



The Joy of Giving

Love is a 4-letter word spelt G-I-V-E

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At some point in the near future, we are hoping to have our own facility. Nothing has been finalized, as there are still some wrinkles to iron out. But it would not be unwise to prepare ourselves for that eventuality. During our 17 years of existence as a church, we rented from 3 schools and from 2 churches, not counting the homes and basements we met in during the formation days.



The first school was Adolph Link school in Elk Grove Village. We were so few that everybody in church had a responsibility. All our church's possessions fit into a trailer that would be transported to the school each Sunday morning, and we would set up the chairs, the curtains, the banners, the children's arts and craft, the projection screen, and the sound system, and soon the school was transformed magically into a place of worship.



My daughter Grace and I were going down memory lane last night just going through these pictures. Putting the frame together for the projection screen was one of the more strenuous tasks that everyone on the set-up and tear-down teams had to master. Over time, everyone learned how to lay the chairs at the precise angle relative to the grain of the polished floor of the gym. And at the end of the service, all these things were put back into the trailer. And voila it was a school again. We would vanish without a trace, except for the occasional stain on the carpet.



We went on to outgrow that as well as the next two schools – Mead Junior High in Elk Grove Village and Helen Keller Junior High in Schaumburg.



Running out of trailer space and school choices, we finally decided to rent a church, NPC which was our first foray into Wheeling.



A couple of years later we outgrew that as well, and moved to this location and our hosts have been so gracious to accommodate our needs. Wheeling seems to be a midway location for all our attendees.

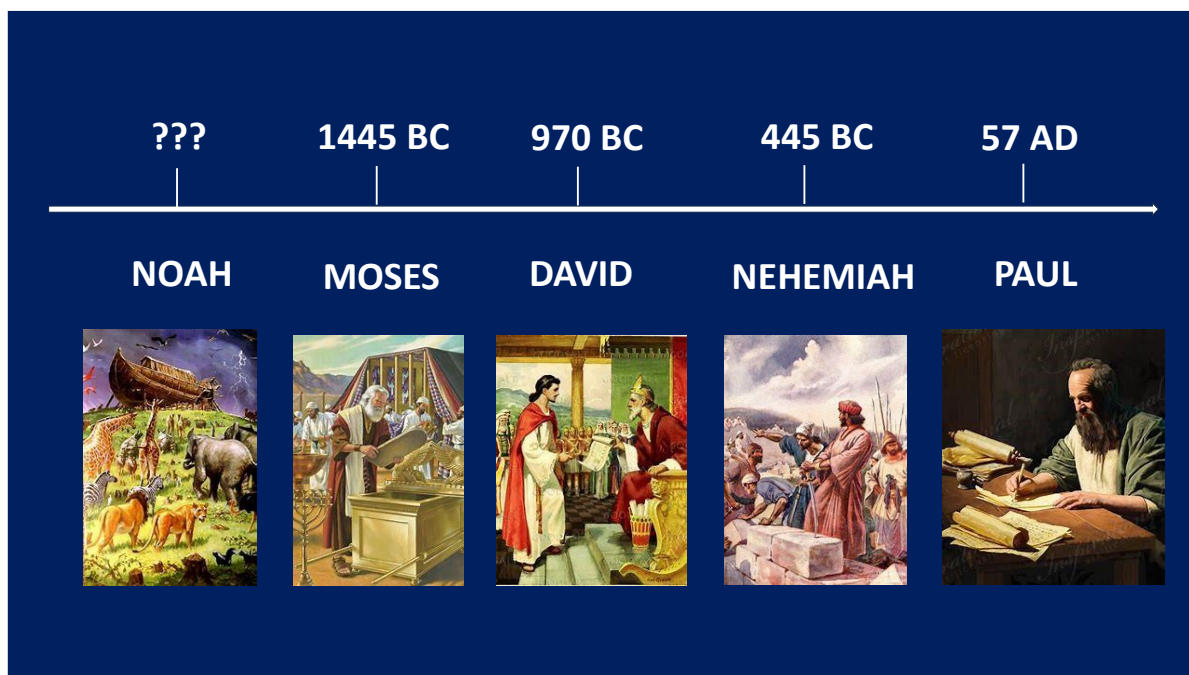
At each point in our church's journey, God has always graciously provided us the exact place that would meet our needs.

If we do move forward with a new facility, this will be a huge undertaking, and will require a lot of our time, money, sweat, and prayers – from all of us. So how do we do it and how can we make sure we do it right?

We need to understand not only the external actions needed to fulfill the objective, but also grasp the spiritual dimension, the heart condition, and the transformation and relationship God wants from us.

Today is Super Bowl 58. Chicago is not playing, so I can watch without stress. I usually support the underdog. In this case, I am still deciding who the underdog is. Lots of people watch it just for the commercials. Do you know how much an ad costs to be shown during the super bowl? Last year it was \$7 million for a 30-second spot. Just imagine, what if miraculously one of those companies instead of buying the ad, decided to glorify God and give that money to ICC. Well miracles are possible. Today's message is about giving, and it is an important principle to understand even if we get a miraculous gift.

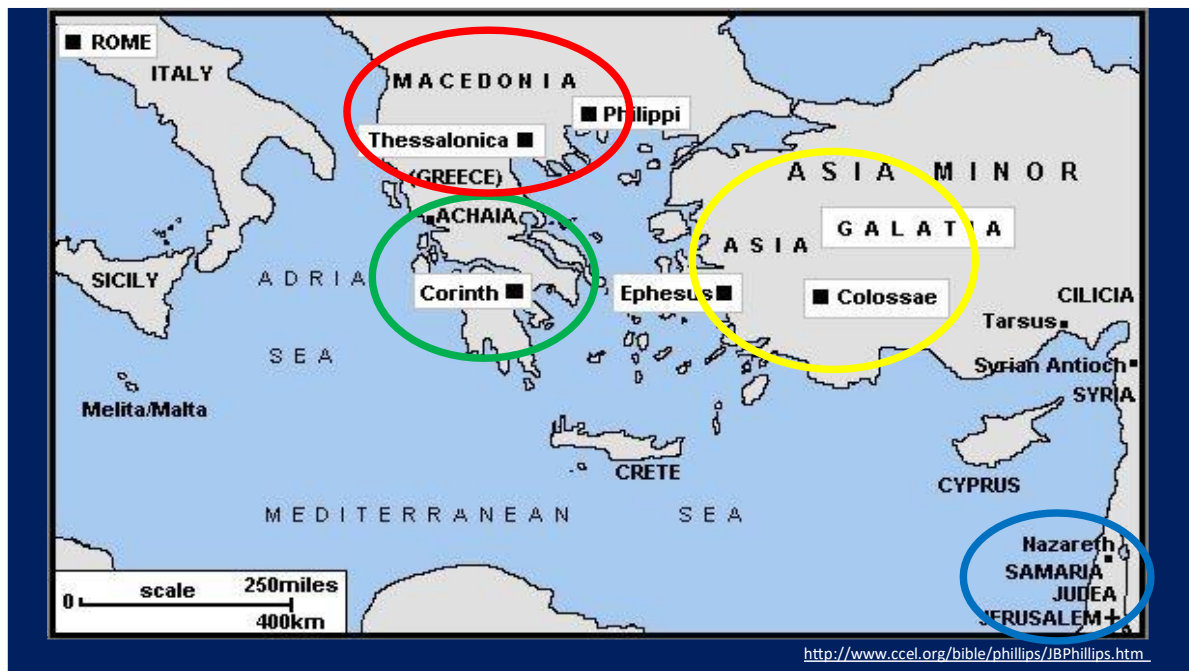
I searched through the Bible for events related to massive projects, and how God's people went about doing them and the lessons we can learn. The first one chronologically was the Tower of Babel but that was an example of what we shouldn't do.



We have other examples, like Noah building the ark, Moses building the tabernacle, David preparing for his son Solomon to build the temple, Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and Paul's fundraising efforts.

Today we will focus on the last one – namely, Paul's efforts to collect money for the impoverished churches in Judea, which is outlined in his second letter to the Corinthians.

This story is not one of the popular or readily recognizable stories like Noah's ark. And yet as we study the New Testament, there is no doubt that Paul – who wrote 14 of the 66 books in the Bible – was extremely passionate about it. We see him referencing this initiative in at least 4 of his letters – to the Galatians, to the Romans, and in two letters to the Corinthians. It is also referenced in Acts written by Paul's travelling companion Luke. I will try to paint a picture of the background so we can get some context.



Just to get our geographical bearings, Jerusalem and the Judean churches are in the bottom right-hand corner I circled in blue. Each missionary journey, Paul went a little further west before returning to Jerusalem.

The yellow circle represents Galatia and Asia – modern day Turkey where he established churches like Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae, etc. during his first trip.

The red and green circles represent Macedonia and Achaia, respectively – regions in modern day Greece where he established churches during his second missionary trip. Macedonian churches were in Philippi, Thessalonica, etc. Achaia's only church of any significance at that time was the one at Corinth.

Paul revisited many of these churches. In between he would write several letters to each of them, and many of them are in our Bible. At the time of Paul, the Roman empire had taken over the entire area seen in this map plus more.

As Paul travelled to Asia Minor and beyond, establishing new churches, the churches back in Jerusalem and surrounding Judea were struggling from abject poverty.

How did that happen? They were persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders for following Christ and were losing their jobs and their means of livelihood. They managed for a while by pooling their resources as mentioned in Acts 2-4. However, to exacerbate matters, waves of famines were ravaging the land during the reign of Claudius Caesar.

Paul, deeply moved by the plight of the Jerusalem Christians, made fervent pleas to several churches and each time he visited Jerusalem he took back offerings from these churches.

The Corinthians were much richer than the Macedonians. But they were a tough church. In fact, Paul had written at least 4 letters to them. There was no internet or computers in those days. Only 2 of the letters survived – probably because they addressed weightier matters and were read and reread, and widely distributed. Eventually they became part of the Bible, now called 1st and 2nd Corinthians.

During his first visit to Corinth, he stayed with them for 18 months and on his second visit for 3 months. So, he knew them well – the factions and the heresies and the philosophies that were tugging them in different directions.

The city was a melting pot of Jewish, Greek, and Roman influences, of slave and free, and the Corinthian church was a microcosm of the city.

2 Corinthians 8 and 9 represent a reminder of Paul's plea from 1 Corinthians 16 to give to the cause of the Judean believers. When Paul had first mentioned the dire need of the Jerusalem church, they had immediately jumped on the bandwagon and were enthusiastic to give, and even gave a token gift. But sometime later, they developed cold feet or got distracted by internal squabbles. He wrote Second Corinthians a year later. This time he dedicated 2 entire chapters reminding them to give. We won't go through the entirety of chapters 8 and 9 today, as that would be a 3-part series, but we will use selected passages to understand Paul's heart for the church. Because the Corinthians were slackers, God gave Paul an opportunity to expound the principles of joyful giving. The culture, language, time period, and the needs of this story were different from ours, but I believe the principles are applicable to us today and it reveals God's heart for us, and it can inform and instruct us on how to give.

1. Why give?
2. How much?
3. Accountability
4. Attitude
5. Impact

1. First, we will establish the **rationale** or **basis** of giving. We will spend a lot of time on this point as it addresses the question “why give”?
2. Then we will look at guidance around how much we should give (hint, it is not a numeric answer)
3. We will understand the principle of **accountability** in giving
4. Next, we will examine our **attitude** while giving,
5. And we will conclude with the **impact** from giving – “what is the result of our giving”

1. BASIS OF GIVING – WHY DO WE GIVE?

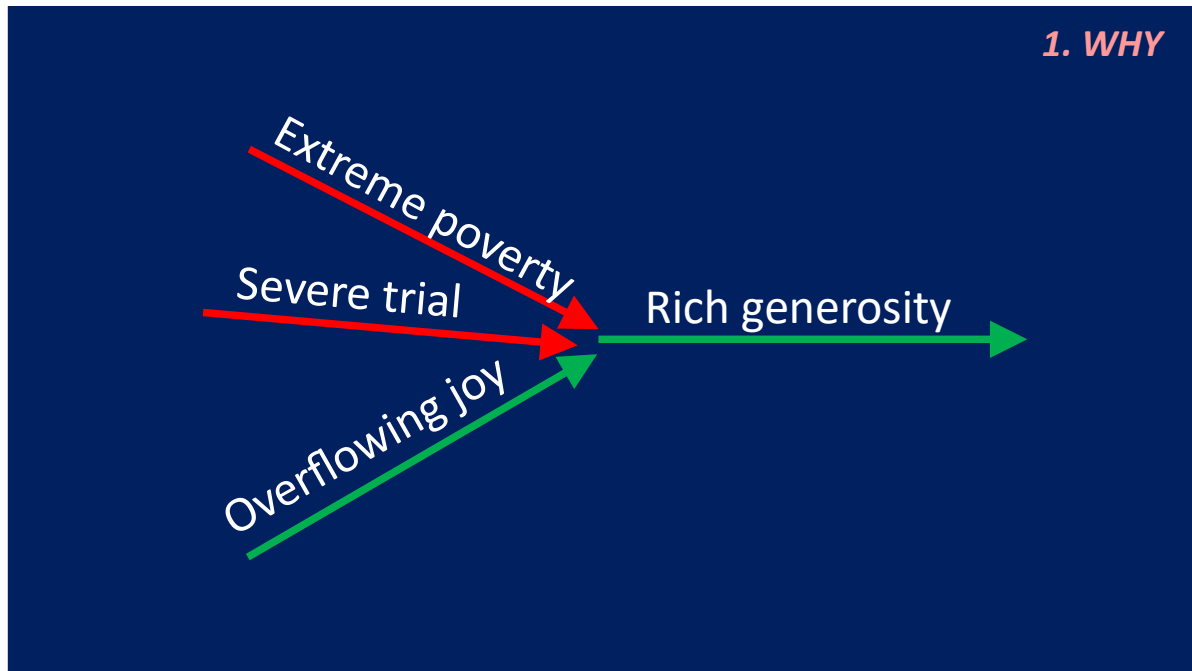
2 Corinthians 8:1-4, And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about **the grace that God has given** the Macedonian churches. ² In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people.

We see Paul boasting about the generosity of the Macedonian churches, and using them as an example for the Corinthian church to follow. Paul is presenting a church on fire here – the Macedonians – which planet are they from? They were begging for the privilege to give. In spite of going through hardships themselves, they have an overflowing joy that leads to generosity – not so-so generosity but rich generosity.

Even though he uses such glowing words to describe them, note that he begins by pointing first NOT to the generosity of the Macedonians, but the grace of God given to the Macedonians.

Their giving is dependent on God giving them grace, and is therefore an outflow of the grace and generosity of God.

Painting a vivid picture of verse 2, John Stott writes in his book *The Grace of Giving*, “Three tributaries came together in the river of Macedonian generosity, namely their severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty”.



This is my crude visualization of what Stott was expressing. I used tributaries in red to show negatives and green to show the positives. There is only one positive but it so overwhelming that the main river takes its characteristics.

Paul is not done talking of grace. He delves deeper into the grace of God in verse 9 to make sure the Corinthians understand the significance of grace.

2 Corinthians 8:9, **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**.

By referring to rich and poor, Paul is not talking of bank balance or material possessions. While on the subject of giving money, Paul smartly uses the monetary language of rich and poor to drive home a spiritual message. How did Christ become poor? and how does that make us rich?

Philippians 2:7-8, ⁷ Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!

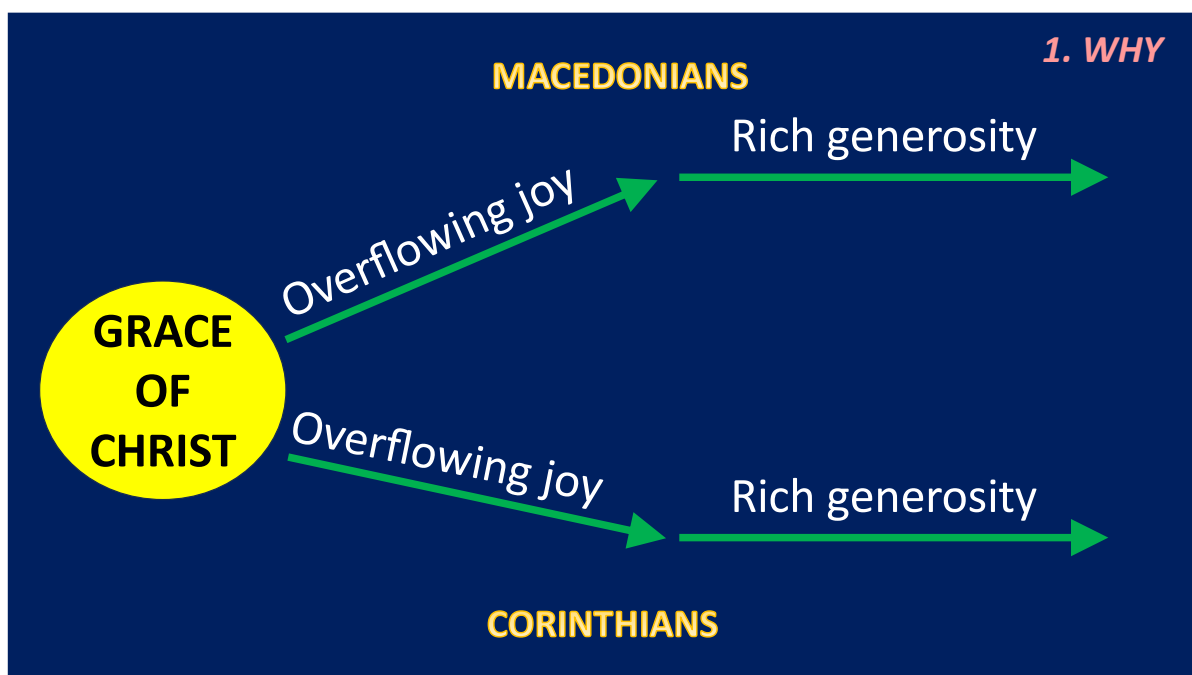
That’s how Christ became poor – he left his Godhood and became man, he served others, and then accepted the worst punishment any man can endure.

John 3:16, For God so loved the world, he **GAVE** his one and only son... God gave us his all. So, if we have been saved by grace through faith, and if Christ is our Lord and Savior, then we are made rich through the free but precious gift of salvation.

Our life, our soul, and everything we have belongs to him. If we find it hard to give, we have to remind ourselves that nothing really belongs to us.

As Tim Keller pointed out in his book *Generous Justice: How God's grace makes us just*, ["A lack of generosity refuses to acknowledge that your assets are not really yours, but God's."](#)

Paul first uses the Macedonians as an example of giving, then as we read in verse 9 he says there is an even better example: the Corinthian standard for giving should be Christ who gave everything.



Where did the Macedonians get their overflowing joy from? It was available to them by the grace of Christ.

The Corinthians also have that same grace available: ergo, they should have overflowing joy that should lead to rich generosity. Paul is brilliant, isn't he?

Again, this is my visualization of Paul's line of argument. And that same grace is available to us 2000 years later.

Someone once said, ["You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving"](#) If we ponder over that statement a bit, we will have to admit that a selfish Christian is a bit of an oxymoron. That's why I subtitled this message, "Love is a 4-letter word spelt G-I-V-E."

To recap, why should we give? John Piper summarizes it so well in his book *Desiring God*,

“... Love is the **overflow of joy** in God which **gladly meets the needs** of others. It is the impulse of a fountain to overflow. It originates in the **grace of God** which overflows freely because it delights to fill the empty”

This is the basis for giving and is not only true when it comes to money, but also giving of our time, our energy, our skills, our prayer, and our attention, using our influence, or standing in the gap for others. And it also holds true whether we are giving to a church, or a mission organization or a charity or a neighbor who is in need or for any other genuine cause we are being called to give.

2. HOW MUCH SHOULD WE GIVE?

Next point is “How much should we give”. There is always a debate about what the Bible teaches about how much we give, Old Testament vs. New Testament. I wish we had time to get into the details of tithes and offerings. Perhaps another time. But for today, we will look at two guidelines that Paul gives about “how much to give”, that will be instructive for us.

2 Corinthians 8:11-12, ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, **according to your means**. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable **according to what one has**, not according to what one does not have.

Here we see that God accepts our giving, simply based on what we have, based on our means, not some standard that is impossible for us to meet. We contribute a portion of what we have as an act of grace and love. And that is up to us, and not according to some set amount that would be unfairly difficult for some and unfairly easy for others.

Sometimes we underestimate what we think we have or what we think we can do. If it is money, we may think, oh I am not rich, let the rich people give. If it requires skills, oh I am not talented, let the people who are gifted do it. If it is missions, oh let the real missionaries or let John go. If it is prayer, oh let the pastors or Bob pray, and thus lose our opportunity to meet someone at their point of need even if God has given us something we can give.

January 2015, was one of the first big losses of my life. My mother was in the last stages of her battle with cancer in India. ICC had been praying for her. We had gone as a family to be with her. My children and I got back to the US so they could do their final exams, while Jomcy stayed back in India to care for my mother. Within a week after I returned, my mother passed away. Although I knew the end was coming, I was devastated at the suddenness of it. My kids bravely told me to go back for the funeral and that they would manage on their own. I was worried about leaving them alone. So only Jomcy attended the funeral. I watched online.

Couple of days later, after Sunday morning church service, one of the first people to come to me on hearing the news was Sean. He probably does not remember this now. Standing in the

school hallway, he saw my sorrow, and unmindful of the crowd, prayed the most comforting prayer of my life.

At the end, I was clinging to him, not wanting to let go. He gave a precious gift that day – the gift of prayer and care, that carried me through for a long time. Sean was not a pastor or part of prayer ministry, he was on the worship team, but God used his willingness to use what he had to bless me. I hope I did not embarrass you Sean by what I just shared.

For those of us who struggle to give to the church or to others because we don't know what others need or what we have that can be given, I will let you in on Sean's secret. I did not realize it then but I found it in one of Dallas Willard's books about hearing God's voice, which is meant for our relationship with God, but I believe is applicable with others as well.

He writes in "Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God" ... **"The first act of love is always the giving of attention"**

The gift of paying attention helps us become aware of and sensitive to the needs of others. Giving starts from being attentive and being in the moment. That's how most of our ministries have started, including the Food Pantry.

Paul does give an additional guidance on how much to give.

2 Corinthians 8:3, For I testify that they [the Macedonians] gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

The Macedonians were poor themselves but they gave beyond what they were able when they heard of another church in another land, of a different race and culture, suffering.

Our giving ought to be sacrificial or going beyond our ability. Such kind of giving has been referred to as "radical generosity" Perhaps a poor analogy would be walking around in a pair of shoes half a size too small for us. We may squirm for a while, it will be uncomfortable, but eventually we could get used to it!

So, how much should we give: Blending the two guidelines: we give according to our means, but still being generous and sacrificial with our giving.

C.S. Lewis puts it this way in his profound book Mere Christianity in a chapter titled "Social Morality." **"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare... If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small."**

3. ACCOUNTABILITY IN GIVING

Moving to our next point, an important aspect of giving is accountability, which I am happy to find Paul addressing here. In the latter section of chapter 8, Paul mentions a self-directed principle of giving that would be good for us to take note of as a church.

2 Corinthians 8:19-21, ¹⁹What is more, he [Titus] was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. ²⁰We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. ²¹**For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.**

Paul was collecting an offering and he wanted to make sure it was built around trust. To do just that, the churches selected a trustworthy man, Titus, to handle the special offering and to deliver it to the believers in Jerusalem. This is a good model for any church or organization to follow.

Accountability and integrity should be the underpinnings of any fundraising drive. And that's why at ICC we have tried to be completely transparent about how much money is collected and how much money is spent, as you would have noticed in last week's annual meeting. If we do purchase a facility, it would mean greatly increased financial and accounting complexity. We would even consider hiring the services of an accounting firm. As we move into a new chapter as a church, we want to ensure that we are completely accountable.

4. WHAT IS OUR ATTITUDE OR THE POSTURE OF OUR HEART WHEN WE GIVE?

Now that we have seen the basis for giving, guidelines for how much to give, and the accountability principle of giving, we move to chapter 9 to examine what our attitude should be while giving. This is where we get to look at our heart.

In this section we need only look at verse 7, which encapsulates beautifully and concisely, what the heart attitude should be. It has three phrases and we will pause at each of them.

2 Corinthians 9:7, **Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

From the first part of this verse, we see Paul telling the Corinthians to give what they had previously decided. It should be an intentional, purposeful decision made through prayer and the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 9:7, Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, **not reluctantly or under compulsion**, for God loves a cheerful giver.

What does “not reluctantly or under compulsion” mean? It means **giving whole-heartedly**. We should not give because of legalism or obligation, nor out of fear of rejection nor for feeling of self-satisfaction or for status or pride or for buying influence.

Another heart attitude is contained within the same verse which is “cheerful giver”

2 Corinthians 9:7, Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver**.

So, decide with our hearts and minds what we want to give, make sure it is wholehearted and for the right reasons, and give with cheer and overflowing joy. This verse makes it clear that while giving is an outward action, it is an expression of our heart.

For those who already are giving and feel burnt out, check your heart – why are you giving? And for those who are not giving, check your heart – why do you not give? Our motivation for giving should be love, the love that God shows us, and our basis for giving is the grace that God gave us. Our heart should be a reflection of what God has done for us. And as an act of worship to our God we give. Serving God in the welcoming ministry or the children’s ministry or the worship ministry cannot be done with a reluctant, complaining heart. It is done with love.

In the famous love chapter that Paul wrote the Corinthians, we read...

1 Corinthians 13:3, If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, **but do not have love, I gain nothing**.

Several years back when faced with tight cash flow, I was once tempted to cut down on all our expenses including giving to the church and to the charitable organizations we support. But it was the Godly voice of my wife Jomcy who insisted that we should cut all other expenses, but we give to God as planned and decided in our hearts, till we reach a point where we just cannot anymore. And God has continued to bless that decision even through my job loss last year when I was out of a job for 3 months, he provided amazingly.

5. IMPACT OF GIVING:

That brings us to the last point – the impact of our giving. What happens as a result of our giving? What are the blessings that come as a result of it? Is the blessing for the giver or the recipient or both? Is it material or spiritual blessing? In Chapter 9, while it is a continuation from the previous chapter, we see a twist. In Chapter 8, Paul bragged about the Macedonians. And in Chapter 9 he does a full disclosure: he reveals to the Corinthians that he had also

bragged about them to the Macedonians saying they were one of the first to jump on the bandwagon last year, and had used their enthusiasm to set an example to the Macedonians. He was creating a bit of a friendly competition between the Greek churches much like our softball and volleyball rivalries today.

2 Corinthians 9:2, For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and **your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.**

When Paul refers to Achaia, if you remember from the map, it is primarily Corinth. When the Macedonians heard from Paul of the eagerness of the Corinthians to give, it inspired them to give. And he then wanted the Corinthians to fulfill their promise that had stirred the other churches to give. So, one of the impacts of our giving is that it sets an example that inspires others to give. Or generosity begets generosity.

Of course, we are not expected to announce to everyone at church how much we are giving in the hope of inspiring others to give. That is not the intention. So then how could we make this practical? One way is by volunteering to serve at church. Others might see our example and get inspired by that.



At our church late last year someone found another creative way to inspire. When we did the sheep project for Kapsowar, Kenya, an anonymous donor agreed to match every contribution made by each of us dollar for dollar. That means our contributions would be doubled. That inspired another anonymous donor to pledge the same. That means our contribution would be tripled. I don't know who these generous donors are, may God bless them! All I know is that our \$6,500 contribution became \$19,500. With that we have given to all the needy in the one

village and are now looking for other villages we can impact since we have a balance leftover from this giving.

Besides inspiring others to give, our giving can result in a cascade of blessings as we see in...

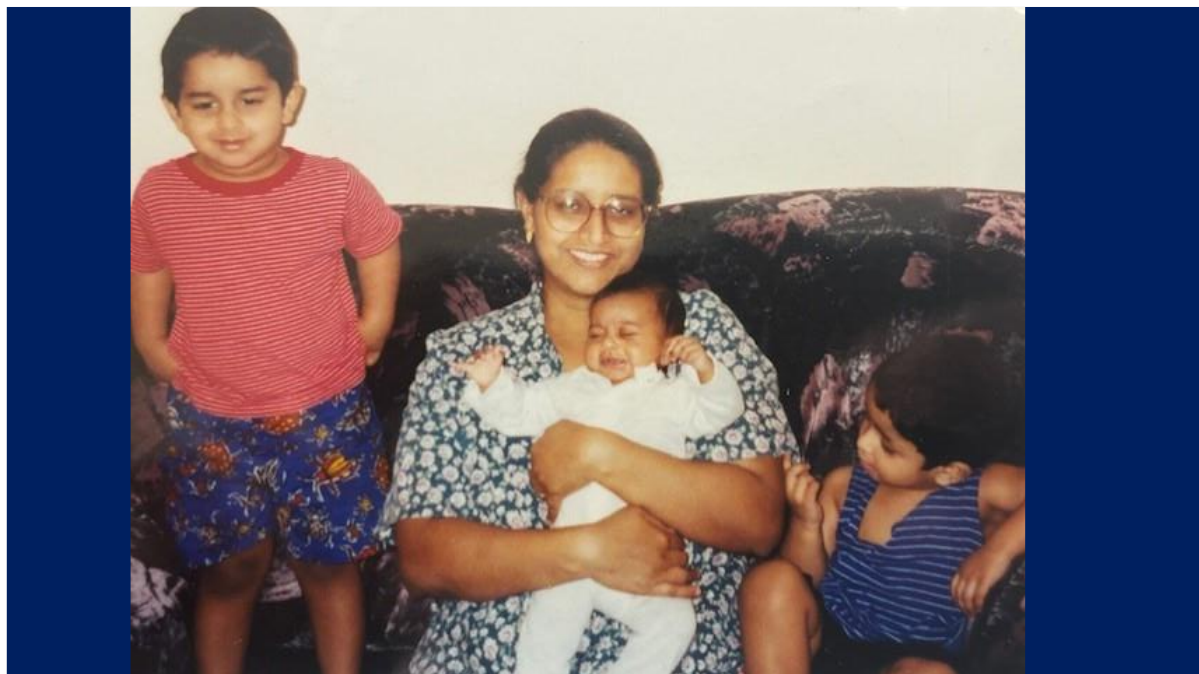
2 Corinthians 9:8, And God is able to **bless you abundantly**, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, **you will abound in every good work**.

What this verse says is that as you give, God will bless you abundantly so you can continue to give and bless others even more. This is how giving gets larger and larger. And the blessings don't stop: they multiply.

This kind of giving sets off a domino effect of overflowing joy, thanksgiving and praise which Paul describes beautifully in the last section.

2 Corinthians 9:13, Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, **others will praise God** for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Ultimately, all praise will go to God as a result of the generous giving. As a recipient of God's blessings, I can testify about his goodness and what he has done in my life through the generosity of several families here. Let me share an example...



When we moved from Las Vegas to Chicago, Jonathan was 6 months old, and then Timothy and Grace came in quick succession. With no family here, we were pretty much on our own. Jomcy stayed home with the kids and I went to work.

I did not realize how much she struggled taking care of three kids under 4 at the same time. Not only that, she had been dealing with a severe back problem due to multiple slipped disks. We barely made it to church. Knowing our spiritual, emotional, and mental state, a few small groups from church (this was before ICC) graciously invited us to join their groups, but we declined as there would be no way go with our little ones. One family did not give up trying. They came up with several ideas on how we could meet, but all their ideas were met with our staunch rebuttal. Like the Macedonians, they pleaded with us for an opportunity to bless us. Finally, they came up with a plan we could not refuse. They told us they would bring their own children to baby sit our three kids, so just the two couples could do Bible study and fellowship at our home. We finally relented. And they came, week after week after week, and we were able to have fellowship and build relationship with our fellow believers.



This is a picture after one of those fellowship times. Do they look familiar? Yes, that is the Tagles probably 23 years ago. It is no coincidence that when ICC was being planted, our two families were together in line to sign up. Rod and Necie have done this not just for us but for so many others. They have given of themselves in so many different ways. I may not be standing here but for the grace of the God and people of God like them, who gave of themselves to bless my family.

As we give towards a potential building project, let us not lose sight of God's vision for our church – to continue to reach people with the gospel and the love of Christ and to reconcile others with God. To do that we will need to continue to expand our missions, our community outreach, our discipleship programs, our fellowship programs, our prayer ministry, our youth ministry, our children's ministry, and others as God puts on your hearts.

I would like to close by quoting Scott J Hafemann who summarized it so well in the NIV Application Commentary...

“Giving is an act of faith in response to God’s grace. As such, our giving is not a decision to participate in the projects of the church, but an expression of the fact that **WE ARE** the church – that is, that we belong to God and hence to one another.”

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Note: *If you have the time, it may be helpful to read 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 in their entirety prior to the discussion.*

1. Read 2 Corinthians 9:2,13. Can you think of a time when you were personally impacted by someone else’s generosity?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 9:8. Can you think of a time when you have given of yourself for a good cause and felt blessed? How did that experience affect you?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 8:3,11-12. What does it mean for you to give sacrificially? Has your understanding changed regarding how much of your time, money, energy, skills, prayers, and attention you give?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 8:19–21. In light of a potential building purchase, how can we as a church be more accountable and transparent about the financial aspects of this project?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 9:7. How can we refocus our attitude when we feel burnt out from giving?
6. What are different ways you can contribute to kingdom work as the body of Christ?