

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-7

THE STRANGEST BEGGARS



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
MARCH 13, 2022 (PM)

INTRODUCTION

Pastor Jean has only been here a week, but already he's had many ask him for help to grow in their faith. He's encouraged and I'm encouraged that so many want to grow spiritually. It's a good sign of life when there's a desire for growth. Some want to grow in their knowledge, others in their marriage, others in their gifts, others in overcoming mental illness. I haven't asked him yet, but if my thirty years of ministry are any guide, I doubt if anyone has asked, "Pastor Jean, **how do I grow in giving?**" It's an area of our Christian lives that often remains at the newborn or toddler stage of development.

Now thankfully First Byron is a giving church with many members who give generously. Our church has a wonderful record of giving more than what's budgeted most years. I'm so thankful that I don't have to stand here and ask you to give more to the Lord's cause. And yet, giving is an area that God calls us to grow in and therefore while commending you in this area, I also want to challenge you to grow in this area. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul gives us a number of reasons to grow in the grace of giving.

BACKGROUND

The Corinthians excelled in many areas, but lacked in the area of giving (7). They got an 'A+' for faith, speech, knowledge and earnestness (7), but a 'C' for giving. He therefore gives them three truths to motivate growth in this area.



How do I start to grow in giving?



1. WE GROW IN GIVING BY GETTING FROM GOD (1-3)

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord (1-3)

We get the grace of losing

Paul pointed to the Macedonian Christians as an example of giving for the Corinthians. What was most staggering about their giving was that it came out of the context of losing. They had 'a severe test of affliction...and extreme poverty' (2). And yet, despite that, or even because of that, they had an 'abundance of joy' and 'overflowed in a wealth of generosity' (2). Sometimes losing is the impetus to giving. We may need to become losers before we become givers. When giving results from losing, losing is a gift from God.

We get the grace of giving

Paul is careful to trace the Macedonian generosity to God's generosity. Their giving to others was the result of God's giving to them. This was not means-tested giving; it was means-bested giving. They didn't ask, "What do we have?" They asked "What do they need?" This was all 'of their own accord.' This wasn't twisted-arm giving; it was cheerful-heart giving.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Use losing as an impetus to giving. Maybe God is blessing you with losing so that you become more giving. People with little resources can often get much more joy in giving than those with many resources.

Ask for the grace of giving. In this area, we may have not because we ask not (James 4:2-3). Perhaps God doesn't give us more because we wouldn't give more if he did. Giving is a grace because it shows who God is.

GOD'S GRACE GIVES
THE GRACE OF GIVING



I want to give even if I have to lose.
What's the next step?



2. WE GROW IN GIVING BY BEGGING (4-5)

We beg to give money to poor Christians

...begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints (4).

The Macedonians went down on their hands and knees and passionately begged Paul for a massive favor. "Please Paul, we're begging you, please, please, please give us a big favor. We beg you to give us the privilege of giving to poor Christians." These are the strangest beggars! Normal beggars beg to get something from others. These beggars begged to give something to others.

We beg to give ourselves to the Lord

...and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us (5).

Something had happened before they gave money for poor Christians. They had given themselves to the Lord and to his servants. It was therefore an easy step to give away their resources to the Lord's people. This surprised even Paul.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

View Christian giving as a favor. It's something you get to do, not something you have to do. It's a privilege not a penalty. It's an opportunity not an obligation.

Give yourself before your money. If you haven't given yourself to the Lord, please don't give a cent to others. Before you open your wallet/purse to give to others, give yourself to God.

BECOME A BEGGAR
TO HELP BEGGARS.



I give quite a lot already.
At what point can I say, "That's enough"?



3. WE GROW IN GIVING BY EXCELLING (6-7)

We start giving

Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace (6).

Having pointed to the Macedonians' example, Paul then challenges the Corinthians in this area. Titus had got them started, but now Paul wants them to grow in this grace until this opportunity for giving had been completed.

We excel in giving

But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also (7).

Paul wasn't just looking for a start, or even in completing one round of giving, but for continuous growth. 'Enough' was not enough. Paul urged them on to excellence. They were a rich church in terms of spiritual gifts and in Paul's love for them. They excelled in every area of church life, but Paul wanted them to excel in this one remaining area where their growth was stunted.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Make a small start. Take the first opportunity that comes along to get on the starting blocks of giving and maybe aim for completing one small giving project.

Aim at excellence. Most of us enjoy growing in different areas of life: work, sports, hobbies, education, parenting, productivity, etc. Why not aim to grow and even at excellence in this area of giving?

EXCELLENCE IN BIG THINGS BEGINS
WITH EXCELLENCE IN SMALL THINGS



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

- **Gospel:** Use your giving by grace to better understand your getting of grace.
- **Jesus:** Jesus excelled in giving by giving us himself. He lost his life to give it away. He begged God for the favor of giving everything to his people.
- **Worship:** Praise God for his giving heart and for inviting us to enjoy that and duplicate it.
- **Prayer:** Giving God, I beg you to give me a giving heart.
- **Church:** We are a giving church. We have enough and to spare. But what can we do more? We have a church building project. We have need of a counseling pastor.
- **Pastor Jean:** Ask Pastor Jean to disciple you or your family or small group in this area.
- **Monday:** Start and complete a small giving project for someone. If you're young, it could be saving up \$10 to give to the Ukrainian Church. It could be starting a fund for church counseling needs. Or it could be a target of giving \$1000 more than last year.
- **Heaven:** No one has ever reached heaven and thought, "Wow, I gave way too much!" Many have reached hell and thought, "I excelled in getting but not in giving."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If 0 is new born and 10 is mature adult, what age are you on the giving scale?
2. How has losing improved your giving?
3. What do you beg God for?
4. What's the biggest favor God could give to you?
5. What small giving project could you start and complete?
6. How can you grow or even excel in this area of Gospel giving?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.HeadHeartHand.org
www.thestorychanger.life