

## **Seven Myths About Giving**

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Rich Nathan

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Blessed To Be A Blessing Series

2 Cor. 8:1-9

We have a lot of crazy ideas about giving. I am going to share some of those ideas this evening [morning] in a message that I am calling "Seven Myths About Giving."

Before we turn to that, you need to know that we are in the home stretch of a giving campaign. I have been saying this for a number of weeks, so regular attenders, please forgive me when I go through the same little spiel about what it is we are doing. Understand that we have 150 new family units attending our church every single week. When you see those hands go up for guests, we give out 120+ CDs every week of the year. Many people here have not heard.

We are in the final weeks of a giving campaign. Our plan is to build a new community center on the front of our church. As I've said over the last couple of months, we desire to practically express the love of Jesus Christ for our city through a variety of means. We plan in our new community center to have a free medial clinic, a free legal clinic, a job training program. We plan to radically expand our after school program, to do tutoring, arts, music, sports. We want to offer a variety of programs designed to bring about real change in people's lives. We want to assist young men in our community to take responsibility for the children they father. We want to help young men and women to become successful parents; and if they are married, to be successfully married. I expect this new community center is going to offer a variety of recovery programs and training programs, and financial counseling.

What we are saying by building this community center is that we want to reach out the hand of Vineyard Columbus even farther into our community.

And in addition, this giving campaign is going to extend the reach of our church globally. We want to send three full teams out from this church, teams of between 8-10 adults, to plant Vineyard churches in Africa and in Asia. And so we are talking about sending between 24-30 adults out to the mission field in the next five years.

But the money that is being raised in this campaign is not only designed to send out these three teams. We want to strengthen our existing fields in Central Asia, Brazil, and in Africa. And we want to participate in development projects to bring economic development to struggling communities in the Third World. We want to

care for AIDS orphans, men and women who have the AIDS virus. In very practical ways from medical care to business development, we want to take a holistic approach in our missions.

Now there are two important dates that are coming up. This Friday evening, March 4<sup>th</sup>, here at the church, we are going to host a leaders' dessert meeting for about 900 of our leaders. Small group leaders, women's group leaders, men's group leaders, ministry leaders, children's ministry workers, worship team members, leaders from all of our various ministries, including our entire staff, will be the first to make the 3-year commitment to our giving campaign. There is a scriptural principle that leaders are to set the pace for giving.

Then on March 10<sup>th</sup>, church, what is happening on Thursday, March 10<sup>th</sup>? We will be as an entire church, all of our services including Joshua House and all of our children, will gather down at the Columbus Convention Center for what I think will be a historic time in the history of the Vineyard. We are going to, for the first time in nearly 7 years, have our entire church gathered together. You will want to be in your seats by 7:15 p.m. because the service will start at 7:30 and you won't want to walk in 20 minutes into the service. You will want to be in your seat to pray and to be spiritually prepared. March 10<sup>th</sup> will be where all of the church will be invited to turn in your 3-year pledge to our giving campaign.

A few months ago *Business Week* asked the question whether we have now entered a new philanthropic era. About 100 years ago some of America's wealthiest businessmen committed most of their fortunes to various philanthropic causes. Andrew Carnegie gave away 90% of the fortune he accumulated through the founding of US Steel to the creation of libraries all over America, and the establishment of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Andrew Carnegie said that "the man who dies rich dies disgraced."

Bill and Melinda Gates seem to have adopted that philosophy. A year ago they gave their 3 billion dollar Microsoft dividend to their foundation.

Michael and Susan Dell, the founders of Dell Corporation, have followed suit and have given hundreds of millions of dollars to a variety of children's causes.

Cheryl Saban, along with her husband Hiam Saban, who have given several hundred million dollars to hospitals and to various Jewish causes said this: "You get to the point where it makes you a lot happier to buy a defibrillator for a hospital than another piece of Lalique."

Are we seeing the birth of a radical new philanthropy by America's wealthiest individuals? Despite the extravagant giving by some, *Business Week* sums up its study of America's wealthiest individuals saying: "On average, the nation's richest 1% own 41% of the country's wealth. Yet they donate only 2% of their income each year to charity. 45% of the dot.com millionaires in Silicon Valley

gave nothing to charity last year. More needs to be done.” That’s their conclusion.

Well, today I want to address the issue of financial giving from a biblical perspective. I want to specifically address some of the crazy ideas that we have about giving. As I said, I’m going to call today’s talk, “Seven Myths About Giving.” Let’s pray.

#### SLIDE

2Co 8:1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

2Co 8:2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

2Co 8:3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

2Co 8:4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

2Co 8:5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.

2Co 8:6 So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.

2Co 8:7 But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

2Co 8:8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

2Co 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

As I mentioned, I am calling today’s talk, “Seven Myths About Giving.” The first myth is this – *people give, but it doesn’t make a difference*. Sure, you write your check, you take your money out of your wallet and throw it in the offering plate, but it really doesn’t make a difference.

Let me give you a bit of background to 2 Cor. 8 and actually 9 as well. The apostle Paul is taking up a collection from Gentile churches, those churches that would be in Asia and in Europe, for the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem in Judea. The collection for poor believers in Jerusalem has been called one of the great enterprises of Paul’s missionary career.

Now, there are a number of reasons why the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were so impoverished. There was a general crop failure and famine that affected all Jews in Judea.

But on top of that, it is very likely that as a result of these Jews turning to Jesus as Messiah, these Jewish converts became the victims of economic boycotts and persecution and disinheritance from parents. Businesses that these Jewish converts would have run were boycotted by their Jewish brethren so that their businesses were in ruin, their family relationships were ruined. We know that some of them were put in prison. Some were beaten. The comparable situation today would be if a Muslim declared their faith in Jesus. Or in some Hindu villages in India, a well-know Hindu declares his faith in Jesus as the exclusive God. The Jewish believers who had turned to Christ were in severe economic straits.

Remember that the very first step in the organization in the very first church was occasioned by the oppression of poverty. Perhaps as early as 32 AD seven deacons were appointed by the apostles to supervise charitable work to widows.

Paul was asked in Galatians 2 if during his missionary work among Gentiles in Asia and Europe, if he would take up a collection for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and Judea. He said, "This very thing I was eager to do. I really wanted to take this collection up."

In fact, Paul taking a collection for the Jewish believers is a repeated theme in his letters. We read about the collection in Romans 15. We read about the collection in Galatians 2. We read about the collection in 1 Cor. 16. The collection forms the backdrop of two chapters of scripture – 2 Cor. 8 and 9. What was the big deal in Paul's mind about taking up this collection? The big deal was that Paul believed that this giving was going to make a difference.

You say, "What difference would this giving make? Why was it so important to Paul to make sure that the Gentile believers gave money to the Jewish believers? Why was it so important?"

Well, certainly it was an act of Christian charity. Paul was making good on his promise to the other apostles to remember the poor in Jerusalem. When we see brothers who are struggling and sisters who are in need, Christian compassion moves us to help those who are in need. Certainly, one of the issues is Christian charity.

But Paul believed that the gifts were not just charity. There was an obligation Paul viewed the offering from the Gentile church as a matter of paying one's debts. In a certain sense, it would be like the church plants from Vineyard Columbus coming back one day to help out the mother church. He saw that the Gentile world was being spiritually enriched from the mother church in Jerusalem. The gospel was going out from the Mother Church in Jerusalem. And so it was appropriate that the Gentiles who were spiritually indebted to this Mother Church give back something.

Romans 15:27

SLIDE

Ro 15:27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

Very significant in Paul's mind, also, was to mention the unity of the Gentile and Jewish wings of the church. The wall of separation between Jew and Gentile was broken down through the cross of Jesus Christ. It didn't matter what your ethnicity was, Jew and Gentile both come to God today through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

But Judaizers demanded that Gentiles be circumcised. Hellenizers urged Gentiles to celebrate their freedom in ways that were offensive to Jewish sensibilities. Both Judaizers and Hellenizers kept rebuilding the wall. How can the wall between the races stay down? Through giving.

Let me update this. How can racial reconciliation in our city be furthered? Here's a way for it to be furthered. When a black woman helps a poor white man get a job, racial reconciliation is furthered. When a white man helps a poor black woman get an education, racial reconciliation is furthered. Our community center is all about continuing the reconciling work of Christ accomplished at the cross.

And even more than that, I think the apostle Paul saw Gentiles bringing material gifts to Jerusalem as being a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. In the Old Testament, the prophets foresaw a day when Gentiles would come to Jews in Jerusalem bearing gifts. The wealth of the nations would flow toward Jerusalem.

SLIDE – Is. 60:5, 6, 10, 11

Isa 60:5 Then you will look and be radiant,  
your heart will throb and swell with joy;  
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,  
to you the riches of the nations will come.

Isa 60:6 Herds of camels will cover your land,  
young camels of Midian and Ephah.  
And all from Sheba will come,  
bearing gold and incense  
and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

Isa 60:10 "Foreigners will rebuild your walls,  
and their kings will serve you.  
Though in anger I struck you,  
in favor I will show you compassion.

Isa 60:11 Your gates will always stand open,  
they will never be shut, day or night,

so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations—their kings led in triumphal procession.

In Paul's mind, Jesus inaugurated the coming of the kingdom. When Jesus came he brought the presence of the kingdom with him. So where were the gifts from the Gentiles to the Jews? I've got it, Paul said. At least these prophecies will be partially fulfilled in this collection. It is all tied up in Paul's mind with the end of the age. The point is, friends, for the apostle Paul financial giving was a big deal because it makes a difference.

We have been getting some marvelous testimonies. Honestly, one of the most encouraging things for me in this last year, of all the things I have seen God do, is reading through the testimonies. Because it is hard for me to know, unless someone says something, that people's lives are really being affected. Let me read to you a few of the testimonies we've gotten in the last couple of weeks.

1.

*Dear Rich,*

*I just wanted to tell you how much the church has blessed us! On Feb. 05, 05 a young man by the name of Ricky Musick was shot and found by his father Ricky Senior. God took Ricky home on Feb. 07, 05.*

*Ricky Senior has lived a very hard life and had no financial means to pay for any type of services for his son. I have just recently started attending the Vineyard with my brother and when this tragedy struck I called the church asking for prayer. Not only did Kerry Davis come to the hospital to pray for Ricky and support the family, he asked if Rick Senior had any type of insurance or financial support.*

*When Rickie passed away the Vineyard and many members of the Church stepped in and took care of the spiritual and financial needs of the family. It has been a long time since I have felt the Lord in my life or where I belonged, I have felt very touched by the Vineyard and your teaching for a while. When the love and support poured out in such a way I finally knew where I belonged.*

*I can not put into words how grateful I am for all of your help and support. I have a new conviction in my heart to spread the word of the Lord and let others know that he is the answer and the way.*

2.

*My husband, my daughter and I were involved in a terrible car accident on October 26. I sustained a broken hip, two broken bones in my arm and a*

*ruptured aorta. God was there immediately. A paramedic emerged from a car behind us to take control of the scene. After radioing for help, he climbed into the car with me and held me still. He put a blanket over me as they cut the top off the car. They life flighted me to Grant Trauma Center and rushed me into surgery. Most people with a torn aorta do not survive. Some are paralyzed. I came through the surgery okay!*

*A few days later, I was having trouble breathing and I felt that my life was threatened. After praying I had a strong impression that a particular couple should pray for me. After somewhat of a struggle with the nurse, I got her to call my husband Dave and give him the message. Dave showed up a bit later, along with the couple I'd asked him to bring. They prayed for me and a blanket of peace fell on me. I could smell the sweetest fragrance I have ever smelled. I didn't know then if that meant I got to live or not, but I had incredible peace.*

*The church has been wonderful to us throughout this difficult time. Some of the things Vineyard has done include:*

- 1. Given me a gift of a CD player with a remote and praise CDs. This meant that I could go to sleep listening to worship music in my hospital room.*
- 2. Different church members brought food to the house.*
- 3. A worship team performed live music in my hospital room.*
- 4. Many people prayed and I know the prayers made a difference.*
- 5. There were hospital visits from many at Vineyard*
- 6. The Benevolence Fund helped us pay our house payment when money was tight because I couldn't work.*
- 7. There was an incredible workday at our house where walls were taken out, a door made larger, and a ramp installed, all to accommodate my wheelchair.*

Giving makes a difference. You know, at the beginning of January, our church too up an offering for tsunami relief. We raised \$109,577.87 And we sent over a team of medical professionals along with our missions pastor, Mark Batcheck and his wife, Kris, who themselves had been missionaries in Indonesia for 4-5 years. An additional \$27,000 was given to send over this entire team and to pay their expenses for a couple of weeks. I want you to see just a little bit of the impact of your giving on a nation devastated by this profound disaster.

VIDEO – Mark Batcheck

But the difference that Christ can make through a giving and building campaign is seen by the presence of hundreds of you here. Here is what I would like you to do. I would like you to all stand, if you can. Now those of you who have been here less than a year, why don't you sit down. Those of you, who have been here less than two years, please sit down. Less than three years, sit down. If you were with us when we met in the gymnasium, remain standing.

Friends, the people who are standing, at least most of them, are the people who prayed and paid for this present facility. We have nearly doubled in size in the last 4½ years. Now if you were not with us in our church on Lehner Road, would you be seated. We came to our present property here on Cooper Road with about 850 people. Many of them have since left with one of our 18 church plants. The few people who are standing helped pay for this piece of property. They did so in faith believing that their gifts were going to make a difference, not just in their lives and for their own comfort and the comfort of their children, but in the lives of people they didn't even know yet like the life of Ricky Musick's family, whose funeral we did a few weeks ago, or the woman who was nearly killed in a auto accident and who was reached out to by many people in our church, or the folks in Indonesia who you just heard about on the video.

And when you sit down and pray about what you are going to give in your three year pledge, you are not just giving for yourself, you are not just giving for your kids, if you have children. You are not even giving for all your friends here, if you are connected, all the people you love. You are not even giving because of all of God's wonderful deeds in the past here in the church. We are giving in faith looking forward to the thousands and thousands of people that God is going to touch that we don't know yet – people all around Central Ohio and people in Africa, in Asia, and in South America.

We are giving in faith for the stories that we are going to hear about. We are giving for the future salvations, for the marriages that will be on the brink of ruin, but will be rescued. We are giving for the kids who will not have to be a statistic. And for their kids, because parents were kept from divorce. We are giving to assist children to have a totally different life because someone in our community center tutored them in an after-school program. So instead of dropping out, or getting into drugs, a child will go on to college and become a contributing member of our society. We are giving for people to be able to find training for better jobs and decent daycare and legal help. Through the arts, to be able to discover some beauty in an otherwise ugly world. We are giving most of all to help people find our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Giving is an act of faith. And the people who gave in the past were asked by God to believe in a future they couldn't see yet. That's what God is asking of us now.



Well, that is myth #1 – my giving doesn't make a difference. Well, it has made a difference in the thousands of people seated here.

We read in 2 Cor. 8:1,

#### SLIDE

2Co 8:1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

By the way, we know of three churches in Macedonia from the New Testament – the church at Philippi, the church at Thessalonica, and the church in Berea, mentioned in the book of Acts. Interestingly, as the Anglican Bishop Lightfoot pointed out over a century ago, Paul never exhorted these churches regarding the temptation of wealth, or the need to give to the poor.

Why didn't he? These churches just happened to be filled with nicer people than the other churches Paul was dealing with?

Here is myth #2 – people give generously because they are noble, they are kind. Because they are that kind of person. The apostle Paul calls attention to the example of the Macedonian churches – these Philippians and Thessalonians. He calls attention to them, but not so people would say regarding them, "My goodness, aren't they something. They are such noble givers. They are so generous." Look at what Paul calls attention to. He says, "We want you to know about the grace that God has given." What the apostle Paul wants to underline is not the nobility, or the great generosity. He directs our attention to God's grace that is at work in them that produced the generosity.

What we see in v. 1 is really the difference between a Christian perspective of people who do good and a non-Christian perspective of people who do good. Very often, someone who doesn't know Christ will watch a Christian or watch a group of Christians relating. They say, "Those people are so nice." Like my mom always says, "Your friends are so nice. Where did you find such a nice group of people? They are all so polite." Many of my family members went to our son's wedding and watched the way Daniel's friends were relating. They were frankly shocked by how pleasant, how nice, Dan's friends were. Their comments were basically: Daniel certainly has chosen a nice group of friends – Daniel's friends are nice kids.

But a Christian perspective is not that these people are noble, that they are naturally generous. A Christian perspective is that the reason they are that way is because of God's grace that is at work in their lives. I want to call your attention not to people, but to grace, the grace that God has given to the Macedonian churches.

In fact, Paul's entire argument about giving in 2 Cor. 8-9 is framed by this concept so fundamental to the Christian faith – the grace of God. It begins with a statement of God's grace in 2 Cor. 8:1,

SLIDE

2Co 8:1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

And he ends with God's grace in 2 Cor. 9:15,

SLIDE

2Co 9:15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Along the way he mentions the word "grace," which the NIV stylistically varies, 9 times. Here's how grace works, 2 Cor. 8:2

SLIDE

2Co 8:2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Grace is the mainspring for Christian giving. God's grace is like a fountain in someone's soul. Paul speaks in v. 2 about generosity welling up. When a person is touched by the grace of God, one of the clear signs of this will be that a naturally stingy person suddenly becomes generous. Generosity wells up as we are filled with God's grace.

And only God's grace can account for generosity springing up from the dry well of stinginess or poverty. The result of God's grace welling up is that people give financial gifts. 2 Cor. 8:6,

SLIDE

2Co 8:6 So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.

The NIV rightly translates the collection that is taken up as "acts of grace." God's grace flows into your life and what flows out are graces in many forms. One of the particular forms that the grace of God flowing out of your life takes is financial generosity, but it doesn't end there. This financial generosity, these monetary grace gifts, results in thanksgiving being given to God, v. 16:

SLIDE

2Co 8:16 I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you.

The word "thanks" in v. 16 is literally, "but grace be to God."

Have you ever heard someone, perhaps from a Roman Catholic background, or traditional church background, say before a meal: "Let's bow our heads and say grace over this food." Now, that is a great expression. It is a very biblical expression. It is the expression Paul is using in 2 Cor. 8:16. Let's say grace. What it means is that our thanks to God is literally a returning of grace. We are recognizing as we bow our heads that the source of this food is the grace of God. Whenever you say thank you to God, you are returning grace. You are saying: Lord, I see that this job or my savings account, this money that I have, my house, my stock, my very life is all the result of your grace.

Friends, we don't give because we are so nice. We give because the grace of God has entered our lives and this grace is a power that makes not nice people and stingy people generous.

You know, parenthetically, I don't think that there is anything that inspires more hope than the possibility that God might change your life by his grace. For those of you who feel utterly stuck, for those of you who look at your life and say: there's no way I could ever change, you don't yet know the power of God's grace.

A few weeks ago we saw the video of a man in our congregation who said that he had been engaged in affairs throughout his marriage. He said in his testimony that the root of these adulterous affairs was a profound selfishness, a profound pride. He described the pain he caused his family in his selfishness and pride, and then wonderfully, God's grace came into his life through the person who had been most hurt by his affairs, namely his wife. He experienced through her the forgiveness and grace of God, a grace that not only forgave his sins, but what I really loved about his video testimony was that it was a grace that empowered him to change. Grace humbled him. Grace created in him real repentance. Grace restored his marriage.

Last weekend we saw another video testimony of a man in our congregation, who had been homeless. He told us that he was repeatedly sexually abused as a child. He told us in this video that he now has the AIDS virus in his body and that he fell into drug and alcohol addiction. What changed this young man? The power of God's grace.

I spoke with a woman last weekend, who we baptized. She had been a heroin addict for years. What changed her? The power of God's grace.

I also spoke last weekend with a businessman in our church. He is a senior executive with one of Central Ohio's largest corporations. By his own confession, he said: You know, I was not a very nice man. He described sitting in a chair with a scotch and cigarette, watching TV evangelists and getting so angry that he would shut the TV off. And then sometimes, he would turn it on

again and listen. He said: There was so much that was wrong with some of the ministries that I watched, but God reached out and touched me one day. Grace found me and I was changed.

You know, the grace of God is available for you, friend. For you who say: I've gone too far, God's grace can change you. For you who say: I'm too old, God's grace is there for you. For you who should have known better and acted differently; for you who failed to act and regret now what you omitted to do, God's grace is there for you for your negligence. And for you who hurt other people and violated trust, and hurt yourself in the process, and offended God, today believe that God's grace is available to you, if you will receive it.

Christian people don't give generously because they are noble, or because they are naturally nice. Christian people give generously because they have been blessed by receiving of the grace of God, and so they turn to be a blessing to others.

Blessed to be a blessing is the theme of our giving campaign. God has blessed us as a church here at the Vineyard and God has blessed us individually, and he's blessed our families. Through this giving campaign, we are responding to God's grace and blessing by turning now and becoming a blessing to others.

SLIDE – 2 Cor. 8:2

2Co 8:2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Myth #3 is that *people give generously only when they have the resources*. Look at the description of the Macedonians. Paul writes, "Out of their most severe trial and extreme poverty..." Literally this word "extreme" means "down to the depth poverty." We would say that these people were scraping the bottom of the barrel. They were rock-bottom poverty. No excess. No fat. And yet out of this scraping the bottom of the barrel poverty, they gave generously and extravagantly. This poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Generosity is not the exclusive purview of the wealthy. Don't any of you say, "Because I don't have a great deal of money or because of my financial situation, I cannot be generous." That is a myth. Do you think God would give the wonderful blessing of generosity only to the wealthy? I mean if generosity is such a good thing, if there is more blessing in giving than getting, do you think he would withhold that precious gift of knowing that you are being generous and watching the grace of God flow through your life – do you think he just gives it to those who are really well off?

God wants everyone of you to experience the privilege of giving generously.

Let me just describe the situation that was going on in Macedonia, because just like their Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, these believers were also suffering great economic hardships. The Romans had taken over most of their industries. They had taken over the gold and silver mines and reserved for themselves the right of importing certain necessary items like salt. They took the trees around the various cities for building ships. The Romans basically raped and looted Macedonia.

The Christians certainly suffered the worst. Like in Jerusalem, they would have been the objects of economic and social oppression. And so these Macedonians would be the kind of people that we would just expect them to pass the offering plate by without dropping anything in because they didn't have very much. "As far as the collection, Paul, that's for the rich. That's not for us single moms. That's not for us teenagers. That's not for us people who are down on our luck."

Paul says, "God is not so unkind as to hold back the precious gift of generosity from the poor." It is the case that if you don't have very much, you can't give as much in absolute dollars as the wealthy can. But you can be just as generous. You might not be able to give, all of us, equal amounts, but everyone of us can make the same degree of sacrifice. Generosity is not the private possession of the well-to-do.

You know the story, many of you, of the widow who gave two small copper coins in the Temple in Jerusalem in Mark 12. Jesus is standing around watching what people give. I imagine he does the same today. He watches what people give, and even more, he looks at the motive, the heart behind the giving. In Mark 12 Jesus is standing around watching what people are putting in the offering plate. Some of the people were putting in great amounts of money and then this poor widow hobbles up and puts in two little copper coins. They were the kind of coins that had been shaved down and they were actually very light coins. Tiny little coins worth very little. Jesus says about her that she gave more than all the wealthy people did because, like the Macedonians, she gave out of her poverty, all that she had. Generosity is not just something that God allows the rich to enjoy.

A woman in our congregation really understands this principle.

*I have been a member of Vineyard Columbus for about 2 years or so. I've been attending for about 5 years. Over the years we've sometimes been able to tithe 10%. Sometimes there would only be five or ten dollars. We depend heavily on my husband's overtime just to meet our monthly bills and needs. On the occasion there was no overtime there was barely money for the food budget. There were weeks when we had only twenty five dollars for food! Still we never went hungry! The Lord would stretch those twenty five dollars into fifty dollars worth of groceries.*

*We've decided to join the new Vineyard church plant. The leaders of this new church plant introduced us to the Vineyard style of worship, praise and preaching. Coming from a Baptist background this was a real stretch for us. How thankful to God I am for stretching us!*

*Being apart of a new church plant I was really worried about the tithing situation. I understand that tithing is vital to the growth of a church I just didn't know where the money was going to come from. The only thing I could think to do was ask God to please provide a tithe for us!*

*Boy did He come through! My husband, and I have custody of our 5 year old granddaughter. Another blessing from God. Don works afternoons and evenings. We don't make enough to afford childcare so I'm a stay at home caregiver! I didn't know what kind of job I could possibly do but I knew that my husband was working all he could with his physical limitations!*

*God recently provided me with a health care job. I work 2 hours a day, 4 days a week and I make enough money to pay the tithe on my husband's salary and my own as well. What an awesome God! The two hours I work my husband is able to watch our granddaughter, so we don't have to pay child care. The homes are very close to us so there is very little gas or wear and tear on the car! Isn't that incredible.*

*Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share another way God provides a tithe to His church and offer Him praise for his incredible provision!*

It is these examples of people who are stretching, who are doing something unnatural, that speaks to us of the grace of God. It is an unnatural thing for people with very little to give the very little away. The only way that someone will give the little they have away is if grace is at work in their lives.

Think about this with me. What is the normal reaction we have to trials, to poverty, to even the prospect of trials and poverty? What is the normal reaction that we have? Terror? Real fear? We clutch harder. The normal reaction to risk is not to open our hands freely.

Eugene Petersen, who wrote a wonderful paraphrase of the Bible called The Message, tells about some birds that he was watching one day as he was walking by a river. Apparently, there were some swallows up in a tree – a mother with her little babies. And the mother swallow was trying to give the babies a lesson in flying. And so one by one she picked the babies up out of the nest and put them on the branch and pushed them off the branch.

He watched this and the first bird is clutching onto the branch and the mother is pecking at the bird's back until the bird lets go from pain and falls off the branch discovering this extraordinary ability that he didn't know he had – that he could

fly! The baby was falling like a rock until his wings begin to move and it swoops up and begins to fly. And then bird #2, peck, peck peck...pushes off. Well, bird #3 – this baby bird is not getting off that branch. I mean this bird is clinging to the branch for dear life and is crying, “Mama, mama, leave me alone. Don’t make me jump.” And Mama bird is just determined – Baby Bird, you are going to get off that branch until she practically had to pick the bird up and throw it.

Well, that baby bird is a picture of us. We face risk, difficulty, trial and fear of not having, our natural response is to clutch down harder. We don’t know that what God has in store for us is this ability to fly, and it is grace. It’s grace that caused these Macedonian believers to soar.

Listen, when you contemplate what you will write down for your three-year pledge, each of us is going to face tests and challenges of varying sorts. For some of you it is going to be giving out of poverty. Some of you are single and have no one else to support you other than yourself. But do not let the enemy rob you of the joy of great generosity because you say generosity is for the wealthy. Generosity is for everyone including your children.

For some of you, you might face the trial that my wife, Marlene, and I faced. We have been trying to come up with what we were going to give. I’ve been saying for months: You need to pray as you determine what it is that you are going to give to this campaign. You need to pray and ask God to speak. Well, Marlene and I have been trying to put that into practice in our own lives. This past Friday morning, I finally said: Marlene, what has the Lord been speaking to you about regarding what we are going to give?

She said: Well, what did the Lord tell you?

I said: Well, here’s the amount I feel like we’re supposed to give. I’ve been trying to figure out how we’re going to give that amount over the next three years and I’ve begun to work out this plan of cutting back here and shifting over there.

I described for her the whole plan. I said: What do you think?

She stared at me wide-eyed and said: The number you mentioned is exactly to the dollar the amount that the Lord spoke to me about.

I said: Really?

She said: It is the exact same amount I felt we ought to give.

The moment we shared those figures, I felt such a peace and a release. It was like “Yeah, Lord, this represents our sacrifice to you.”

I think that if you go through this process of really praying – couples praying separately and then coming together and praying together, God will give you a sense of peace – yes, this is really a sacrifice. Which leads us to the fourth myth:

#4 – People give only what they can afford to give. Look at what it says about these Macedonian believers. 2 Cor. 8:3

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2Co 8:3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

Literally, the Greek says “contrary to ability.” If your ability is to earn \$25,000, you can’t give \$50,000. The person who can only lift 10 pounds cannot lift 50 pounds. So what does it mean that the Macedonians gave contrary to their ability?

“Contrary to ability” means that the proportion a person gives is out of sync with the common considerations people have about giving. The Macedonians gave beyond common sense, beyond what you would expect. They didn’t just give out of the fat. They understood that Christian giving was different than the way the world gives. It is not just giving out of excess, out of the fat, oh yeah, we can give this without changing anything at all. Christian giving, that really shows forth the grace of God, is giving that cuts into the muscle and the bone.

I sent many of you a portion of a testimony a woman in our congregation sent me. I would like to read a portion of that to you because it speaks so plainly about giving contrary to ability. This woman writes:

*I want to give so much and have been praying for God to bless this family financially so we can give money to this campaign. I have restructured some of our debt, reduced our spending on groceries, shop at thrift stores for clothes, but no relief has been forthcoming. And yet we are still making it.*

*God has given me an amount to give and it is not a lot of money. Basically, it is the amount I usually spend on buying a pizza on Friday nights as sort of a treat. And if anything changes, I can send more. But I am so excited about what we are doing that I can hardly stand it. I can’t wait to get involved in volunteering and wonder if, perhaps, God knowing my heart, has put me in these circumstances so that I can really understand the pain of what these people are going through? If things were different and I was financially successful, would I truly be able to be compassionate, or would I be given to platitudes and a pat on the back?*

I was really cut to the heart as I read a statement from one of our members that the only way she could think about coming up with money to give to people poorer than she was to give up the one little luxury she had: eating pizza on



Friday night. I can see her sitting there calculating: Well, you know, if we give up \$10 every Friday, that's 52 pizzas a year that is \$500 a year, x 3...I could give \$1500. That, my friend, is giving contrary to ability.

I talked with you about how to determine what to pledge in this 3-year campaign. I've said there are two approaches to giving that you can use. #1 is to figure up your income for the next three years and subtract from that income all of your expenses, desires, and then give a portion of the leftovers.

A second, very different, approach is to ask God what we are to give. Many times following prayer, we are going to have a distinct impression of what God is saying. That happened to me and Marlene. We had a settled peace as a married couple when we found really surprisingly that we agreed down to the very dollar of what we were supposed to give.

But what if you don't hear anything? Are you just supposed to sit around and wait until a certain dollar amount floats into your mind? Do you just guess? Is the process entirely mystical?

Let me try to de-mystify this process for you. The Old Testament King David said in 2 Samuel 24:24,

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2Sa 24:24 But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing."  
So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century terms, David word mean: I will not write down an amount in this 3-year pledge, which does not require a change in my lifestyle. I'm not just going to cut out a little bit of fat. I'm going to cut into muscle and bone.

When our giving requires some change in lifestyle, that we have to change our vacation plans, when we have to change our purchase plans for a car, when we have to change our plans for paying off bills, if you have to change your lifestyle, then you are probably close to the will of God.

Listen, we don't give what we can afford to give. We give what we choose to give. See, the way we handle money is not based on our incomes, it is based on our choices. Let me put it this way. Lifestyle for people who make more than their absolute necessities demand – your lifestyle is not a matter of your income. That's a myth. Lifestyle above the basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothing is a matter of your choices. Let me prove this to you.

There are tens of thousands of men and women living in Central Ohio suburbs in really great houses and they drive great cars and wear great clothes and have

really nice jewelry and go on nice vacations, and they are barely keeping their heads above water. They are up to their ears in debt. They are living paycheck to paycheck, hand to mouth. They are one paycheck away from the street with no real savings account, borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. I used to see these great houses in these suburban neighborhoods and think, "Wow – I didn't realize there were so many people in Columbus with such great incomes." I didn't realize there were so many jobs paying significantly above 6-figure incomes in the city of Columbus.

I was talking with one of my physician friends who was commenting about some of his neighbors. He said, "Rich, a lot of people aren't doing that well. That's not what their income is. They are mortgaged up to the hilt. The least little job change or wind that blows into their lives and their whole house of cards collapses."

Friends, lifestyle is a choice. Some people choose to live way above their means. Some people choose to live right at their means. Some people choose to live well below their means.

Part of figuring out what our lifestyle is going to be and what we are going to give is to begin to see that the amount of money that we have very often is the result of choices we make. It is not necessarily the case that all of us need to continue maintaining the same lifestyle that we have been maintaining.

- You may want to consider committing your raises for the next three years to the Lord. It is not necessarily the case that our lifestyle has to increase with our income.
- Here is another possible lifestyle adjustment: Commit your income tax refund check to the Lord for the next three years.
- A person could easily save \$500-600 a year just by cutting off cable services.
- Lifestyle change #4: Adjust your vacation. For one or more of the next three years, do something inexpensive. Go camping. Go hiking. Rent a cabin in Ohio.

Well, here is Myth #5 – People give generously only when pressed and pushed and manipulated. The apostle Paul says in v. 5,

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<sup>2Co 8:5</sup> And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

You know something, the grace of God when it is at work in our lives completely turns begging upside down. I don't know if you have noticed this in your Bible reading, but when God's grace enters a person's life, they are the ones who do

the begging to serve God and to give to God. Instead of having to be pushed and manipulated and begged to give, when God works in someone's life, the recipient of grace himself is the one who does the begging.

For example, there is a demoniac, this guy with demons in Mark 5. Jesus casts the demons out of the guy. And what we read is this healed fellow, this restored person, this same guy begs Jesus, "Please let me follow you." Jesus doesn't beg him. It would be so wonderful if you followed me. I would provide this and that for you. The grace of God, this power, this force, this influence enters his life and he begs Jesus for the privilege of following him.

When the prophet Isaiah encounters the holiness of God and the grace of God what does Isaiah do? He throws himself at God and says, "Here am I, send me." He begs God for the privilege of being used by God. Have you ever begged God to use you? If you have, you are the recipient of God's grace.

I've watched this grace over and over again in the life of this church. Instead of begging to get volunteers, or begging for money, God has moved on the hearts of individuals to step forward to say: Here am I, use me. Here is my money. When a leader is forced to strong-arm, when a leader has to manipulate, or plead, then we need to go back to the drawing board to pray and fast and we need to go back to discipling, and cry out for more grace to touch people's lives.

The people are wandering in the wilderness. Moses is going to construct a tabernacle according to the command of God. The people are touched by the grace of God and they beg Moses for the privilege of giving to the tabernacle. So much so that Moses has to say, "Enough, you have given enough."

Just one day in my life I would like to experience that – where we say "enough." It is the product of the grace of God. When God works in your life, when this power comes in your life, you beg God for the privilege of being a part of His work.

Myth #6 – People give only when they have the spiritual gift of giving. V. 7,

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<sup>2Co 8:7</sup> But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

People give only when they have the spiritual gift of giving. Paul mentions various spiritual gifts. He mentions faith and speech and knowledge. He may be speaking of the message of knowledge. He may be speaking of various speech gifts from 1 Cor. 12 – prophecy and tongues and the interpretation of tongues, the gift of faith. He goes on and commends them not only for gifts, but for qualities, what we call fruit of the Spirit – love, zeal. And he says to them. "Just

as you excel in everything else, see to it that you also excel in this grace of giving.”

Here’s his point, friends. No one can call himself a really good disciple of Jesus unless they are also a really good giver. You and I may have a lot of areas of our lives together. We may have learned how to pray well or how to read the Bible well, or how to share our faith well, or we may have really good families. We have learned to be loving spouses. We have learned how to bring our sex lives under control. We have learned how not to curse. We may have learned how to be encouragers. To be kind. But we are not yet full disciples of Jesus unless we have also learned how to be great givers. Giving is not the special purview of a few wealthy people, a few gifted people, or a few noble people. Generous giving is something that God requires of every follower of Christ.

Which leads to the last point – Myth #7: People’s gifts are the most important ones.

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“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

Are people’s gifts the most important? Paul started with the example of the Macedonian believers – people who gave out of their poverty. And he said, “I want you to know the grace that was at work there.”

Friends, there is no greater example of giving than that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our giving is not the most important giving. It’s His giving. This community center is designed to get more people in touch with the most important thing – His giving. No one was ever richer than Jesus. No one ever gave more than Jesus. No one ever became poorer than Jesus. He humbled Himself to death, even death on a cross.

And no one ever makes people richer than Jesus. We want to open the community center and send out missionaries to get people in touch with this message—the message of Jesus’ giving. Our giving is not the most important thing. But what we are about is celebrating His giving. Let’s pray.

#### Announcement:

If you weren’t able to attend one of the personal contact meetings that we hosted this past month, the booklet and DVD of the meeting is available as you leave the sanctuary. We have a very limited number, so if you attended the meeting don’t take another. Husbands and wives, we would like to limit these to one per family. Thanks!

## **Seven Myths About Giving**

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Rich Nathan

February 26-27, 2005

Blessed To Be A Blessing Series

2 Cor. 8:1-9

- I. My Giving Doesn't Make A Difference (Gal. 2:10; Rom. 15:27; Is. 60:5ff)
- II. People Give Generously Because They Are Naturally Noble (2 Cor. 8:1)
- III. People Give Generously Only When They Have The Resources (2 Cor. 8:2)
- IV. People Give Only What They Can Afford To Give (2 Cor. 8:3)
- V. People Give Generously Only When Coerced To Do So (2 Cor. 8:4)
- VI. People Give Generously Only When They Have The Spiritual Gift Of Giving (2 Cor. 8:7)
- VII. People's Gifts Are The Most Important Ones (2 Cor. 8:9)