2 Corinthians 9:1-15

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[0:00] Do turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. If you need a Bible or if you didn't pick up a bulletin on your way in, maybe just stick your hand up and I'm sure someone will bring one to you.

Thanks. Tom or Ian will bring one to you. It'll be helpful to have a bulletin so you can follow along with an outline of my talk inside your bulletin and then for connection cards later.
So just, I don't know, grab someone's attention. But turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. Sorry, chapter 9. I do know which passage we're looking at this morning. I'll read it for us and then we'll start working our way through it together.
Thanks, Ian. The Apostle Paul writes, 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 am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty 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 are not ready, we would be humiliated, to say nothing of you, for being so confident.
[1:23] 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. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, 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 is distributed freely. He is 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, to be generous in every way, 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.
[2:37] By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes 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. This is the word of the Lord. All right, Catherine and I have a glass door going into our shower.
I don't know if there's too much information. And posted on the glass door, so on the outside but looking in so that you can see it when you're showering, is this picture. And I don't know if you can read the Bible verse there.
It's from 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. Paul says, Now it comes from an illustration that I used earlier in the year.
This is not a real bloke. It's some AI composite of all of us. But anyway, it comes from an illustration I used in the beginning of the year at the Uni Church weekend away, which was on the topic of Thanksgiving.
[3:58] And since most of you were not there, I thought we might begin this morning with the same exercise. Okay, so if you will indulge me for a moment, I want you to close your eyes.

Go on. Close your eyes. And take a deep breath. You know, breathe in and breathe out. And now imagine standing in a field under a gentle sun with a soft rain pouring down over you and all around you.

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Now I want you to imagine that really each droplet of rain is actually a little droplet of God's love for you. Specifically, God's grace.
God's undeserved love. You are saturated in it. You don't deserve all this extravagant, abundant love. But God is just pouring it out and pouring it out relentlessly over you and your whole life and His whole world.
Now you can open your eyes. Please don't fall asleep. But just keep thinking about this with me. On the one hand, it's an analogy. Right now I just want you to visualize God's extravagant love for you by thinking about it like rain.
[5:16] But on the other hand, it's actually really true, isn't it? That when the rain falls down gently, filling up our reservoirs and flowing through our rivers and our taps and into our bodies, we should see in it the goodness and the gracious provision of God.

God's grace. Because every good and every perfect gift comes from above. All the good gifts we have, all the good gifts we see around us testify to the generous giver behind them all.
God is satisfying our hearts with His relentless, extravagant, abundant love expressed through things like sunshine and rain, the provision of food.
Every breath you take is His gift to you. Every sensation you've ever felt. Every meal you've ever eaten. Every sight you've ever seen. Have you ever tasted a strawberry with cream or gazed at a sunset or been hugged by someone who really loves you?
We live in a world of countless treasures and wonders. Not to mention God's special grace to us that He would send His one and only Son to save us.
[6:37] Which takes us to the heart of our passage this morning because as we've seen again and again in this letter, 2 Corinthians is a book about God's overflowing grace.

But what does it really look like for someone to get grace? And that's the question Paul is answering now. What does it look like when God's grace reaches us and floods our lives and transforms our minds and our hearts that we really get it?
What does it look like when grace penetrates our hearts? Well, Paul has a very tangible test, if you like, for each of the Corinthians and for us.
The test is if we really have experienced the grace of God, then we will overflow with generosity. Again, if you think of your life like a cup that God is pouring His grace into, at some point, if God has filled up your life with grace, then that grace is going to overflow onto others, isn't it?
If what keeps coming out of you is whinging or cruelty or stinginess and begs the question whether you have really experienced the grace of God at all.
[8:00] How full up of God's love can you be if, as it were, when we cut you, you bleed grumbling and complaining? So a couple of weeks ago we talked about how the Corinthians need to put their money where their mouth is.

Remember, Paul has been traveling around the Mediterranean collecting money for the poor believers in Judea. The Corinthians were originally eager to participate in the offering, but somehow that got derailed.
So this part of the letter is about encouraging them to take the next step to get back on board and follow through with their original good intentions in this gospel partnership, this partnership in the gospel of grace with Paul and with other believers and other churches.
There are four parts to the chapter, so we'll just work through them one at a time. In part one, verses one to five, Paul wants the Corinthians to be ready to give.
The key idea is readiness. That Paul wants their giving to be a willing offering rather than extracted from them reluctantly in a moment of pressure.
[9:15] So he urges them time and again in this section to be ready, to be prepared because he has been telling everyone that they are prepared or will be, but he doesn't want to arrive and find that his boasting is slightly empty, find that they're not and then they'll be embarrassed, he'll be humiliated too and then they might give out of a sense of awkwardness or obligation, you know, under duress rather than willingly and from the heart.

So the key principle I think is spelt out in verse five. He says, so I thought it necessary to urge the brothers, Titus and the other 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.
Right, so there is a sense of obligation there. It's not that Paul's saying there's absolutely no obligation here. After all, the Corinthians promised to give, right, they promised, but Paul wants

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them to follow through on their promise as it were, kind of off their own bat, you know, in their own time rather than under pressure when he comes.
He doesn't want to have to do any sort of twisting of their arm or take them by surprise. I think this has lots of implications for us. Now, of course, we're not in exactly the same position, right?
We're not trying to gather a collection for the saints in Judea and it's worth thinking about the different nuances in terms of giving to Christians versus giving to non-Christians. Paul's arranging for a giving to a group of Christians here or giving to gospel work versus giving to relieve poverty.
[10:54] Obviously, Paul's arranging here for the relief of poverty. So, obviously, Paul is dealing with a particular crisis here that he's raising money for but still, I think there are just some good principles in this chapter for Christian giving in general that we should think about.

So, number one, we don't want to pressure people into giving ever. We don't want to manipulate people or embarrass people into giving, do we?
I think it's really helpful, for instance, that we don't pass around a plate during our services or something like that. You know, when the plate comes to you, you feel a sense of obligation or embarrassment.
If that's the only option you've got, that's what you've got to do, isn't it? But I think it's great that we don't have to do that. I've even heard of churches where they'll pass around the plate again if there isn't enough put into it the first time.
You know, have you read East of Eden, Steinbeck's book about, and the pastor in that book locks people in the room because they haven't given enough to whatever he's collecting? That's outrageous.
[11:56] We don't want to pressure people like that. Or with last minute, end of financial year, sort of sales tactics like, you know, give urgently. Give now.

Don't miss out. You know, it's sort of encouraging. There's kind of impulse giving. I mean, sometimes I think we want to pivot quickly to make the most of opportunities as they arise. But in general, we want our giving to be thoughtful, considered, you know, go home, sit in front of your computer, open your Bible, talk with your spouse if you have one, and think about what kinds of things you want to give to, how much you want to give, how frequently you want to give, how frequently you want to reassess your giving, and so on.
Right? That is the kind of considered approach Paul is advocating for here. No one looking over your shoulder, no one forcing you, but just thinking in your own heart about what's best for the Lord and for others, how you can be loving with your money.
But secondly, give cheerfully. So in verses 6 and 7, these are the memory verses of the passage, aren't they? First of all, Paul wants us just to think about reality, right? How the world works. So he uses the illustration of a farmer sowing seed.
You know, guess what? I mean, I don't know much about farming, let's be honest, but everything I do know about farming is probably from this book. If you sow lots of seed when it's sowing time, then you'll be able to reap a bumper crop when it's harvest time.
[13:29] Whereas, if you sow sparingly, of course, you should expect to reap sparingly. Right? Sowing and reaping are proportionally related. That's what I've picked up. And of course, because seeds produce plants with even more seeds, after a few years of being generous sowing your seeds, you might have 30-fold or 60-fold or 100-fold what you started with.

A handful of seeds that you could grind into flour and use up all at once one year to make a single pathetic loaf of bread could become barns and barns of seeds and bakeries and bakeries of bread. If instead of holding onto your seeds, you sow them year after year after year, giving, giving, giving. I mean, it's just sort of compound interest, isn't it?
If you're more used to being financially savvy, you can reinvest your dividends so that the capital grows larger and larger and larger at an ever-increasing pace. That's why the wise farmer always keeps his eyes on harvest time.
Giving in the short term, going without in the short term, will be so much better in the long run.
[14:47] And secondly, Paul says, give cheerfully because God loves a cheerful giver. So give cheerfully and give generously keeping your eyes on the harvest and give cheerfully and give generously keeping your eyes on the God above who loves a cheerful giver.

I wonder, do you want God to love you? I mean, I know that God does love us, right? In fact, as we began, right?

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In some ways, God loves all his creatures everywhere and he showers his undeserved love both on the just and the unjust. And God especially loves his church.
The doctrine of God's love though is rich and vast, not one-dimensional. Don Carson wrote a wonderful little book years ago called The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God. If you can get a hold of it, it's fantastic.
It's about all the different ways that the Bible speaks of God's love because there are many dimensions to it. So Paul is not undermining grace here, right? And again, as we've seen, this whole book is about God's love for the unlovely, God's grace, God's love for the unlovable.
[15:56] But it is interesting in the midst of that, isn't it? That here Paul talks about God's love in a conditional way, God's love for the lovely. God loves the cheerful giver.

And you could say God hates the cheerless giver, the reluctant, grudging giver, or the person who doesn't give at all, of course, and maybe they're cheerful about that or not, I'm not sure.
But Paul is talking about God's delight delight in people, in us. What pleases Him is when we give cheerfully.
God approves of the cheerful giver. My mother used to say, God doesn't count what you give, He counts what you keep. That's a good way of putting it, isn't it?
But perhaps even better here, God doesn't count what you give, He counts what you want to give. And just as we were thinking last week, God looks upon the heart and He cares about what's in there.
[17:03] You know, not just how much you give or how much you keep, but what you want to give. You might give a lot, but if it's begrudging or cheerless, God isn't pleased.

One of the downsides, I think, of electronic giving is that it's easy to sort of just set and forget things, isn't it?
That God wants our hearts attached to our giving. God wants our hearts in our giving. God wants us to be happy when the money leaves our accounts.
Because we're thinking of the harvest, harvest, we're thinking about the potential yield and we're thinking about His smiling face. Like the child looking up to their father for approval, not because they're insecure in His love, but because they love to please Him.
So are you a cheerful giver? Thirdly, in verses 8 and 9, Paul says, give freely. Because you see how verse 8 begins, and God is able.
[18:16] And that's the key line. Our giving directly relates to the kind of God we believe in. What kind of God do you believe in? Notice in verse 8 how Paul expands his scope out beyond our money now to talk about every good work.

The question is, if you like, about capacity. Do you have capacity to give? Do you have capacity for every good work that God lays out before you?
You know, when you're running a business, you've got to think about the assets you've got, investors you might lean on, the workforce, machinery you have, and so on. And you think, if we sign a contract to provide 50,000 units of whatever it is by this time next year, will we have capacity to fulfill that order?
So Paul is saying here that our capacity rests on the power of God. Our capacity rests on the God who is able.
Because God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may be able, you may abound in every good work.
[19:34] Notice how he uses the word all four times in this verse. In fact, in the Greek, he uses it five times because that word every is just another instance of the word all.

And Paul uses the word abound twice in this verse. Remember how many times we've seen that word before. It has to do with overflowing, beyond containment, in excess.
In other words, Paul wants to stress God's absolute, total, comprehensive capacity to provide for all our needs so that we can do every good work that he wants us to do.
Do you need a million dollars next year to do the good works that God has prepared for you to do? Do you need a hundred million? Don't worry, you'll have it.
I mean, you may not need it. You know, you may not need more energy or better health. God has plenty of good works for sick people and even bedridden people to do.
[20:39] God has plenty of good works for poor people to do. This is not promising any particular capacity or something like that to do any particular good work that you might have in mind. Like,

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yeah, I really do need that Lamborghini next year to do all those good works.

No, not that. But it is promising that we'll always have enough to do the good works God wants us to do. Because God is always, as it were, the ultimate kind of angel investor with limitless funds, providing everything we need to serve Him.
So we can serve with confidence, with freedom and energy and optimism, knowing, in a sense, ultimately, that we can't fail. You and I, in a billion years from now, no matter what happens, as long as we keep trusting God, we will be happy and safe.
We can't mess it up. You know, which is where the quote in verse 9 comes in. This is one of those quotes worth looking up in context, because at first, I think, it might sound like it's talking about God in verse 9, that God has distributed freely and so on.
But actually, come with me back to Psalm 112. Psalm 112. Or I'll put it up on the screen as well, I think. Yeah, it's up behind me. But if you want to come with me, it's Psalm 112.
[21:55] It's a short psalm, so I'll read the whole thing for us and then you'll hear the context.
Praise the Lord. Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments.

His offspring will be mighty in the land. The generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house and his righteousness endures forever. Light dawns in the darkness for the upright.
He is gracious, merciful, and righteous. It is well with the man who deals generously and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved.
He will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news. His heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.
His heart is steady. He will not be afraid until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.
He has distributed freely. He has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. His horn is exalted in honor. The wicked man sees it and is angry.
[22:57] He gnashes his teeth and melts away. The desire of the wicked will perish. So you see the quote there Paul borrows is from verse 9.

And it's not about God distributing freely to the poor. It's about the righteous man who trusts in God distributing freely because he's not afraid.
He doesn't need to hoard or keep all his money to himself. God is sovereign and God is good. I love verse 7. He is not afraid of bad news.
His heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. Are you afraid of bad news? You might lose your job or get sick. You might be worried about the rise of AI and how it's going to rip through our economy mercilessly or drive us to the brink of extinction maybe.
You know I don't know maybe it will. But no worries. God is sovereign and God is good. Do you have enemies verse 8?
[24:01] People who would just love to see you fall. You know people maybe who are plotting behind your work, behind you at work, angling for your job or something like that. Neighbors from hell.

People who seem to be just have it in for you, out to get you. The righteous man, his heart is steady. He will not be afraid until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.
At the end of the day, we are going to be victorious. Because God is sovereign and God is good. And those who trust in him will have the victory.
Very often we are reluctant to give, aren't we? Because we are afraid. Because money means security. What if I overstretch or overextend myself?
Maybe I won't end up having enough. Or what if I burn out trying to do every good work? You know, trying to be the good Samaritan constantly. My life constantly being derailed by other people's needs.
[25:04] And again, of course this passage is not encouraging us to be foolish or to be, or to forget that we are creatures with limits. It's not saying we are kind of indispensable to every good work that's happening around the place or that we are the Messiah everybody needs.

Now there's a great deal of wisdom in resting when you're tired and in taking holidays and so on. But also let's not mute the force of this passage or blunted or dampen it with too many caveats or worse still kind of escape clauses for Pharisees because we are all prone to that, aren't we?
In the name of creatureliness, we put up boundaries. When in fact, what this passage says is that because we are creatures of an infinitely powerful and generous God, then we can trust him to supply our every need.

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Or again, in the name of wisdom, we hold back and hold on to our money. when in fact, what this passage says is that the wise farmer sows bountifully because they want to reap a bountiful crop. Why would it be wise to sow sparingly if we want to reap a great harvest? So obviously, this, you know, Paul's not saying everything there is to say on this subject this morning, but at least I think if we want to let our thinking be shaped by God's word, we've got to be careful not to override what God's word says here with kind of worldly wisdom.
[26:40] Faith is never foolish so long as our faith is in a good and sovereign God and what he says to us rather than our own ideas and imaginations.

Okay, which brings us finally to verses 10 to 15. And after three sections about giving, finally this last section is about getting. But notice what Paul expects us to get. I mean, think about this.
If you sow wheat seeds, what do you expect to get? More wheat, right? If you give money, what do you expect to get? Well, more money, isn't that how it works?
And of course, this is where the prosperity gospel goes. Those smiley false teachers baptizing greed with Bible quotes taken out of context. But that's not where Paul goes.
And actually, when you think about it, that's not really how money works. Money is not exactly like seeds. But more importantly, what Paul seems to think that we are really sowing, when we're giving our money away generously to the poor, what he seems to think that we are really sowing is righteousness.
[27:46] You see, in verse 10, he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, which is just wonderful, isn't it? Because God, in his sovereignty and goodness, is in control of the beginning of the harvest time and the end result.

And 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.
righteousness. I think Paul is echoing Hosea chapter 10 here. Listen to Hosea chapter 10 verses 12 and 13. Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.
You have plowed iniquity, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies, because you have trusted in your own way and in the multitude of your warriors.
See, the choice Israel faced and the choice that we all face is between sowing righteousness and sowing iniquity. And then if we sow righteousness, we'll reap steadfast love.
[28:56] Or if we sow iniquity, we'll reap injustice. I think Paul is saying much the same thing here in 2 Corinthians. What he really wants the Corinthians to sow is righteousness, is love, is grace, is cheerful service and genuine care for the Judeans.

And then what he expects them to reap is a harvest of righteousness and a harvest of love. In verse 11, you see, he says, you will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.
And the word grace and the word thanks are related. In fact, in the Greek, they are exactly the same word. Charis. Okay?
So charis means grace in some context and charis means thanks in some context, like down in verse 15. And the word thanksgiving is eukaristeo, right?
It's got the charis word in there as well. Right? So again, the point is something like grace begets grace. Righteousness begets righteousness. Just as seeds kind of multiply more of the same kind, grace multiplies as it flows through us.
[30:13] We have a book at home, which was a gift from a friend upon the birth of our first child. And it's called, You Can Never Run Out of Love. And it goes through various things, like you can run out of socks, which we do seem to all the time.

You can run out of gravy, et cetera. You can run out of all sorts of things. I can't remember. But you can never run out of love. And that's Paul's point here, that love grows. Like the bottomless jar of the widow Elijah stayed with.
Or the packed lunch of the boy when Jesus fed the crowds. It's just always enough. Love multiplies and grows. So when someone loves me, and is generous to me, then that produces in me more love for them.
We call one grace and the other thanks. But in a way, you see, they're just two sides of, two ways of saying the same thing. In verse 14, see how the Judeans are going to respond to the Corinthian gift.

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Number one, they will long for you. And if you give to them, they will long for you. Like a deep yearning to be with someone.
[31:24] They've never met these people. But they will long for them like you might miss your spouse or your kids after being separated for a while. And Paul says, they will pray for you.

So they might not have money, but money is not the only gift that you can give. What a glorious privilege it is to have someone pray for you. To approach the throne of almighty God, the throne of grace on your behalf.
To plead with God for your benefit. Paul is saying, see how your love for them is really going to produce in them a great love for you. Or it's going to produce in the whole fellowship more and more love, 30, 60, and 100 fold.
And ultimately, of course, this all, this love all comes from God. That's why Paul ends with thanks to God. His grace to us shown both in creation and all the things, all the good gifts he's provided us with, our money or whatever it is.
And in salvation, through the gospel, God has lavished his grace upon us. People sort of ruminate on what the gift is in verse 15. What is God's inexpressible gift?
[32:36] Is it the Lord Jesus himself? Is it God's righteousness or his love that he pours out upon us? I think the answer is yes. Of course, it's all of the above.

The fountain of all grace is God himself. He is the spring from which all love overflows.
His most perfect gift, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. But it's not necessary here, I don't think, to sort of extract Jesus out as a person from all the wonderful things that come along with knowing him, from the righteousness we receive in him, the forgiveness, the hope, the peace, the joy, belonging to the family of believers, drawn from every tribe, tongue, and nation, and so on.
The point, in fact, is that God's grace to us is indescribable. How can you sum it up with words? How can you sum up all the excellencies of Christ?
They are immeasurable. So, time to wrap up. This passage is about grace. Grace that begins with God and overflows to us.
[33:49] And if we really get grace, as we've seen before, we will be generous to others. We will pour out love into others, into our families, into our church, into our denomination.

I mean, I mention that because that's kind of what's developing here, isn't it? Paul is sharing resources between different churches in his network. We will pour out our love into our neighborhoods and into the non- Christians around us, going back a few chapters.
Remember, in chapter 6, Paul talked to the Corinthians about not receiving the grace of God in vain, but to make the most of the day of salvation by speaking the gospel to others. And it's all part and parcel of the same package and the bigger argument in this book.
Overflowing love. That is what is to characterize the lives of believers. Overflowing love that impacts our prayer lives, impacts how hard we work, impacts what we say to each other and to others, and even impacts our wallets.
Let's pray. Amen. Loving Father God, thank you for the inexpressible gift of the Lord Jesus and all the righteousness, grace, peace, hope, joy that comes in him.
[35:20] Thank you for your constant generosity and love for us that does pour out over our lives every day. Help us to be receptive to it, to be aware of it, to be full of thanksgiving and joy and security, peace, knowing that you are sovereign and in control and that you smile down upon us.

And help us to be full of generosity overflowing to others. We do pray that our lips would be speaking of your grace and love all the time, sharing the good news with others, loving each other in church.
We pray that your generosity to us would impact our own wallets, that we are not reluctant or stingy, but we take hold of the great blessing of giving.
We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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