

# THE CHALLENGE TO GIVE

## 2 CORINTHIANS 08:01–15

### *Introduction*

The churches throughout Judea were suffering great poverty and needed help badly. This is what this passage is about: meeting the desperate need of fellow believers and human beings who were being threatened with starvation and death, many of whom were without Christ and doomed to an eternity apart from Christ.

The need of missions is an *unending call*, a *call that never ends*. The desperate needs of the world must always confront man. Why? Because the world is sinful and corruptible, full of greed and covetousness, banking and hoarding. People who *have* more than they need should be helping and giving, serving and ministering. Instead they are banking and hoarding. The result is a world reeling in desperate need. The challenge to the church is clear! *Give* — give all you are and have to reach and help the desperate of the world.

- I. Know the spirit of the Macedonians: they gave because of the grace and favour of God (vv. 1-5).
- II. Excel in the same spirit of giving (vv. 6-7).
- III. Prove the sincerity of your love (v. 8).
- IV. Know the example of Christ — He gave (v. 9).
- V. Remember your own past record (v. 10).
- VI. Give readily and willingly (vv. 11-12).
- VII. Meet the needs of one another — equally (vv. 13-15).

### **I. 2 Corinthians 08:01–5 Stewardship, Giving, Offerings**

The first challenge is to know the spirit of the Macedonians. The Roman province of Macedonia included all of northern Greece. The known churches of the region were Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. The first two are well known by every generation of Christians because of the two letters addressed to them in the New Testament. At one time, the Macedonian province had been known for its natural resources. But down through the centuries the area had been ravaged by war, and Rome had stripped it of its wealth. Because of this the churches of the area were somewhat poor in material wealth. But note a glorious fact: they were extremely wealthy in the grace of God. God had given an *abundance of grace* upon the churches — so much grace that Paul is able to use them as a dynamic example of God's grace. Remember that grace means the favour and blessings of God, all the good things of life which God gives us — the greatest of which is salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. God's blessings were "given to" the churches. The idea is that God just poured or laid blessing after blessing upon the churches.

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They knew the grace, the favour and the blessings of God in a very, very special way. Note four dynamic facts about their testimony.

1. They gave to help others, and gave liberally. They gave despite terrible trial and deep poverty. There was great suffering among the believers and churches of Macedonia.  
=> Believers suffered afflictions and persecutions, and the afflictions were a “severe trial” for them to bear. When they accepted Christ and took their stand for Him, they were heavily persecuted.

*1 Th 1:6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*

*1 Th 2:14 For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews.*

*2 Th 1:4 Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.*

- => Believers suffered “extreme poverty,” which means utter poverty, poverty down to the depths. As mentioned, this was due to the ravages of war and the battles which were fought on their own soil, and to the heavy taxation and stripping of resources by the Roman government.

However, note that the believers were filled with an “overflowing joy.” They had come to know Christ: their sins had been forgiven and the Spirit of God was living in their hearts and lives, strengthening and guiding them through all. God was now looking after their lives and taking care of them. God was giving them the absolute assurance of His care and provision day by day and of eternal life when they departed this world. They joyed and rejoiced in all that God was doing for them and was going to do for them.

The point is this: they knew the Lord — really knew Him — and they were committed to living for the Lord. Therefore, when someone needed help, they were ready to help. They gave in rich generosity. The word “generosity” (*haplotetos*) means singleness of mind, sincerely, with an open and free heart. The churches of Macedonia determined to give, to open their hearts and give all they could.

2. They gave beyond their ability. They willingly gave: no special appeal had to be made; no pressure had to be executed. They gave freely and readily. And note: they did not give according to their ability, but they *went beyond* what they were able to give.
3. They gave insistently, begging for the privilege to share. Apparently, they were giving so much that Paul felt it was just beyond their means. However they insisted, and note why: they wanted to share in *this service to the saints*. Some fellow believers were in

need, and they wanted the privilege of serving with them *by giving to them*. Note how *giving* is said to be a means of *sending with others*.

4. They gave themselves to the Lord first. This is a most striking verse and point. What it means is this: these dear believers gave all they were and had to the Lord. They used this occasion, the occasion of an offering — the occasion when they were asked to help others — to *rededicate* their lives and possessions to Christ. Note that this involved three steps:

=> the dedication of their lives to Christ: all they were.

=> the dedication of their possessions to Christ: all they had.

=> the dedication of themselves to the minister, Paul, in order to serve by his side and to allow them all to serve Christ together.

Paul distinctly says that they gave “themselves first to the Lord, and then to us in keeping with God’s will.” This is essential if the needs of a world reeling in desperate needs are to ever be reached: believers must join hand in hand with the ministers of God.

**Thought 1.** The dynamic example of the Macedonian church needs to be studied by the churches of every generation. They clearly demonstrate the spirit that is absolutely essential for meeting the desperate needs of the world, a world that is lost and doomed unless it is reached with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Mat 25:35-36** “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

**Rom 15:1** *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

**Acts 20:35** “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

**Gal 6:2** *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

**1 Th 5:14** *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

**Heb 13:3** *Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.*

**James 1:27** *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

*Isa 58:7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

## **II. 2 Corinthians 08:06–07 *Excel in the Spirit of Giving***

The second challenge is to excel in the same spirit of giving as the Macedonians. Sometime earlier the Corinthian church had begun to take up an offering for the poor churches of Judea, but something had happened that caused the church to stop the project. Just what is not actually known, but it was probably all the trouble and problems covered in the letters of I and II Corinthians. Since the church had experienced revival, it was now time for the offering project to be completed. Very simply, Paul says two things that apply to every church.

1. The grace of giving is to be completed in you. The Corinthians were to financially support the Lord's work, the very ministry of God Himself. They were to support the ministry of meeting the needs of desperate people and of proclaiming the gospel to a lost and dying world. This glorious privilege is clearly seen when it is remembered that God has not given to angels the privilege of supporting His work; God has committed this grace, this privilege only to men.
2. The other graces abound in you; therefore, the grace of giving is to abound in you. The Corinthians had an abundance of spiritual resources, especially the gifts that involved...
  - faith: the trust in God that enabled them to walk through life victoriously and to serve God faithfully.
  - speech: the ability to share the gospel and the doctrines of God's Word.
  - knowledge: the understanding of God's Word.
  - earnestness: the energy and zeal to carry on the ministry of the Lord Jesus.
  - love for us: the care for the minister of God who serves Christ so faithfully.

Because the church was so strong in these gifts, they needed to abound in the gift of giving as well. Giving and helping others in their desperate need was as much a duty as any other responsibility.

**Rom 12:13** *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

**Gal 6:10** *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

**1 Tim 6:18** *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*

**Heb 13:16** *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

### **III. 2 Corinthians 08:08 Prove the Sincerity of Love**

The third exhortation is to prove the sincerity of your love. Note that Paul does not command the Corinthians to give. If giving is forced or coerced, it benefits nothing; it does not please God. God is pleased only with gifts that are willingly and cheerfully given. He blesses only those who willingly help others. Therefore, giving must be based upon two things.

1. Giving must be based upon love for those who are lost and needy. Giving must be based upon love for the Lord Jesus who has commanded us to go into all the world to reach and help the people of the world.
2. Giving must be based upon the example of those who give sacrificially. In the case of the Corinthians, they had the dynamic example of the Macedonians. The Corinthians should have been stirred to follow the example of such sacrificial giving. In our case, we should be stirred to follow the dynamic example of all those who give willingly and sacrificially.

Note how love is proven by action. Love cannot be known unless it is demonstrated by deeds of compassion and giving. Love demands sacrificial giving. In fact, there is no love unless there is sacrificial giving.

*Mat 22:39* “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”

*John 13:35* “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

*John 15:12* “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

*Eph 5:2* And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

*1 Th 3:12* May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

### **IV. 2 Corinthians 08:09 The Example of Christ, Giving**

The fourth challenge is to know the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Above all others, Jesus Christ demonstrates not only that we are to give, but how we are to give.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ was rich. He was the Son of God, possessing the very nature and being and fullness of God (Jn. 1:1-3; Ph. 2:6).
  - => He dwelt in the glory and majesty, dominion and power of the Godhead (Jude 24-25).
  - => He dwelt in light which no man can approach, in all the splendour and brilliance of the Godhead (1 Tim. 6:16).
  - => He possessed every good and perfect thing that can be possessed (Jas. 1:17).
  - => He had all the worship and adoration of heavenly beings (Rev. 4:6f; 5:11f).

2. The Lord Jesus Christ became poor. This refers to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, that is, to His condescension or humiliation. It refers to the great gulf He had to span in coming to earth. The Lord Jesus Christ, who was King of kings and Lord of lords, who was God of very God, left all the glory and worship of heaven to become a man. He who was...

- God became an humble man.
- the Lord took on flesh and blood.
- the Holy God took the place of the lowest.
- the Sovereign Lord became the subject.
- the Beloved became the rejected.
- the Perfect One became the Sacrifice for sin.
- the Life became the Substitute for death.

As Scripture declares so aptly, “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” Because He became poor, we can become rich. We can receive the adoption of sons, actually become sons and daughters of God and live with Him forever and ever in the new heavens and earth (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

The point is this: since Christ willingly sacrificed so much to help us, we ought to sacrifice to help those in need. Just as Christ gave everything for us when we were in desperate need, so we are to give everything to meet the needs of those who are desperately lost in this world.

*Phil 2:5-8 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!*

*Heb 2:14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

*Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

## **V. 2 Corinthians 08:10 Corinthians’ Past Record of Giving**

The fifth challenge is to remember your own past record. As mentioned above, the Corinthians had undertaken the mission project of meeting the needs of the poor churches in Judea, but they had backed off the project when divisiveness had reared its ugly head in

the church (see note 2, 2 Cor. 8:6-7). Now that they had experienced revival, Paul gives his advice: pick up the mission project again. “This is best for you”: expedient and beneficial for you personally and for your ministry. Recommitting yourselves to missions will stir God to bless the church.

Note that the church had been forward, that is, *zealous* in undertaking the mission project about a year before. Since the revival of recommitment, they should be *even more zealous* to launch a ministry of missions for the Lord.

**Mat 20:28** “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Luke 10:36-37** “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

**John 21:16** Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

**Gal 6:2** Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

**Gal 6:10** Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

**Eph 6:7** Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.

## **VI. 2 Corinthians 08: 11–12 Giving Readily and Willingly**

The sixth challenge is to give readily and willingly. Four quick points are made in these two verses, points that give clear directions on missions to any church that is willing to listen. Note: Paul is no longer giving advice; he is now charging the church to give itself to missions and to undertake this particular mission project.

1. Give yourselves to missions. This is implied, understood. Paul is dealing with one mission project, but underlying the whole discussion is the absolute necessity for a permanent commitment to missions. After a mission need has been met, there is always another need to meet — a need just as critical. The world reels under the weight of sin and disease, corruption and death, hunger and thirst, poverty and ignorance, homelessness and exposure to the elements. Literally thousands die prematurely and without Christ every day — die because no one cared enough to help them. The call of missions is the constant call of Christ:

**Mat 20:28** “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Luke 19:10** “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

**Mat 28:19-20** *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

2. Finish the mission. The Corinthian church had begun the project; they needed to finish it. The church is to reach out in mission projects all over the world, and it is to finish the projects. Remember that Jerusalem was a foreign field to the Corinthians.
3. Be ready to give willingly. Note that this is the first requirement when a person gives. Above all else, he is to give willingly.
4. The reason is simply stated: God is going to judge us for what we give. The idea is this: in the day of judgment God is going to look at what we gave and at what we kept back. If we have banked, hoarded and lived extravagantly, He is going to reject us. But if we gave all that we had beyond our needs, then we will be “acceptable,” that is, approved to live in the presence of Christ who sacrificed all He had for us. (See notes, Mt. 19:16-22; 19:23-26; 19:27-30.)

**Luke 11:41** *“But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.”*

**Luke 12:33** *“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”*

**Luke 18:22** *When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

**Acts 11:29** *The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.*

**1 Cor 16:2** *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

**2 Cor 8:12** *For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.*

**2 Cor 9:7** *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

**Deu 16:17** *Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.*



## **VII. 2 Corinthians 08:13–15 Meet the Needs of Others**

The seventh challenge is to meet the needs of one another — equally. It is critical to note that these verses are not dealing with possessions or property, not with what a person has, but with *needs*.

1. One person's need is not to be eased while another person has a need.
2. Each need is to be equally met. This is an explosive principle, for it goes contrary to what society practices. It eliminates the hoarding and keeping of goods beyond our needs. God wants the needs of the starving and lost masses met. The only way they can be met is by giving all we are and have *beyond what is needed* to take care of our own families.
3. The Old Testament Scripture supports this principle (Exo. 16:18). When God miraculously fed Israel with the manna from the sky, the people were to gather only what they needed. If they gathered too much and attempted to hoard and put it back, it spoiled overnight. If a person was unable to gather enough due to some illness or inability, his need was either met by the help of others or by God Himself.

The point is striking: every believer is to use all he has and give it to meet the needs of a desperate world. He is to particularly meet the needs of fellow believers. (See Mt. 19:16-22; 19:23-26; 19:27-30.)

**Luke 12:33** *“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”*

**Acts 20:35** *“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

**Rom 12:13** *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

**Gal 6:10** *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

**1 Tim 6:17-19** *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

**Heb 13:16** *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. ■*