

Reaching Forward

Study Guide #3 The Grace of Reaching Forward

“THERE WOULD BE NO ADVANTAGE to be gained by sowing a field of wheat if the harvest did not return more than was sown.” — Napoleon Hill(1883-1970) American speaker and motivational writer.

How much we believe the above statement to be true has everything to do with how we give to the kingdom of God. The above statement has everything to do with the purpose of the church, connecting it to the words of Jesus, *“The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”* Mt 9:37,38 (NLT) The sending aspect is the giving aspect. The sending aspect is a ministry of the church that must be under girded with prayer and supported by financial giving. Such giving and support is inspired by the belief that the return for such stewardship will always be greater than the original investment.

It is truly a blessing to have an opportunity to give anything in these hard economic times. But again, what one believes about the return of their giving makes all the difference. To this mindset, Jesus is quoted in Acts 20:35 as saying *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* To be blessed is another way of saying that one receives more out of giving or has a greater return than the actual value of what is given originally.

The blessedness of giving and the multiple return received for one’s sowing is something to think about during this study. A commitment to give of oneself beyond what one is able is a sacrificial investment - or sowing if you will - into the future that one may or may not see, but can have the faith in Christ that it will reap an abundant harvest.

You are invited to begin your time with God this week with prayer:

*O Father, you first extended the
grace of giving to us when you sent your Son
to live, die, and come to life again for us.
You set the ultimate example of the joy in giving
and the wisdom in knowing that you would have a
tremendous harvest as a result.
Teach me the value in this grace of giving,
because not only am I yours, but everything I have.
Amen*

Focus Scripture

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

*1*And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. *2*Out of the most 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 saints. *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. *6*So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. *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.

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

*10*And here is my advice 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. *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 he does not have.

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

Thoughts From The Text


- ✚ What is the gift that is given to the Macedonian Church?
- ✚ What *three* things seemed to develop a heart of giving for this church? (vs 2)
- ✚ Though the pattern is listed in reverse in verses 3-5, what *four* ways did this church give of themselves?
- ✚ Read 2 Corinthians 8:6-7. What does Paul tell the church to do? What things does Paul connect to this grace of giving?"
- ✚ Read 2 Corinthians 8:8-12. Why does Paul not command them to give? What principle about our giving can we gain from these verses?
- ✚ Read 2 Corinthians 8:13-15. What does these verses tell us about our giving?

A decorative logo for "Group Talk" featuring the text in a central oval, surrounded by a starburst pattern of eight points.

- ❖ In 1 Corinthians 13, we are told that if we did not have love, our Christian lives are "nothing." If that is the case, then what bearing does our giving have on the issue of whether we love?
- ❖ Does Paul teach in v.8 that the sincerity of our love is tested by our generosity? How would do on that test?
- ❖ How can someone give beyond his or her ability?
- ❖ In what way is giving a "privilege"?
- ❖ In verse 9, Paul talks about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why would Paul place this verse on the love and redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ in the middle of a passage about stewardship?
- ❖ If the Apostle Paul showed up in our group today to advise us regarding our Reaching Forward Capital Campaign, would you jump at the chance to do as he said? Why or Why not?


THE GRACE OF REACHING FORWARD

1. THIS GRACE EXPRESSES OUR LOVE FOR GOD

 Take a moment and read 2 Cor 8:5,8

These verses remind us that when we give ourselves first to the Lord that it should result in a continued, even greater heart for giving. When we give to the Lord, we are outwardly expressing our love to Him: *I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love.* Giving expresses not our love, but the sincerity of it. For example, do you love your spouse or parent or best friend? Then the evidence of your sincerity is shown by how you give your time and attention and assistance to help that person. If you have children, how do you show your love to them children? By giving them your time and attention and working to meet any needs they have? Now, ask yourself how you show the sincerity of your love for the Lord? The answer should appear to be the same - by giving. We give Him our hearts, our obedience, and our resources. To give our resources is simply saying that we offer our finances as evidence our love for him.

2. THIS GRACE IS AN OUTWARD EXPRESSION OF AN INWARD WEALTH

 Take a moment and read 2 Cor 8:9

This verse reminds us that Jesus Christ was rich before we ever knew him. How rich? He owns it ALL.

📖 Read Psalm 50:10-12

Clearly, Jesus was rich because there was nothing that he did not own or was not at his disposal. Yet, he gave up everything that we might gain his richness. Interestingly enough, you would not have known Jesus to be a person of wealth while he walked the earth in the physical, having no place to lay his head and despised by all. He gave up everything to come to those who had nothing and give them everything. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...*

Genesis 1:27 & 5:1 tells us that we were created in the image of God. That means that we have the capacity to be like God in our giving. He is a giving God. Always has been and always will be. To give to God, whether in our regular tithe or in our sacrificial giving to a capital campaign is acting in a God-like manner out of the very riches that He has exclusively provided for us - regardless of how much value that might be.

3. THIS GRACE UNDERSTANDS THE VALUE OF EQUAL SACRIFICE

📖 Take a moment and read 2 Cor 8:3,4,13,14

These verses describe a good understanding of stewardship. The concept of ability and giving beyond our ability, when connected to the advice of equality found here, restates the biblical principle of proportionate giving. Not everyone has the resources to make a million dollar gift, but every person can make a prayerful, equalosacrificial gift. Reaching Forward to achieve God's vision encourages, not demands, an equal sense of commitment and sacrifice among all those who make up a single church body, with each person prayerfully determining his or her own gift.

Personal Reflection

📖 Read Philippians 2:1-8

🔗 Think of one generous act you have committed in your life without regard to the cost or demand it placed on you. This may or may not involve money. Who was it for?

🔗 Why did you do it? What did you get out of it?

🔗 If you were able to relive the moment ... knowing what you know now, would you do it again?

🔗 After reading the opening quote from Napoleon Hill, do you agree with this statement? How does it apply to your heart when given the invitation and challenge to give a sacrificial offering to God?

Thinking Ahead

From this passage, we can conclude that our *Reaching Forward* Campaign presents us with a two-fold opportunity. First, it provides us the opportunity to show our sincerity in

loving others by sacrificing of our plenty to support a vision aimed at reaching others for Christ. It is planting a seed or young sapling with the understanding that we might not see much fruit from this effort, but others will reap the harvest. It is a tangible way of showing, just as the Macedonian church did, that it is not about us, but the call of Christ to invest ourselves in something beyond ourselves.

Second, it provides us the opportunity to engage God on a personal and sacrificial level as the One who touches our hearts with His grace so that we have the desire and willingness to help others in need. He also graciously supplies what we need so that we can help others when they are undergoing difficult times.

There is an “exchange” that takes place when we willingly offer our sacrifice. As noted in the quote that started this study, the grace of giving is about giving up something worth one thing in order to replace it with something of greater value, knowing that we very well might not see the full fruition of our offering.