



# ALL THINGS NEW

FIRST EPISCOPAL DISTRICT BIBLE STUDY

NOVEMBER 2017

## November Theme: A New Way of Giving

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### A New Word

God wants us to be whole and complete in Him. Righteousness does not require our money or possession, but simply total surrender and full commitment to follow.

### A New Understanding

Scripture records more correspondence from the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth than to any other church. Beginning with his mission to Corinth around 50 A.D. (Acts 18), Paul proceeded to work with the Corinthian church for more than a decade, making several visits and writing numerous letters in response to various crises in the life of a complicated, multiracial, multiethnic, and economically diverse church in the cosmopolitan capital city of the Roman province of Achaia. 2 Corinthians is believed to contain a compilation of letters written around 57 A.D.

The study passage comes from a fundraising letter (chapters 8 and 9) through which Paul was making an appeal for the collection he was taking up from the churches he had planted for the Jerusalem church. Paul's relationship with the Corinthians had hit a rough patch, as evidenced by Paul's reference to a painful visit (2 Cor. 2:1) after which he wrote a letter "with many tears" (2 Cor. 2:3-4). However, things seemed to be improving after a successful visit from Titus (2 Cor. 7:13-16) and the church at Corinth had begun to give towards the relief effort for the Christians in Judea.

### KEY VERSE

*Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

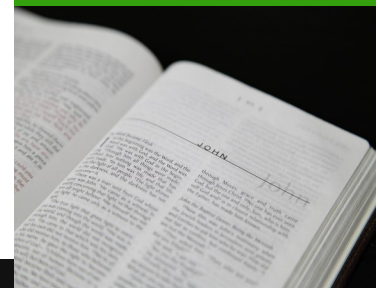
*- Matthew 19:21*

### STUDY

### PASSAGE

**2 Corinthians**

**8:1-15**



## A New Understanding (continued)

Yet, despite the fact that Corinth was a fairly affluent trade center with a strong economy, the church there was reluctant to complete their pledge and Paul felt they had more to give. As a way of inspiring them to finish what they started, our study passage finds Paul boasting to the Corinthians about the church at Macedonia, which despite the poverty of its members, contributed to the needs of their brothers and sisters in Judaea. These poor, common people responded magnanimously to the call, demonstrating their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Albeit impoverished and sorely tried by persecution, they came forward with eager joy and poured out the riches of their liberality, straining their means to the utmost to relieve the suffering of others. Paul attributes their generosity and joy of spirit to them first having given themselves to the Lord. He commends their liberal giving and sharing as a godly example for the Corinthians, and all of us to follow.

The overarching theme of this section of 2 Corinthians is that the Christian experience is supposed to be about celebrating how much we have been given, and giving back joyfully. The ability to give with grace, generosity, and passion comes from an understanding of how much God has already given us. Giving that is motivated by God's kind of love blesses, transforms, and, ultimately, brings glory to God!

### 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

**8** And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.<sup>3</sup> For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,<sup>4</sup> they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.<sup>5</sup> And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.<sup>6</sup> So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.<sup>7</sup> But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.<sup>8</sup> I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the

earnestness of others.<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.<sup>11</sup> Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.<sup>12</sup> For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

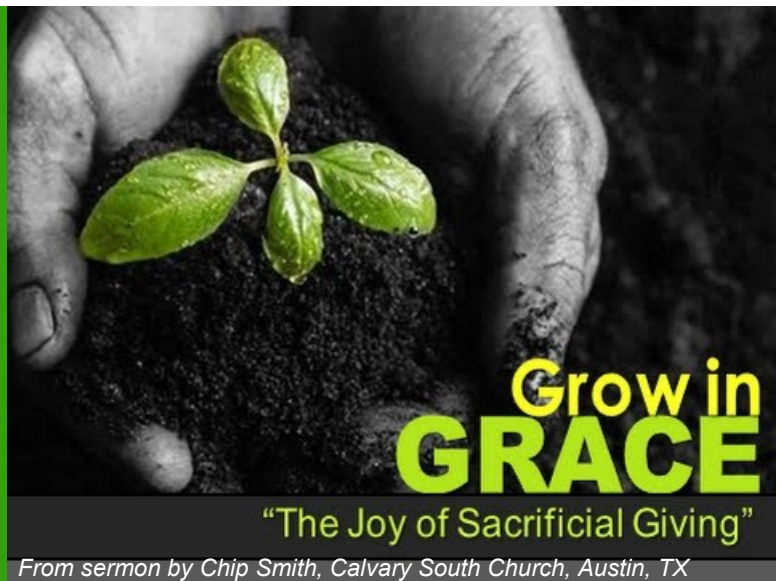
<sup>13</sup> Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.<sup>14</sup> At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality,<sup>15</sup> as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."

## The Old in the Text

Paul notes that the Corinthians were first to express the desire to give. Yet, a year later, they had not fulfilled their pledge. What are some reasons why they may have made a promise to give that they could not (or did not want to) keep? What do you think motivated their giving? [Tip: chapter 7 may offer some clues].

## The New in the Text

1. There are [at least] three kinds of giving associated with the Macedonian church. Can you identify them?
2. What does the text tell us about the motivations of the Macedonian church to give? Compare and contrast their motivations with what might have been going on with the Corinthian church.
3. Paul appeals to the Corinthians in [at least] three different ways. Can you identify them? Does anything surprise you about what Paul says?
4. The Greek word for gift (*charisma*) comes from the word for grace (*charism*). What does the use of both words in the text teach us of the relationship between giving and following Jesus?



## A New Look

Scott, the owner of Scott Machinery, attended a conference where a presenter at the conference (Bill) challenged people to give one million dollars to help fulfill the Great Commission. This amount was laughable to Scott, far beyond anything he could imagine, since his machinery business was generating an income of under \$50,000 a year. The presenter asked, "How much did you give last year?" Scott felt pretty good about his answer: "We gave \$17,000, about 35 percent of our income." Without blinking an eye, Bill responded, "Over the next year, why don't you make a goal of giving \$50,000?" Scott thought Bill hadn't understood. Fifty thousand dollars was more than he'd made all year. But Scott and his wife decided to trust God with Bill's challenge, asking God to do the impossible. God provided in amazing ways. With a miraculous December 31 provision, Scott was able to give the \$50,000. The next year he set a goal of giving \$100,000. Again, God provided. Ten years from the time he began to excel in his giving, Scott passed the one million dollar giving mark. The best part is he continues to excel.

[Excerpted from *Daily Devotionals* (2013) by Peter Kennedy]

# A New Conversation

1. How does reading Scott's story make you feel? Does it excite you and remind you of your own testimony? Does it make you feel sadness or inadequacy because you don't feel as though you have ever experienced God move in this way? Do you feel something altogether different? Explore what you might be feeling about Scott's experience and why.
2. In the study passage, Paul concludes by assuring the Corinthian church that the acceptability of giving is measured "according to what one has, not according to what [one] does not have" (v.12). However, he begins the passage by commending the Macedonians for giving "beyond their ability." How does Bill's story help us to consider the value of these two, seemingly contradictory, proclamations by the Apostle Paul?
3. Bill's "challenge" to Scott bears some resemblance to the way that Paul sought to "test the sincerity" of the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 8:8). Do you agree with this form of leadership? Why or why not? How do you think that church leaders should address "giving" [both monetary and otherwise] within the life of the church? What kind of language do you think would aid in the development of giving in the context of discipleship? What kind of language do you find unhelpful?
4. The key verse and Bill's story both address giving from the perspective of the individual and suggest that discipleship of Jesus involves extravagant giving for the sake of others. In the study passage, Paul applies that principle to whole church communities. To what extent do our church budgets reflect our commitment to following Jesus through giving to others? To what extent do they reflect our commitment to our own institutions?

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## A New Walk

1. What principles have you used to govern your giving? Obligation? Gratitude? Desire to help?
2. What is the new thing God is calling you to do regarding your giving?
3. What is the next step you must take in your life, budget, ministry, etc. to bring your giving in line with God's call?