership in the church is not like leadership in the world.

The head of the church is a crucified Saviour so the leaders of His church must exhibit crucified leadership.

This morning we come to the **tenth** mark:



### **Tester.**

What do I mean by this?

Look down to chapter 8 verse 8. Paul says:

I am **testing** the genuineness of your love.

He says – I am not commanding you to give – I don't need your money – I am doing this because I want to test you so you will know if your faith is genuine and be blessed.

Because we love our people, Pastors test the genuineness of our people's faith.

Why? Because if you are struggling in the faith – a test that says – the Spirit is at work in your heart is a blessing.

And if you are failing the test – you can evaluate where your heart really is at and deal with it.

When we read the Gospels – the area Jesus spoke about far more than any other as a test of faith is this – what do we do with our money – or more accurately – what do we do with His money?

Chapters 8 and 9 go together.

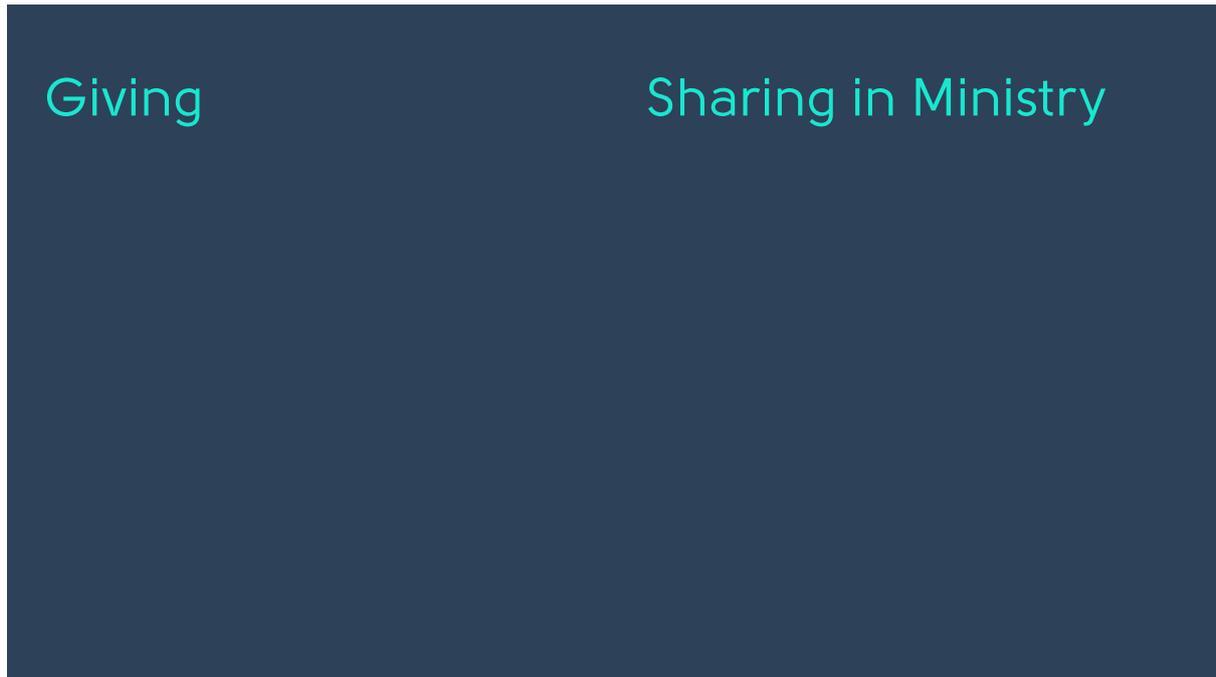
Now, if I asked you what you know about chapters 8 and 9 – what would you say?

I think most of you would say – these are the ‘*giving*’ chapters.

*They are – and they aren’t.*

The reality is that Paul only uses the term ‘give’ in relation to money once – way down in 9:7 – God loves a cheerful **giver**.

Instead, Paul uses terms like sharing in ministry or completing an act of grace.



When he is framing this discussion, look at how Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 8:4:

They begged us earnestly for the privilege of **sharing in the ministry to the saints**.

He doesn't say:

They begged us earnestly for the privilege of **giving**.

I think this is because the term *giving* can give the wrong impression.

Giving

Sharing in Ministry

Ownership

Stewardship

**Giving** sounds like I **own** the money. It belongs to me so I can do what I want with it.

**Sharing in ministry** makes it clear – we are but **stewards** of *God's* resources and we are to use what He entrusts to our care for ministry purposes.

Haggai 2:8:

“The silver and gold belong to me”—this is the declaration of the LORD of Armies.

Job 41:11:

Everything under heaven belongs to me.

And in case anyone objects and thinks – no – I worked hard for what I have – no one gifted me anything – Deuteronomy 8:17–18 says:

You may say to yourself, ‘My power and my own ability have gained this wealth for me,’ but remember that the LORD your God gives you the power to gain wealth.

If you worked hard to get a degree, set up a business and by the sweat of your brow earned what you have – well remember it is God who gave you the brain, the strong limbs and the tenacity to earn it.

That is why Jesus repeatedly frames everything we have as a stewardship.

We think my money, my house, my resources, my occupation, my position in society, my family – actually it all belongs to Him.

Jesus uses the term talents to show it is more than just money – your time, your abilities – everything you have and are – whatever you have it is just a stewardship. You have nothing – you are nothing – except God entrusted it to you.

And the day will come when we have to give an account for our stewardship.

And understanding this makes a huge difference in how we view things.

|                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Giving             | Sharing in Ministry |
| Ownership          | Stewardship         |
| We do God a favour | He does us a favour |

**Giving** – sounds like it is ours so we are doing God a favour letting Him have a bit of our stuff.

**Sharing in ministry** – sounds like it is God's stuff and He is doing us a favour letting us use it and be blessed by it.

## Giving

Ownership

We do God a favour

If I give my money  
it costs me

## Sharing in Ministry

Stewardship

He does us a favour

If I use God's money  
it blesses me

### **If I give my money it costs me.**

If it belongs to me – giving it away sounds like it is loss.

What was mine has now vanished into the black hole of church finances. It can no longer bless me. It is gone.

Money is my reward.

But sharing in ministry – stewardship – gives a different perspective.

### **If I use God's money it blesses me.**

Stewards are rewarded by the Master for how they handle His assets.

He blesses us now. He supplies our needs, He gives us the blessing of fellowship and peace, the privilege of participating in seeing the kingdom expand across this world **and** everything we use and infinitely more is laid up for us in the world to come.

The blessings of wise stewardship are eternal.

If you view money as yours then the story of the rich young ruler is one we might repeat.

One of the great passages on stewardship comes from the words of David in 1 Chronicles 29:10–18. Among the things David says in that passage are these:

**Everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to you.**

**... And we have given you only what comes from your own hand.**

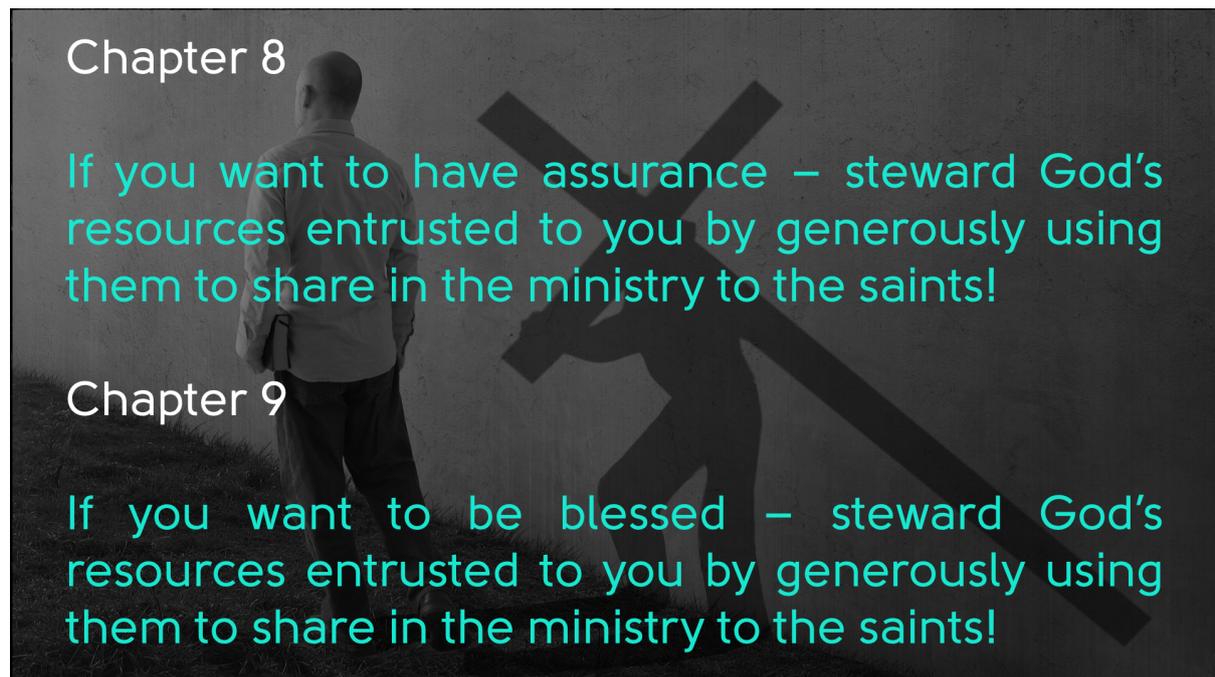
And then this:

**I know, my God, that you test the heart and that you are pleased with what is right.**

Everything is God's. What we have to give is only because we are stewards over God's stuff. And how we handle that stewardship is a test of our heart.

Paul sees things exactly the same way.

So, if I wanted to use Paul's terms, I would sum up these chapters like this:

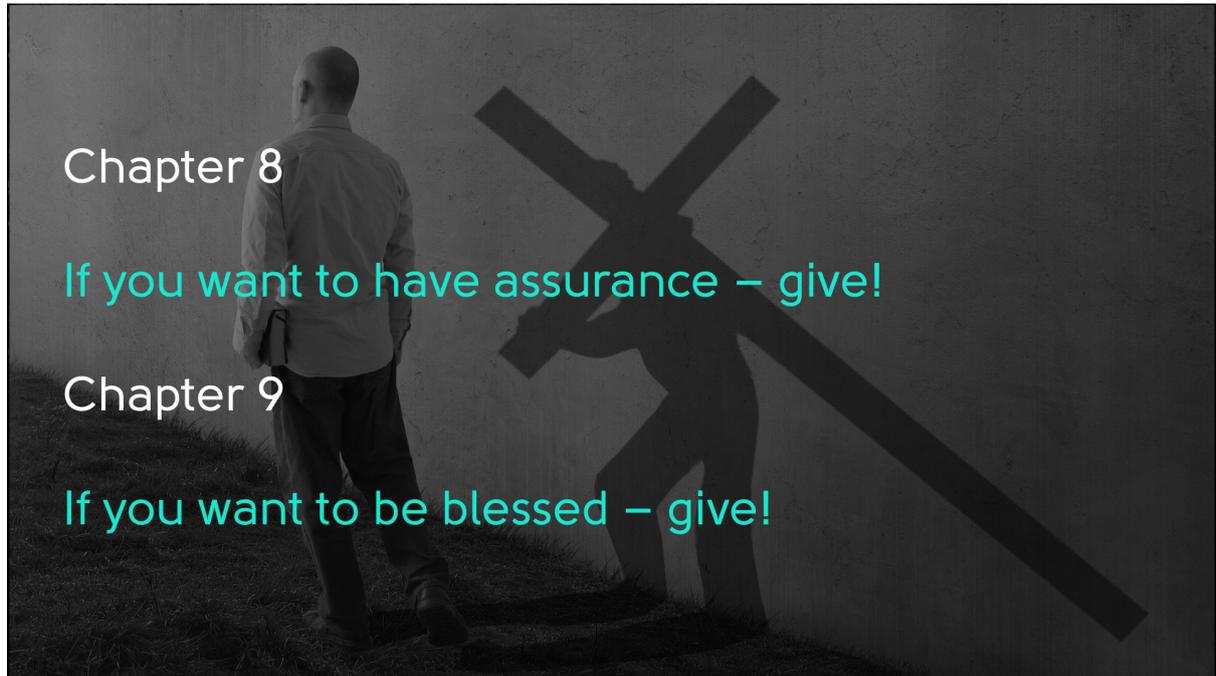


**Chapter 8 If you want to have assurance – steward God's resources entrusted to you by generously using them to share in the ministry to the saints!**

**Chapter 9 If you want to be blessed – steward God's resources entrusted to you by generously using them to share in the ministry to the saints!**

It is accurate – but it doesn't really sing.

So instead – I caved in and summed up these chapters like this:



**Chapter 8 If you want to have assurance – give!**

**Chapter 9 If you want to be blessed – give!**

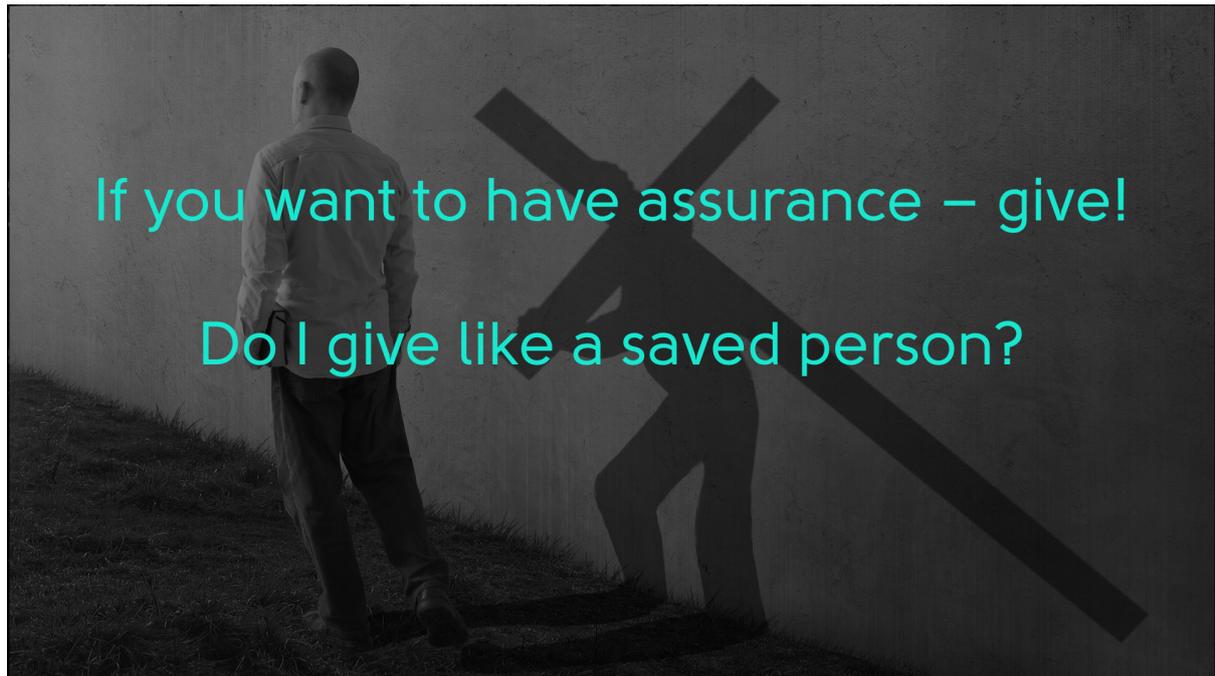
So here is the point of this morning's message:



**If you want to have assurance – give!**

**If you want to have assurance – give!**

Or putting it as a question:



### **Do I give like a saved person?**

But when I say this – remember – these are God’s resources temporarily entrusted to you.

So, what Paul is saying is this:

### **How we steward God’s resources tells us whether God’s grace is at work in us.**

Don’t misunderstand this. Just because you give a small fraction or even a large fraction of your income doesn’t mean you have a place in heaven. There is no percentage giving that says – saved.

But if the Spirit of God is at work in you such that you are cheerfully using God’s resources in your care for His glory – then you can be pretty sure you are His.

Look, there is not one person in this building who does not squirm a bit when the subject of money and how we use it comes up.

But that is not a bad thing. Putting our faith to the test is a good thing.

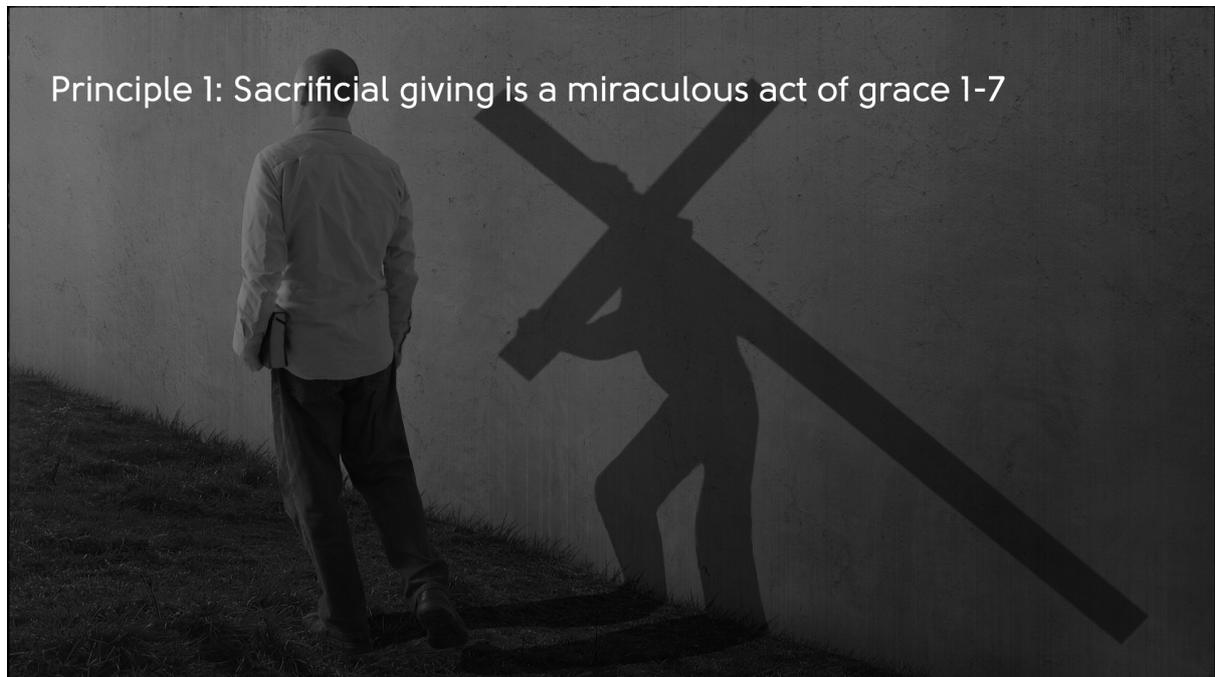
Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. This church is wealthy and affluent.

But despite this they had listened to the super apostles who said – we are God’s men and if you give to us – you give to God and if you give to God – He will make you Kings – He will bless you with even more money.

Instead of giving to worship God – they were giving to bless themselves.

This whole man-centred approach was incredibly dangerous to their spiritual health.

In this passage, Paul gives us four principles and then gives us a test of each principle. Here is Paul's first principle.



### **Principle 1: Sacrificial giving is a miraculous act of grace 1-7**

Paul says – no one gives sacrificially for ministry unless the Spirit of God is at work in their heart.

Even Spirit-filled Christians balk at giving – it is so unnatural.

2 Corinthians 8:1:

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia.

The word **grace** is a key word in chapters 8 and 9.

When you hear the word '**grace**' – what do you think?

Probably something like this:

# GRACE

## An unmerited loving gift

### **An unmerited loving gift**

So, when Paul says – let me tell you about the grace given to the churches in Macedonia – the idea that he is speaking of a gift might make us think of a blessing such as – the gospel has impacted that area such that many have come to faith.

But what we will see is that he means – let me tell you about the great blessing – God graced these churches with the ability to give sacrificially and cheerfully for the gospel despite their poverty.

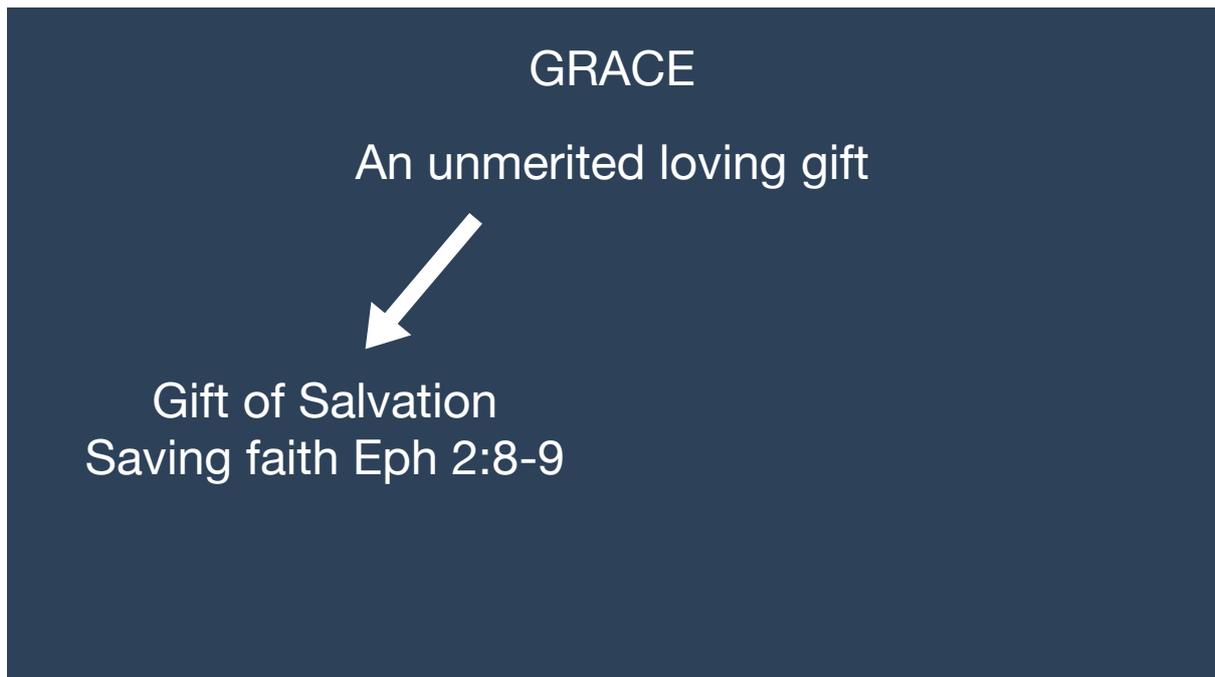
Think about this for a moment. These churches are poor and God gives them the gift to give away what little they have.

Many of us would say – thank you for the offer – but that doesn't seem like a particularly good gift to me.

What Paul is going to do in this chapter and in particular in chapter 9 is to say – actually this is an incredible gift.

Why does Paul call this – grace?

Grace is an unmerited loving gift.

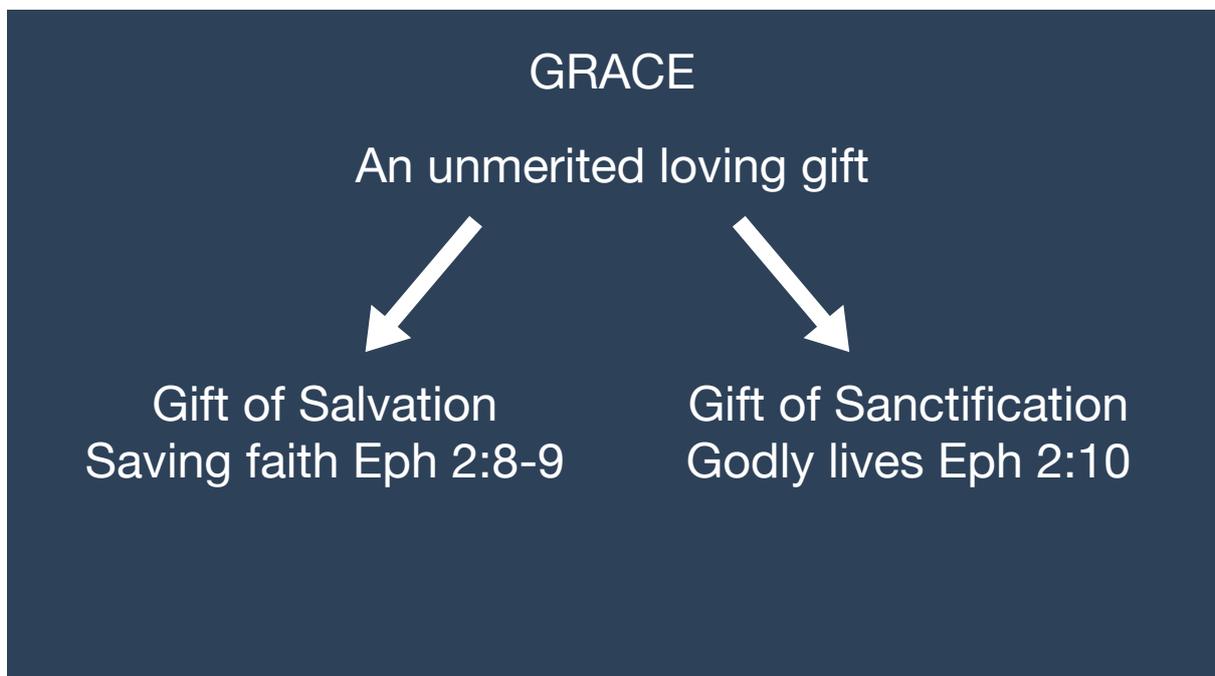


The **gift of salvation** is *one* gracious gift.

Ephesians 2:8-9.

**But** here is the thing many of us fail to grasp.

The Scriptures are very clear – there are *other* gracious gifts that God gives. In particular:



**The gift of sanctification.** The gift of empowerment to live godly – Ephesians 2:10.



# GRACE

An unmerited loving gift that enables us to use  
God's resources sacrificially and cheerfully  
to benefit the work of the kingdom

An unmerited loving gift that enables us to use God's resources sacrificially and cheerfully to benefit the work of the kingdom.

This is such an unnatural act – such an unnatural response – it proves the Spirit of God is at work in us.

A couple of things.

You don't give *in order to* get saved. If you do that – then you are wasting your money. Better off having a nice holiday.

You give *because* you are saved.

Grace saves you and grace empowers you.

Many are happy to accept the grace that saves – but many would prefer not to have grace that leads them to extraordinary acts of Christian living.

Many think like this – if God gives me the desire to empty my wallet to help others – that does not seem like a gift to me.

So, if it is all the same – I want the gift of salvation – but God can keep the gift of sacrificial giving.

Paul is clear – first – they go together. If you have the grace of salvation – you have the grace of godly living.

And second, we need to realise that this is actually a wonderful gift.

Paul is not being sarcastic in any way – he sees being enabled to give generously as a great blessing not just to others – but to us. We will come to that next week.

Finally, I also want to point out that this grace to give is related to – but not the same as the spiritual gift of giving.

Some Christians are blessed with an ability to give in ways that are supernatural in ways beyond what most Christians have.

But just as some have the gift of evangelism, yet all Christians are to evangelise – so too – some have the gift of giving, yet all Christians are to give sacrificially and cheerfully.



Look at verse 2:

During a severe trial brought about by affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

Macedonia was not an overly wealthy part of Europe – certainly not like Corinth.

But, you would not say it suffered from extreme poverty.

However, the churches there were severely persecuted and the believers had trouble getting employment and as such they were some of the poorest citizens in those cities.

Now, when Paul turned up in Macedonia to wait for Titus, he talked about the collection he was organising from Gentile churches to aid the Jewish saints in Jerusalem.

This was a project close to Paul's heart.

Jerusalem had significant need.

The city was overpopulated and its resources were severely strained.

Things were worse for Christians – they were bitterly persecuted. In Acts 8 we read that many eventually were driven out of Jerusalem and were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

For the saints who remained just surviving was tough.

But as well as meeting practical needs – Paul had another reason for the Gentile churches helping the poorer saints in Jerusalem.

It was to build *gospel unity*.

When you read the New Testament – it is very clear the early church went perilously close to splitting into two. Into a Jewish church and a Gentile church.

But this would have destroyed a key message of the gospel – we are **one** in Christ.

And we need each other.

This collection would be a practical demonstration of this unity.

I think Paul did not expect the Macedonians to have to give so generously – they had enough difficulties. In fact, they could have done with a little financial help themselves rather than giving.

But it seems he mentioned that the Corinthians were eager to help and that spurred the Macedonians to want in. We want to be blessed too.

Their abundant joy in Christ could not be quenched by their extreme poverty and it overflowed in a wealth of generosity.

Verses 3 and 4:

I can testify that, according to their ability and even beyond their ability, of their own accord, they begged us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints.

Let me frame this.

Most missionaries go to churches and basically beg for support.

Paul goes to these churches filled with impoverished Christians and they beg him to allow them the privilege of giving to the Jerusalem saints.

Most missionaries and churches would collapse in shock if groups of Christians sought them out begging to support them.

This supernatural ability to give comes from the work of the Spirit in them.

And what is the reason for this extraordinary situation? Verse 5:

And not just as we had hoped. Instead, they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us by God's will.

Paul says it was the will of God that the churches in Macedonia gave generously to us – but the reason they could perform this act of grace was this – they gave themselves **first** to the Lord.

What does it mean to give yourself *first* to God?

Before we came to Christ – the most important person in the world was – us!

Our needs, our comfort, our kingdom was what mattered.

Coming to Christ means, His kingdom comes first.

Giving to see the lost saved and the kingdom advance is what matters.

If you give yourself to the Lord – your whole worldview changes.

What you have is His and you are but stewards.

What satisfies is not stuff but being good stewards.

What matters eternally is His kingdom.

Dying with a lot of toys is nothing.

Dying having used what you have to see others saved is everything.

When you give – you are not giving to the church but to the Lord.

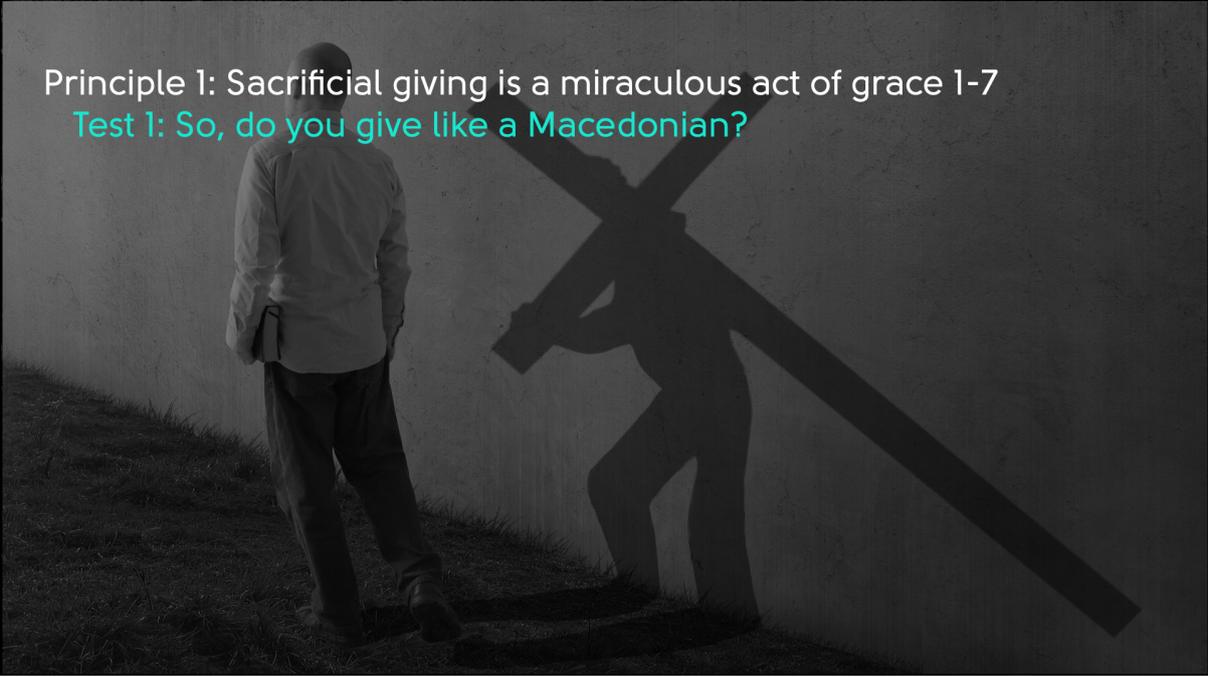
Verses 6 and 7:

So we urged Titus that just as he had begun, so he should also complete among you this act of grace. Now as you excel in everything—in faith, speech, knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love for us—excel also in this act of grace.

This act of grace is God enabling them to powerfully and sacrificially use God's resources in their stewardship for the work of His kingdom.

Paul says – I told Titus to urge you to excel in this stewardship.

So, what is the test related to this first principle?



Principle 1: Sacrificial giving is a miraculous act of grace 1-7  
Test 1: So, do you give like a Macedonian?

### **So, do you give like a Macedonian?**

I suspect if I stood up and said – hey I just heard that *Second Presbyterian Church* gave \$100,000 last month. Come on – you can't let the Pressies outgive us – you wouldn't like that – and nor should you.

But that isn't what Paul is doing. Paul didn't mention an amount. He didn't talk about the Macedonians to guilt the Corinthians into giving.

He wants the Corinthians to be blessed like the Macedonians.

He only mentions *how* they gave.

They gave generously and cheerfully.

They gave to honour God.

They gave to see His kingdom grow.

He mentioned this to test the reality of the Corinthian's faith.

If you have the grace of God – you give willingly and cheerfully.

The story is told of a collection during a service in a Scottish church some time ago.

The plate was passed around and a wealthy man reached into his pocket and pulled out a coin and put it on the offering plate.

But then he realised he had put a crown on the plate.

He told the steward – sorry – wrong coin – I meant to put in a penny.

He went to retrieve the crown and the steward moved the plate away – oh no – once in – always in.

And the wealthy man said – Ah well, at least I get credit in heaven for a crown.

And the steward replied – oh no – you only get credit for a penny.

For it to count – our giving has to be motivated by the grace of God.

The point is this. Ask yourself, have I given myself to the Lord such that my joy overflows as I give generously to the work of the ministry?

By design, I do not have a clue whether you give or not. I don't know if you give generously or a bit that really costs you nothing.

A few churches require members' finances to be an open book.

A number ask for free-will giving and then ask for pledges on top that they do monitor.

Some good churches ask all Pastors and Elders giving to be open among the leaders.

I think these kind of things might increase our giving – but that is not the point.

I can't tell your heart – I don't know if you give as an act of grace – or if you give so people think you are godly.

Unless giving comes because we gave ourselves to God and received His grace – it doesn't come from the heart – and it won't lead to blessing.

Ultimately, what you give is between you and the Lord – do you give like a Macedonian – because that shows the grace of God is at work in you?

**Principle 2:**



Principle 1: Sacrificial giving is a miraculous act of grace 1-7

Test 1: So, do you give like a Macedonian?

Principle 2: Sacrificial giving tests the reality of our love 8-10

### **Sacrificial giving tests the reality of our love 8-10**

Verse 8:

I am not saying this as a command. Rather, by means of the diligence of others, I am testing the genuineness of your love.

As an Apostle – I think it was within Paul’s authority to command this rich church to give.

But, Paul doesn’t need their money. God will provide.

Paul shared what God had done in the Macedonians to test the genuineness of the Corinthian’s love for God – and to test our love for God.

Genuine love for God means we will strive to use His resources well.

Many in this room worked hard to earn what you have. So, thinking of it as God’s and using it for kingdom work does not come naturally – in fact it is one of the most unnatural things we do.

But, it shows the Spirit of God is at work in us.

What are the two great commandments? – to love God and love our neighbour.

Giving from love shows the genuineness of our faith.

But true love means we finish our commitments.

Verse 9:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Grace empowered the love of Christ which led Him to give everything. He gave up the privilege of heaven. He gave up His very life.

His love was shown to be true when He gave everything to make us rich – to save us.

He became poor – so you might have the riches of eternal life.

Verse 10:

And in this matter I am giving advice because it is profitable for you, who began last year not only to do something but also to want to do it.

I am not issuing a command.

I am giving advice – because being a good steward is actually profitable for you.

He then comments that a year earlier – when Paul was in Corinth for the painful visit – they said – sure we will give.

But, when it came time to follow through – things got harder.

If the motive is right – the follow-through will happen.

It is like sitting in a sermon on giving – saying yes – yes – I will give more – but then when you leave – having second thoughts – I was caught up in the emotion – I will think about giving later.

Paul says – following through is actually profitable for you.

I was reflecting on that this week.

I have struggled to preach on money and giving. Why?

Because I don't want to sound like a tele-evangelist.

I don't want you to ever think I only want your wallet.

I don't want you to question my motives.

However, maybe I am doing you a disservice. Since encouraging you to give is for your profit – it strengthens and affirms your faith – it encourages you to be a part of God's work – it lays up treasure in heaven – maybe I should emphasise this more.

Look, the Pentecostals are right – giving brings great benefit.

But it is not necessarily material benefit – it is usually spiritual benefit.

But because they emphasise the wrong benefit doesn't mean I should not stand here from time to time and say – because I love you – give to be blessed.

And when you decide to give – perhaps I should make sure you follow through.

Look intending to give and actually giving are different.

The story is told of a pastor preaching one Sunday. The pastor was saying – I know you all – you would give generously to the Lord. Amen Pastor – they cried.

If you had a pig and God needed it – you would give the pig – Amen came the replies.

If you had a goat and God needed it – you would give the goat – Amen can the replies.

If you had had a horse and God needed it – you would give the horse. At that one of the farmers said – well hold on now Pastor Jones – you know full well that while I don't have a pig or a goat – I **do** have a horse.

We can make commitments – but what matters is whether we have the real love that means we follow through on those commitments.

And what is the test of this principle?



### **So, do you give like Christ?**

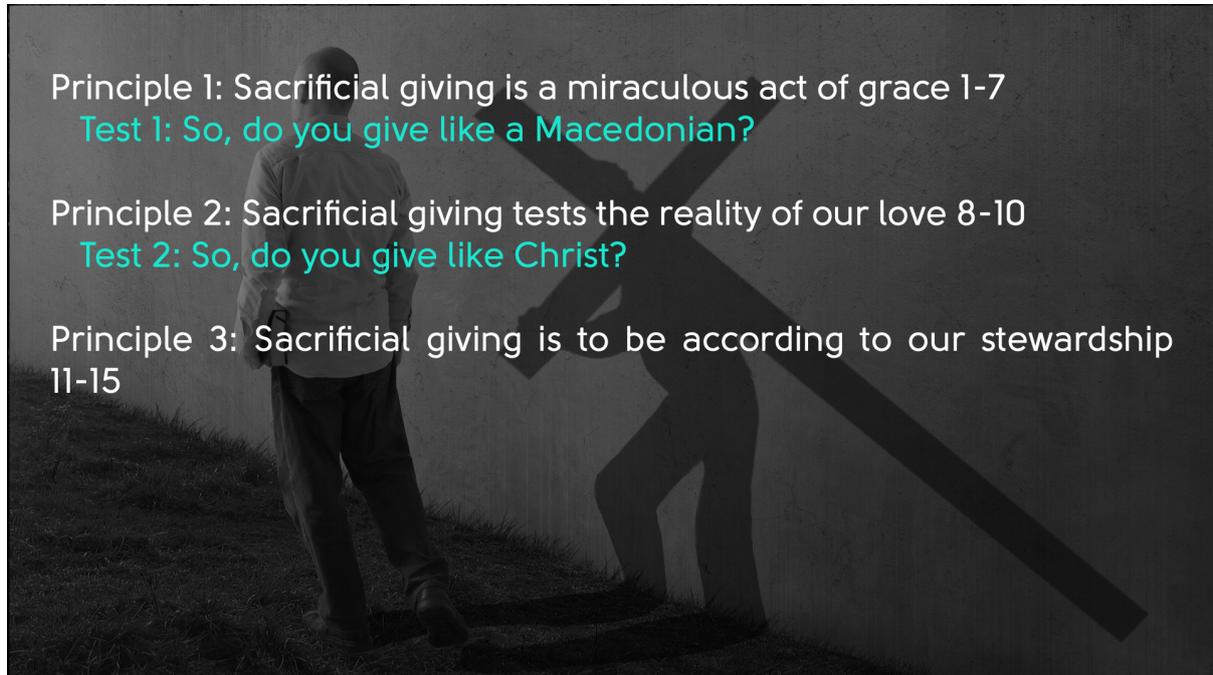
Christ loved us enough to give everything.

Where would we be if Christ decided not to follow through on His commitment?

Father, I know I promised to leave heaven and redeem them – but wow the cost is so high and they don't deserve it.

Is your love for God and man such that you actually do use God's resources wisely?

**Principle 3:**



**Sacrificial giving is to be according to our stewardship 11-15**

Verse 11:

Now also finish the task, so that just as there was an eager desire, there may also be a completion, according to what you have.

You need to follow through – but you need to follow through according to what you have.

Verse 12:

For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

What made the Macedonians gift acceptable was not the amount.

In real terms it was probably not huge. They did not have a lot.

But they gave sacrificially and cheerfully – which made their giving enormous.

Remember Jesus in the Temple. Wealthy people dropping in huge amounts – then he stops the disciples – did you see that?

What? That poor widow!

She just gave two mites!

They were confused – that was nothing – a tiny amount. Who cares?

But Jesus said – she gave out of her poverty all she had to live on. God cares.

Remember the Parable of the talents? – some got 5, some 2, some 1.

We are all entrusted with different resources.

Different talents, abilities, situations.

In terms of money – some are born in wealthy countries to well off parents.

Some are born with the tenacity and drive to earn well.

Others are born in terrible situations of deep poverty.

The Macedonians were poor. The Corinthians were well off.

The Corinthians could give much more than the Macedonians.

It would have cost them nothing to give the same amount as the poor Macedonians.

But Paul wanted them to give **like** the Macedonians.

To give generously, sacrificially – to cost them.

Verse 13:

It is not that there should be relief for others and hardship for you.

Paul is not asking the Corinthians to give until they were as poor as the Macedonians.

Verses 13-14:

But it is a question of equality. At the present time your surplus is available for their need, so that their abundance may in turn meet your need, in order that there may be equality.

By equality here – Paul means that just as each person has various gifts – so does each church.

Some churches have spiritual riches – prayer, teaching, faith.

Some have gifts like manpower – workers to send into the harvest.

Some have material gifts – finances.

Every church has its gifts and its roles.

At this time – the church in Corinth had wealth – a surplus that could help the church in Jerusalem.

The church in Jerusalem seemed to have a spiritual abundance – so in chapter 9 verse 14 we find them praying for the Corinthians.

Their spiritual wealth could help the Corinthians.

And he backs this up with a quote – verse 15:

As it is written: **The person who had much did not have too much, and the person who had little did not have too little.**

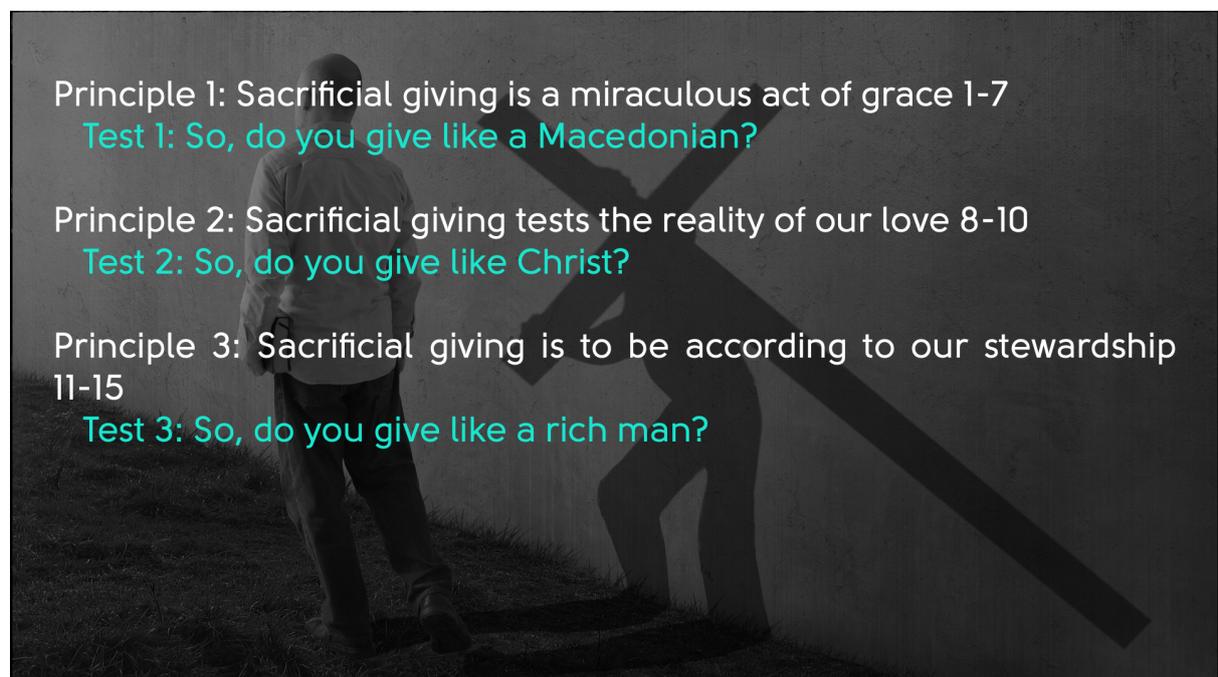
When Israel was in the wilderness collecting manna – some were younger and fitter and gathered a lot. Children and the elderly gathered less – but God supernaturally saw to it that all had enough – no one had more and no one had too little.

The principle was equality.

God's plan for the churches is that none would have too much and the ones with less would be helped.

The ones with more material surplus were to help the ones in need. It showed we are one in Christ.

And what is the test of this principle?



**So, do you give like a rich man?**

I should really ask – do you give like a rich man should? – because often the poor are the greatest givers.

Often the more you have – the harder it is to give.

Often you are well off because you don't give.

But if God entrusted you with riches – it is to use them for His kingdom.

The materially rich churches were to help the gospel among the impoverished churches.

The spiritually rich churches were to send out teachers and missionaries to help the spiritually poor churches.

Paul's point is this – if you are a church with a lot – give a lot.

In terms of comparative wealth – every last person in this church is rich.

Compared to most of the world, we are rich in terms of material assets.

As well, you have been blessed spiritually – good teaching and blessed with sound theology.

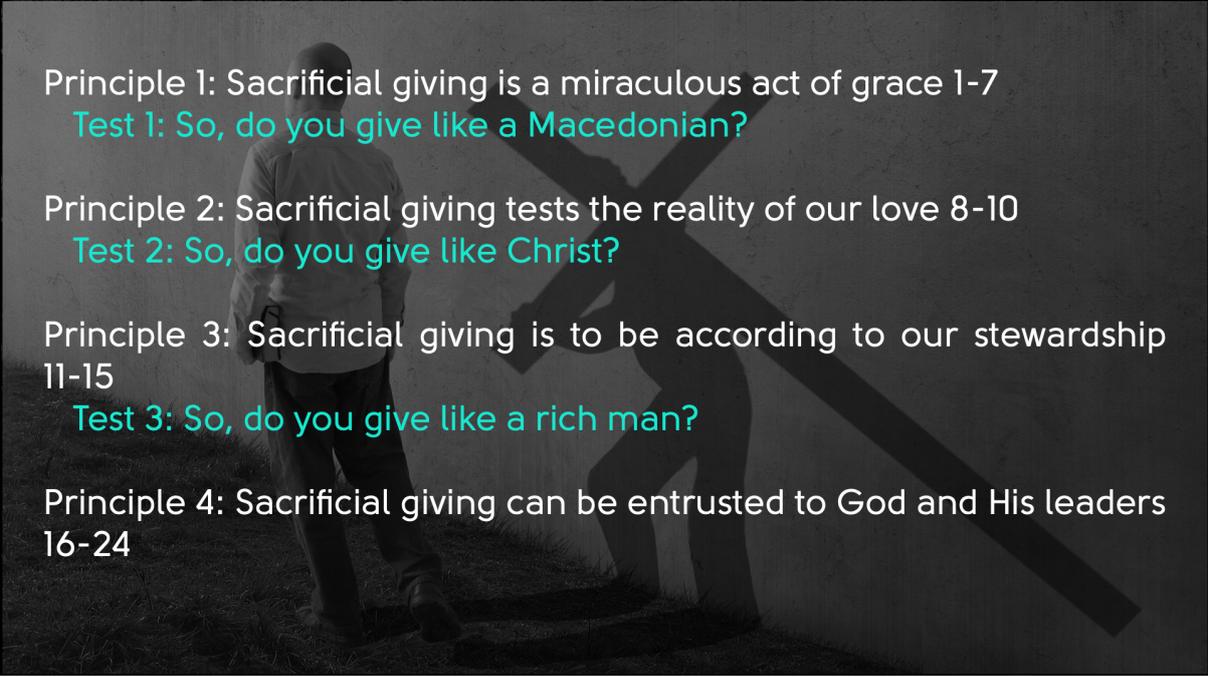
We should give generously – to the church – to missions.

We should make the costly decision to send pastors and missionaries.

And don't miss how this principle is being worked out in other ways. As the church in the west has become weaker – it is churches in places like Africa and Asia – poorer churches who are now sending workers to the west.

This idea that all churches give is achieving the Great Commission.

Finally, **principle 4:**



Principle 1: Sacrificial giving is a miraculous act of grace 1-7

Test 1: So, do you give like a Macedonian?

Principle 2: Sacrificial giving tests the reality of our love 8-10

Test 2: So, do you give like Christ?

Principle 3: Sacrificial giving is to be according to our stewardship 11-15

Test 3: So, do you give like a rich man?

Principle 4: Sacrificial giving can be entrusted to God and His leaders 16-24

### **Sacrificial giving can be entrusted to God and His leaders 16-24**

2 Corinthians 8:16–23:

Thanks be to God, who put the same concern for you into the heart of Titus. For he welcomed our appeal and, being very diligent, went out to you by his own choice. We have sent with him the brother who is praised among all the churches for his gospel ministry. And not only that, but he was also appointed by the churches to accompany us with this gracious gift that we are administering for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. We are taking this precaution so that no one will criticize us about this large sum that we are administering. Indeed, we are giving careful thought to do what is right, not only before the Lord but also before people. We have also sent with them our brother. We have often tested him in many circumstances and found him to be diligent—and now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and coworker for you; as for our brothers, they are the messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

One of the main excuses I have heard for not giving is this – I can't trust the church with my money.

I agree that there are many men and women in the church I would not trust with God's resources.

And there is little doubt that at times even good churches will spend your offerings in ways you don't entirely agree with.

But, here is the principle – you should find churches and ministries headed by men and women of integrity – where there is transparency and accountability for funds – and then you give.

God will hold you responsible to give – and He will hold those leaders responsible for what they did with those funds.

When you read these verses you get the sense that the super apostles said something like – OK so Paul doesn't take a wage from you – but what about that collection of his? Sure, it is for the poor in Jerusalem.

Paul wanted everything to be above reproach. He wanted no excuse for Corinth not to be blessed by giving.

Paul tells them – the collection will be overseen by Titus – who you know and trust – the brother who is well known and praised in the churches and the other brother who is diligent.

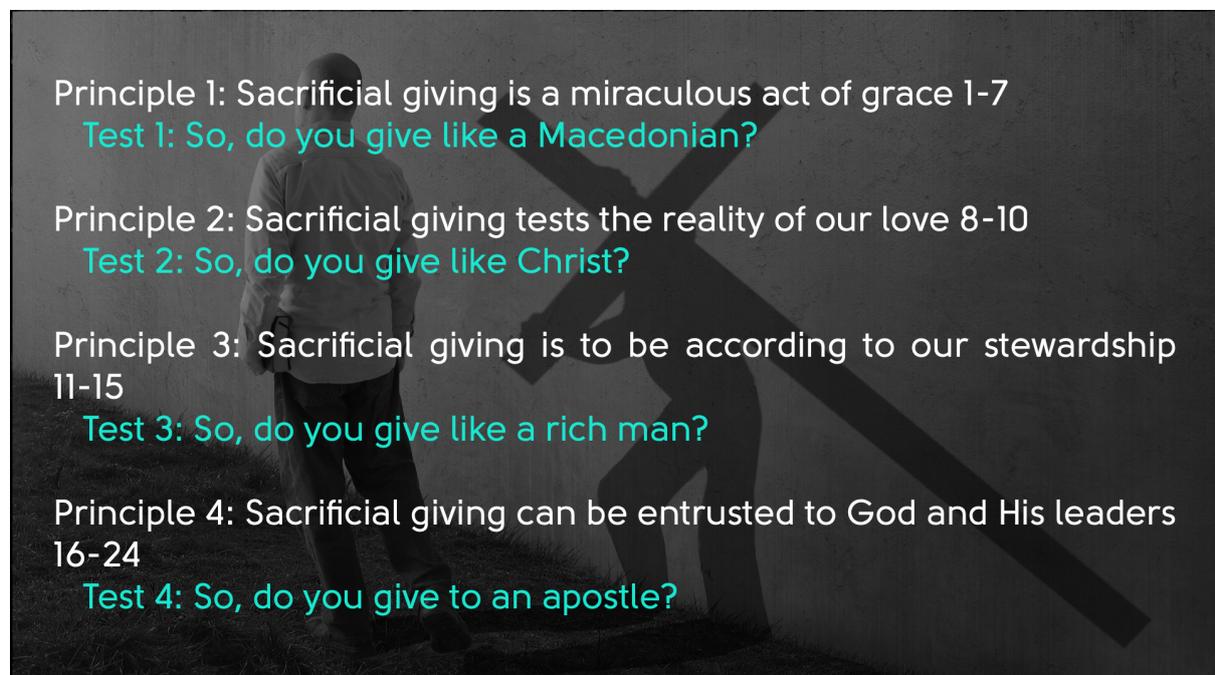
In verse 23 Paul calls these brothers – messengers – or apostles of the churches.

Verse 24:

Therefore, show them proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you.

You have no reason at all to not give generously, entrust your offering to these men and prove my boasting about your generosity true.

What is the test associated with this principle?



**So, do you give to an apostle?**

In the first century, there were **capital 'A' Apostles** – Apostles of God – the 12 and Paul.

But, while some claim the office today – there aren't any – so don't give to them.

There were **super apostles** – pedlars of the word after your money. We have plenty of them today – and if you entrust your money to them – more fool you.

There were **small 'a' apostles** – apostles of the churches. Men and women appointed by churches – who you can trust with God's resources.

Trustworthy leaders – tested men and women of integrity. We have them today.

Paul said I know we are talking a large sum – but I want to be careful to do what is right before the Lord and before man.

So, I appointed men I can trust – men you can trust to oversee this process.

Look, if you don't trust us to be good stewards of God's resources – too right you should not give generously into our care. But, you should find a church where you **can** trust the leaders to handle God's resources and give cheerfully and generously.

If you don't trust our missionaries – find some you do trust.

What you can't do is stand before God and say – yeah – I never found anyone I could trust with your resources – so I just kept them – hope you don't mind.

He minds.

Brothers and sisters – you are to:

**Give like a Macedonian.**

Give, cheerfully and generously because of the grace of God in you.

You are to:

**Give like Christ.**

Make a kingdom commitment to give and let your love for God and man mean you keep it.

You are to:

**Give like a rich man.**

Give plenty to the church, to missions, to those who do kingdom work.

You are to:

## **Give to apostles.**

Entrust God's resources under your care to godly men who will use it for kingdom purposes.

I don't find it easy to preach on giving – but as I reflected this week – I realised that one other reason I don't often speak on giving is that – most of you **are** generous, sacrificial givers.

I don't know who you are – but I see the offerings and I know you are there – and God knows.

So let me address those who are not gracious givers – I don't know who you are and I don't want to know.

But for your sake – if whatever you regularly give costs you very little – if most of God's resources are spent on your comfort – then I do urge you – give generously so you will be blessed – now and eternally – and one great blessing is this – you will know the Spirit of God is at work in you.

My favourite Dickens story is – *A Christmas Carol*.

It is the story of Ebenezer Scrooge.

Every person in this room is a Scrooge. The question our passage asks is this – which Scrooge?

The Scrooge who viewed every penny as his or the Scrooge visited by a spirit and transformed into a man who delighted to give and help others and received a harvest of righteousness.

If the Spirit of God is in you – you will delight to use God's resources wisely to His glory.

And on that day – you will hear – well done good and faithful steward.

## **The Grace of Sacrificial Ministry** **2 Corinthians 8:1-24     September 18, 2022**

**Main Point: If you want to have assurance – give!**

### **General Questions:**

1. Do you see having your faith tested as a good thing or a bad thing – why?
2. What is the difference between a mindset of giving our resources and stewarding God's resources?
3. Why is money such a powerful test of the reality of our faith?
4. Why is giving generously and sacrificially such a hard thing to do?
5. Why is something we worked for and sacrificed to get – actually God's?
6. Why would Paul call the ability to give sacrificially an act of grace?
7. What does it mean to give yourself *first* to God?
8. How does giving test the reality of our love?
9. Why did Paul use the example of Jesus' sacrifice? How does that relate to giving?
10. Why is giving generously profitable for us?
11. What does Paul mean when he says giving is a question of equality?
12. How does this lead to the gospel and God's kingdom being spread?
13. Why is it so important to find faithful leaders to entrust God's money to?

### **Application Questions:**

1. As a church – do you think we should talk more about giving – less about giving – or it is about right?
2. What can we do as a church to help you in this respect?
3. What are the stewardships entrusted to you by God?
4. How can you be a wise steward?
5. What resources has our church been entrusted with?

6. What can you do to be a faithful wise steward?