lincolnberean

DATE: **JANUARY 10, 2026**
SERIES: **RETHINK (TIME/MONEY/COMMUNITY)**
MESSAGE: **THE GRACE OF GIVING**
PASSAGE: **2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15 (NASB)**
SPEAKER: **RYAN HARMON**

Before we open the scriptures this evening, I did want to give you an update on our year-end giving. It's that time of year. All the numbers have been crunched. We have our final tally. Gonna get to our churches year-end goal in just a moment, but before I do that, I did want to update you on two other giving opportunities that a number of you most likely participated in. There it is. Let me tell you about these.

So, there are two organizations that we support that are partners. We have a number of partners, but I do want to tell you about these two, because they were giving opportunities in November and December with these two organizations. The first is the Crisis Pregnancy Center, and the Baby Bottle Drive. Last year, we raised over $15,000, but you'll see this year, the generosity of the church raised $8,000 more than last year, and that is extraordinary. Absolutely.

Now, Gifts of Love, that opportunity is one that is in partnership with an organization that began by members of this very church 30 years ago. City Impact is an amazing organization helping those who are in desperate need in our very city. And we together, as a church, donated over 780 items totaling over $14,000, which means over $35,000 to those two opportunities. And that is an extraordinary thing that we want to acknowledge. Yeah, absolutely. It's worthy of celebration.

Now, our church's goal. We said, back in November, to meet our budget projection for the end of the year, was to raise $2.4 million, so we let you know about that throughout those weeks. And here is where we ended up on that goal. $2.548 for eight, so 106% of our goal. And so in light of that, I want to do two things. First, I want to together thank our God, who richly supplies for our needs. He's the one who supplies for our needs. But I also want to take a moment and affirm you as a body, as a people of God, to affirm the generosity, the response that you had, to that need, and you generously poured forth gifts. And that's something that is worthy of acknowledgment and recognition and affirmation. Makes me so happy as one of your pastors to see that. And it leads me into our topic for this evening.

As Brian mentioned last week, every January for 2 weeks, we talk about this idea of stewardship. And this week, we're continuing in this overall theme of rethinking. When we do these rethinks, we just, we want to think deeper about something that we might take for granted. This week, we want to rethink, we want to think deeper about giving. What happens when we give? What is giving all about? I want to consider that together, because I know that in the act of giving, something goes from my pocket, or from my bank account, into the pocket, or the bank account of someone or something else. And if that's all the deeper that I think about giving, then I'm susceptible to start to think about giving purely as loss and transaction. Loss and transaction that I know I'm required to do, and maybe there's not much more to it.

But see, a biblical view of giving is so rich and so deep that it is worthy of our reflection because the biblical idea of giving is that giving is great gain. It's not loss at all. So, that's what we want to consider together this evening. In order to do that, I'm going to invite you to turn with me to 2nd Corinthians chapter 8. It's gonna be in verses one to fifteen of this letter of Paul's.

Now 2nd Corinthians, let me give you a little background here, 2nd Corinthians was written during a five-year period of Paul's life where he gave considerable attention to the gathering of a collection, a giving campaign, for the churches and the Christians, the brothers and sisters in Judea, and really in Jerusalem, for the church in Jerusalem. We believe that during that time, we don't know exactly why, but they had experienced significant poverty. It could be that it was the result of persecution. It could be that there was famine in the land. It could be that the church had gotten so big, in their efforts to care for the orphans and widows in their midst, had gotten so large that they needed money. They were poor, they were impoverished. And Paul saw that situation, and he sprang into action. He began to mobilize a relief campaign, a giving campaign, in order to help the church in Jerusalem. So, that giving campaign is what is in the background of chapters eight and nine of 2nd Corinthians.

So, with that in mind, let's see what he has to say. 2nd Corinthians chapter eight, verse one, he says:

> *1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.*

So, Paul turns his attention in this book to this collection. He begins in a place that maybe the Corinthians didn't expect. He begins by recounting what had just occurred with the brothers and sisters in the churches in Macedonia. What had happened in the churches of Macedonia. Now, Corinth was a long ways away from Macedonia, Corinth is all the way down in the south of Greece. Macedonia is all the way up in the north, but despite that distance, Paul wanted to point out what had occurred among these believers in Macedonia. He wanted to use what occurred among them as an illustration of how giving and how generosity is to work.

So, the question is, what exactly had the Macedonians done? Or maybe a better question would be this: what had God done in the Macedonians? What had God done? Because that's exactly how Paul begins. He began in verse one by saying that he wished to make known the grace of God, which had been given in the churches of Macedonia. The Macedonians had received God's grace. God's grace somehow had been poured out upon them. That's where it all began.

That word grace is one that we are familiar with. It's one that we cherish and rightly so. I think very often when we think about that word grace, our mind immediately goes to forgiveness. Grace as God's forgiveness of us, and grace is certainly forgiveness. Forgiveness is solely an act of God's grace. Grace is also something that is so much bigger than that. Grace, that very word grace is one that is so packed full of meaning in the Bible that it is worthy of us deeply reflecting upon it.

Dallas Willard is a philosopher. He wrote a lot on the Christian life, and he gave this definition of grace. He said, "Grace is God acting in our life to accomplish what we cannot do on our own." God acting in our life, to bring about, to accomplish what we cannot accomplish on our own. We can't do it. We're stuck. And when you think about all the good things that we're called to, which of them can we do on our own? Answer: none of them. We are completely dependent upon grace. Can we forgive ourselves? Answer: no, grace forgives. Can we transform our heart? Can we change ourselves internally? Answer: no, grace changes us. When we're walking through hardship, can we in our own strength find the sustenance we need, the strength we need? Answer: no, grace sustains us.

Grace is God's gift. It's him coming in and doing for us what we cannot do for our own, on our own. That starts with forgiveness. But grace is so rich. Grace is God's divine dynamic power poured out in our lives, to work in us and through us. We want to be people that think much about grace.

Now that's where Paul began. In verse one, he said, grace had been given. And what did he say that it produced? Well, he continued, he said, in a great ordeal of affliction. In a great ordeal of fiction, by God's grace, the believers in Macedonia had an abundance of joy. Only possible by God's grace. An abundance of joy. But he continued. He said, while they were in deep poverty, impoverished, they didn't have anything. He said they overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

Now, liberality could also be translated generosity. They overflowed in the wealth of their generosity as they found themselves in severe poverty. God's grace given to them produced within them joy in affliction and generosity in poverty. Only God's grace can do that. God's grace comes in and produces things in us that are incongruent, that don't align with our circumstances. It produces joy in the midst of sorrow. And here in the lives of the Macedonians, he produced abundant generosity in the face of deep poverty.

Now, Paul, he loved God's grace. He spoke about it all the time. He was the apostle of grace. But what's so interesting is that as he continues to reflect on what he saw in Macedonia, it's almost as if he was caught off guard by all this. He says in verse three:

> *3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*

Not as we had expected. And this is Paul. Paul had seen a lot. He had experienced nearly everything, but he said what he saw in the lives of these Macedonians shocked him, surprised him. It wasn't what he expected. His grace was given, and it was powerfully at work. He already recounted how it's powerfully at work and that it had produced generosity in the lives of the Macedonians. But Paul here adds on and he says they gave beyond their ability. Beyond their ability. They were suffering. We believe that at this time there was also persecution, severe persecution in Macedonia, that northern part of Greece, and that persecution would have financial implications. They were poor, they were impoverished, and yet they gave beyond their ability. They overflowed with generosity, beyond their ability. That is the first remarkable thing that we see.

Second remarkable thing we see. They gave of their own accord. In other words, no pressure. No ask even from Paul. No exerting his authority, telling him they had to do this, and that he had the authority to ask that, but then he goes beyond it. He said they gave of their own accord. But then he continues and he said that they begged. Despite their poverty, they begged. They urged for the favor of participation in the support of the saints. Begging Paul. Urging him. Don't go, you didn't let us give yet.

When we were missionaries, we had to raise support. And this church, Lincoln Berean, generously provided 50% of our support. But we were responsible to raise the other 50%. And I'll be honest with you, when I would go to raise money when I'd meet with people, I often felt as if I was burdening them. And the reason I felt that is because I hadn't learned this. I didn't understand this well.

See, what Paul clearly is indicating is that the Macedonians understood that giving was a privilege. Giving was an opportunity. Giving was an opportunity to participate in what God was doing. The Macedonians didn't need anyone to ask them. They begged to be able to give. Just think about that. In the midst of their severe affliction, their deep poverty. I almost imagine Paul leaving town and thinking, you know, I'm not going to ask them. And then they chase him down on the road. They grab him. They say, wait, you didn't let us give? We want to give! Now, what would compel them to do that?

Answer: grace. God's grace. God had worked in them, had stirred up generosity within them. That's the first thing. Second: understanding. God's grace given, understanding the transforming work of God's grace, they then became people who longed to turn around and give away what had been given to them, to overflow and with generosity, to grace others and give to others, because so much had been given to them.

Because this is how grace works. God's grace comes into our lives, we don't deserve it at all. It comes in by faith. We believe, and it comes in, it floors us. It changes our whole life. It turns us upside down, but then it doesn't stop there. It starts to work within us, starts to change us into different kind of people. It makes hearts that are prone to selfishness when they are left all by themselves—it begins to work generosity and love in our hearts. And soon, we become people that say, I just want to pour out, I want to give because what's been given. Grace gives birth to more grace.

Sometimes when we read scripture it's not all that helpful when a preacher talks about the Greek. But I wish we could do a deep Greek lesson here, because this is one time where the Greek helps us so much. I wish you could see how many times in the Greek this word "charis," grace, occurs. It is over and over and over again. Our translators help us, they help us understand the passage by translating in a way that they think makes sense of this phrase. But verse four is one of those moments. Verse four says they begged and they urged. My translation said, for the favor, but that word is literally the grace. They begged and urged for the grace of participation in the support of the saints. Begging for the grace of participation, because of the grace that had come and transformed them. Grace received soon transforms, and then in turn creates people who long to give away, who long to offer grace to others, to give gifts to be generous. It's the way grace works.

So, now with this example established, the example of the Macedonians, Paul now turns directly to the Corinthians. Verse six, he says:

> *6 So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.*

There's that word again. Now Paul didn't need to tell them about the collection. He didn't need to explain the reason for it because it's very clear. They already knew about it. Not only did they already know about it, but they had also made a beginning previously. In other words, they had started to gather together money. They had started to take up a collection. But something had stalled their momentum. And so in response, Paul urged Titus to go that he might, in them and through them, complete what he refers to as this gracious work. This gracious work. Now again, one more time, quite literally, it says that he might complete in you this grace. This grace.

I titled this sermon "the grace of giving." The grace of giving. Here's why. Giving can be coerced. It can be manipulated. It can be forced. People do that. But that's not at all what we want to do. Now, what we want to do is be a church that is a grace-filled church. And grace-filled giving is motivated by, it is brought about, it is enabled by, God's work of grace in each and every individual life. God's grace comes in and produces something different, and then that person generously gives—not because they've been pressured, but because that's who they've become.

Consequently, that's the same reason that God's the only one that deserves thanks when the money comes in. It's because we believe that God's grace is the one that produces or the thing that produces generous hearts that then results in generous giving and generous living. God's the one that motivates, supports, empowers, enables generous giving. Therefore, he's the only one that deserves praise. He's the only one that deserves the glory. Only one that deserves credit.

So on December 31st, I was watching football. And I was praying. And our staff was praying. It's the last day of the calendar year, and so we were praying that God would richly supply for our needs as a church. We didn't call a single person. We talked to God. We asked him, because we believe he is the prime mover. He is the one that stirs in the hearts of people, to bring about generosity by his grace, motivated by his grace. God deserves all the glory. That is how the grace of giving works. God stirs it up, God creates generous people. It's important that we understand that. It's important that we acknowledge that.

But as we acknowledge that, I think it is also important that we acknowledge in our humanity, as people who are growing, this is a work also that we will constantly be growing in. We need to grow in generosity, brought about by the grace of God, but we need to grow in generosity. I need to grow in generosity. I hope that five years from now, by the grace of God, empowered by him, I am more generous than I am right now. We need to grow in these areas, and our growing occurs over time. And we need to acknowledge also that there are times where we might want to resist and be tempted to resist the growth that God is seeking to bring about in us.

Now we know that's true. Because Paul wrote 2nd Corinthians chapters eight and nine. He needed to encourage the Corinthians. Need to encourage them to pursue this growth. Perhaps this was a blind spot for them. So, Paul the pastor writes to them because he longed to see them grow in this area. So, as their pastors he continues, he wants to spur them on.

Verse seven, he says to them:

> *7 But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work, also.*

He said you're abounding in everything. They have placed their faith in Jesus, they were earnest, they were serious about this—you're abounding in love. In other words, Paul's saying, I know God's grace is at work in you, I see it, I see evidence all over. But, I want to challenge you, I wanna encourage you, there might be this spot you're missing. There's an incredibly important facet of your growth that I want to encourage in you, and it's this important demonstration of faith. They're abounding in everything, so he said abound in this gracious work also, abound in this grace.

This grace that cannot be coerced, it has to be joyfully entered into, brought about by the very grace of God. Continues, he says:

> *8 I'm not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.*

Just so interesting. Paul is taking pains to make sure that this giving was something that they didn't do because he said they had to. It had to be their choice, it had to be their decision. But he did want to help them understand, this is what it is. When you give, it is a demonstration of the love that is in you. It displays what is happening in you. There's a new work in you. It's making you into a different kind of person, and this is a sincere outpouring of what is actually in you. It's why he made mention of the Macedonians. He pointed to their example.

But here as he continues, he's going to point in just a moment to the ultimate example. The ultimate example of grace and generosity and self-giving. He points to the Lord Jesus himself. Verse nine, he says:

> *9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

Jesus Christ, though he was rich, let it all loose. God's son, eternally dwelling in perfect community with the Father, enjoying the unending, unfathomable riches and glory of heaven, let go of it. Though he was rich, he became poor. In taking on flesh, Jesus entered into the darkness of our world, the betrayal, the frustration, going all the way to the cross. Doing all of that so that through his poverty, we might become rich, we might enjoy salvation, eternity with him. The one who was rich beyond comprehension graced us by letting it all go, by becoming poor, by giving of himself that we, through him and through his poverty, through his death, through his life, through his incarnation, that we, through the cross, might become rich.

There's no better example. Jesus' giving, God's self-giving through Jesus Christ. He who was rich became poor, that we might become rich. This is why, church, so often when we talk about giving, we talk about how the most generous giver is God. Our giving is modeled after and motivated by and prompted by him. He is the one who is ultimately generous, the one who is rich beyond measure, became poor, that we might become rich.

So now the question is, in light of all of this, what could possibly prevent the Corinthians, and what could possibly prevent us, from embracing a life of generosity? Answer: fear.

Fear of lack. Fear of loss. Perhaps even fear that through our giving, others will benefit to our pain. We will be pained and burdened while others benefit. Fear. And so always the pastor, Paul, as he continues, addresses these very, very natural, very human responses.

He starts by again saying this isn't a command, verse ten:

> *10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.*

So, he's just repeating again, you began well, you had the desire, but something had stalled the momentum. So, he continues, verse 11:

> *11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. 12 For if the readiness is present [you're ready to do it], it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality—*

They had begun well, but the momentum had stopped. It seems as though Paul is acknowledging it was fear, it was concern that caused them to stop. I can just hear the Corinthians saying something to Paul as they're talking about this collection. I can hear them saying, "Now Paul, Is this what you're saying?" Are you really telling us that we should just give everything away and we should live in poverty, while those in Jerusalem are high on the hog, living the high life, and we're here suffering? Is that what you're telling us to do? Is that the kind of system you're setting up, Paul?

The answer, of course, is no, not at all. Paul clarifies exactly what his ask is. His ask is, give according to your ability. Give according to your ability. He doesn't name a amount, he doesn't name a percentage. He doesn't say this is how much you have to give. He doesn't say this is required. He doesn't say it's some tax, none of that. He's extremely careful to ensure that this, if it happened, was stirred up by God's spirit, by God's grace working in them. Can't be forced, can't be pressured.

Because although grace filled-giving will often will often require some measure of sacrifice, it is never the product of guilt. Never the product of guilt. It's the product of grace.

So, this was the ask. He asked that they give, enabled by grace according to their ability, not according to what they didn't have, according to what they did have. He continued, and he clarified this ask. He then added in verse thirteen, this interesting word, "equality," said this is by way of equality, which is a little confusing to us. So, he unpacks that a little more in these last two verses we're going to consider. Verse fourteen, he says:

> *14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; 15 as it is written, [and here he quotes Exodus 16] he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.*

The idea of equality, here's what it is not. It is not some Christian form, some biblical call to, communism or socialism. As if Paul is saying, here's what we're gonna do, everyone throw everything in a pot, we're going to disperse it equally, that's the way we're going to operate now. That is not what Paul is suggesting. But he is suggesting something radical. And it's that within the Christian community, there should be extraordinary care and generosity towards one another, such that if a brother or a sister is in desperate need and cannot make ends meet, cannot fulfill the basic requirements of life, within the Christian community, it is to be different than the world. The Christian community rallies and from their abundance, they help those in need. Paul was absolutely insistent that, in this present time, the church, the people of God, they were to be a different type of people.

You know, I've been in India, and I will just tell you in India, there is a culture, there is a framework that just says, if someone is suffering, they deserve it. They deserve it. That's just their destiny. That is not what the community of grace, the community of God believes at all. Paul says, no, we are a community of extravagant care for one another. You see someone in need out of your abundance, you help them.

We do that at this present time, he said. And in using that phrase, at this present time, I believe he's saying something quite deep. I believe he is thinking about a future time that is coming, but is not yet at this present time. This is how we operate now, but there is a future time when this will no longer be required. At this present time, in other words, today—because today there is suffering, today there is poverty, today there are haves and there are have nots. But a day is coming, a future day is coming when God will settle it all. He will come and he will bring his justice to bear. He will right all wrongs. And in that day, there will not be haves and have nots, there will not be rich and poor—there will only be God's people living according to what he richly provides them himself, the source of not only light, but the source of all that is good.

There is that day, it is coming, but it is not this present time. And so here's the opportunity giving provides. In this present time, the Christian community, we get to live a little bit in the future. See, God's going to do something, but now we get a little taste of it as we live with extravagant generosity towards one another. We get to bless one another, we get to be the agents through whom God richly provides for one another. It is a foretaste of what God is ultimately going to do. We get to be people who live in the future today.

That's a little bit like what Israel did, and I believe that's why he referenced Exodus 16. He referred back to that moment when Israel was in the wilderness, and God was their sole provider, manna from heaven. They didn't even understand what was going on. Mana means "what is it?" Can't figure it out. But God said, take just what you need, don't take anything for tomorrow because it will spoil. But you can have what you need today. And Paul says, whoever took much had just enough. Whoever

took a little bit had just enough. Because God was satisfying them, God was richly providing them a type of foretaste of what God would ultimately do.

Now, in this present moment, in the moment of the new covenant people, the church of Christ, we get to be a people that have a foretaste of what God is ultimately going to do as we richly, generously care for one another.

Rethink, giving. What is Giving? It is a response to God's grace. It is a joyous participation in the work of God. It is a little taste of life as it will one day be when all needs are provided for abundantly, extravagantly by God himself. Giving is not a duty, it is a delight. It's not loss, it's gain. It's not driven by guilt, it's driven by God's grace.

And so today, in light of these announcements, Lincoln Brean Church, I want to affirm God's grace working in you, making you into generous people. And I, along with you, want to say, let us as a people of God, let us abound in this gracious work all the more.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we acknowledge that you are our generous provider. All that we have, all that we have is yours. We're mere stewards. So, we ask, Lord, by your grace, may you stir up in us hearts of generosity, that we become people who would joyously participate in giving to the good things, the good works that you are doing in Lincoln, in Nebraska, in the United States, and around the world, that you might be glorified. And that we might experience the great grace of giving and the joy that comes along with it. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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