

Series: Stand Alone
Date: November 21, 2021
Speaker: Spence Shelton
Sermon: Give like Jesus
Text: 2 Corinthians 8-9

Intro

Last week we finished our series in the Song of Solomon. What a great series about Love & Sex according to God's good design! If you are brand new to Mercy and missed that series, I would encourage you to go catch it on our podcast because it was, I believe, a really formative time God is using in the life of our church. NEXT week we will start our Advent series where we will walk through Matthew 1 & 2 as we celebrate Christmas together. But I left this weekend open so that as I pray for you & our church, I have the space to just share from scripture what the Lord has put on my heart for us.

When I look at the gods of our day. The little "g" gods who compete for our attention & ultimately our affection. There are three that will not surprise you at all. They are not new to our day. The Bible talks about them a great deal. But while they are not new to us, they are certainly true of our day. I'm talking about the gods of Power, Sex, and Money. These three gods are the primary things that if you just set your life on cruise control and let the world

around you sort of shape your life...you will be directed to give your life in service to one or more of those 3.

Well since we spent all fall allowing God to get all up in your personal space as we talked about sex...I thought I'd give you a break this weekend. And we will talk about your money instead! We are going to be in the New Testament book of 2 Corinthians. We'll start in chapter 8.

Listen in praying about what I need to preach I was convicted I've only preached on money 4 times in 6.5 years. Jesus talked about it more than heaven or hell combined.

And I will confess why to you:

I know how pastors & churches have manipulated people when it comes to money. And that history makes me hesitant to preach because I'm afraid your defenses will go up and you won't receive it.

I've given my attention to other things and just allowed us to coast on the generosity of those already giving here. That's lazy preaching and it has probably stifled our church's spiritual maturity and stunted our capacity for advancing the gospel as a result.

But you are such a gracious church. Recently I've had some of you come and say to me "pastor, we love giving, it's about time you preached on generosity again." Man,

that just goes to show how much you love Jesus. And like we will talk about today, the generosity of Jesus overflows from your heart into generosity towards the mission here.

SO, I hope you will forgive me where I've stayed away from it. I hope you will receive this message from the Lord. And I know so many of you are new here. And you have never heard sound biblical teaching on generosity that connects the dots of giving straight from the gospel to your heart and out to the mission. So, I want to do 3 things today:

- Give you a free pass.
- Show you God's word on giving from 2 Corinthians 8 & 9
- Put our mission back in front of us and show you where we've come & where we are headed. Because I believe the generosity of God's people fuels the mission. I think that's what you'll see here.

Free Pass

Some of you are skeptical about a pastor talking about money. That's not just my fear, that's your reality. So, we might as well acknowledge it. And you are waiting for the pastor to try and get your money. So let me say right here: I DON'T WANT YOUR MONEY. Ok? That's not what God is after, and it's not what I'm after. I'm not

preaching this sermon on God's behalf because God is poor and needy up there in heaven hoping some guy named Gary will finally start giving money so the gospel can go forward. My understanding of God is that he is not in need. In fact, the scriptures tell me he owns the cattle on a thousand hills. The scriptures tell me everything I have...is just stuff he has temporarily given me to manage. It's his & always has been. So, he doesn't need my money or your money.

That's your Free Pass. Now I will challenge you to give your money away today. not for me. But for you. because giving it away is a part of liberating you from its power over you. So, the challenge is going to be to give it somewhere. The members of Mercy Church give here because they believe in our mission & vision to make disciples of Jesus who Love God, Love Each Other, and Love our World. Our vision is to see a gospel awakening in Charlotte carried to the ends of the earth. Our members have committed to give to that mission & vision here but if that's not you that's fine!

I just want you to put the boxing gloves down a bit and really hear and consider what the bible says.

Speaking of, it's time to get into the Bible. 2 Corinthians 8. We will start in verse 1 and show you why to give like Jesus and how to give like Jesus. But ya'll its really that simple.

Main Idea: Give like Jesus.

I want this to be something you can talk about with elementary aged kids on up. What if each of us, our families, and our church family - tried to give like Jesus. The one we follow. The Apostle Paul is going to tell us a story about a church who came together and tried to give like Jesus. I want to show you from these verses what it looks like to give like Jesus.

1 We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia:

Situation: The church in Jerusalem is in poverty & needs help. So, Paul is taking up a collection from other churches for that church in need. And by the time he writes to the Corinthians he's with the churches in Macedonia (Philippians & Thessalonians) And he's so inspired by what they are doing that he tells their story in this letter to the Corinthian believers to inspire them to give too. THE HEART TO GIVE FROM A PLACE OF JOY- That heart is God's gift TO YOU.

2 During a severe trial brought about by affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

Listen, these young churches were being severely persecuted for believing the gospel. This was not an easy time for them. And YET...Paul doesn't call it affliction. He calls it a trial brought about by affliction. It's a test because he knows this moment is an opportunity for this church to flourish. Crisis usually creates these tests, don't they? The hard moments are where we reveal whether we really are going to trust in the Lord. It's not an easy thing, especially depending on your crisis. Some of you need to hear that today and it's got nothing to do with money at all, but you have a crisis right now and your instinct is to run away from the Lord. No, this crisis is an opportunity to trust him. And God brought you here today to hear that you are not alone & that he loves you. And that if you trust him you are surrounded by people who can testify he is faithful and will sustain you with his strength.

Ok back to verse 2 the idea that keeps sticking out is abundance. Abundant joy, abundant poverty, abundant generosity. They had nothing when you look at their circumstances. Yet...they had an ABUNDANCE of joy. THIS IS THE FIRST KEY in understanding what it means to give like Jesus. First, you gotta know the joy of knowing Jesus. That's where joy comes from.

Giving Like Jesus means giving from abundance of Joy in Christ

The gospel says we are all alike...we are sinners. We've incurred a debt in our sin that must be paid. And all our best deeds & all our wealth...none of it will save us from our sin. Nothing can pay that debt. We are all POOR. We can't do enough to EARN God's forgiveness and grace. Then the gospel says Christ comes and pays our debt for us. So, God forgives us. And he doesn't just forgive us, he adopts us as his children. So now we who had NOTHING...have been given the inheritance of the one who owns the world. We have perfect love poured out on us, we have eternity secured with that father...we who had nothing, have everything! That love creates JOY! Abundant joy of the soul that can sustain you even in those really hard trials of afflictions!

And Paul is saying I want you to see these crazy Macedonians. Poverty + Joy in Christ = the capacity to GIVE. I may have little, But I will give of it abundantly to you. Because my heart has found Joy in Jesus. And just like he loved me & gave for me, I love you & give for you. We give like Jesus.

3 I can testify that, according to their ability and even beyond their ability, of their own accord, 4 they begged us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints,

Let me say that again. Crazy. They begged us earnestly for the privilege! These poor Christians regarded the

request Paul gave them as a privilege! Why? Because they saw what this moment really was. It was a chance for them to do for someone else what Christ had done for them. By giving away some of themselves...to be a blessing to others. They weren't coerced. They did it out of their own accord. But they wanted to get IN on the privilege of gospel ministry.

Giving Like Jesus means seeing giving as a privilege not an obligation.

I'm in those same lines you are in where you get the guilt trip to give. Like I'm buying a sandwich yesterday at the football game and the person selling it says, "You want to add a tip for veterans who've sacrificed their lives and the lives of their family defending your rights?" See that kind of ask is peer pressure. It's my obligation to give. That's a shame induced giving.

5 and not just as we had hoped. Instead, they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us by God's will.

Order matters! See the first thing this church did...they once again opened their hands and said God...everything I have is a gift from you. It's all yours! As long as you think what you have is YOURS, giving it away will be hard. You may give of your excess, but you'll rarely if ever give as a sacrifice and you'll struggle to find joy in it. But when you give yourself to the Lord -

that's you acknowledging everything I have is from God anyways. My talent, my wealth, my time, my friends, my health...that's all God's. And when you believe the gospel, you submit yourself to the authority of God. He's the new head of your life. THIS RIGHT HERE is why giving is hard ya'll. It's because the idea that you are not the supreme authority of your life...that is hard. Lordship - that's my shorthand way to say God rules your life - Lordship is hard.

** I think of college students who just had their final campus meeting of the semester. And they were challenged to give their summer to serving the Lord on an 8-week ministry training we call city project. Man learning to think of your summer as GOD's summer he gave you...that's tough. I'm not saying that means you go, I'm saying you recognize your time just like your stuff...is his first.

Giving like Jesus means surrendering our will to God's will

Especially hard with our stuff. Think about it, one of the first words a child learns to speak is "MINE!" That's not trained. It's just a word to express our natural feelings of selfishness. But when you come to realize everything you have is God's...and that the best thing for you here on earth will be how you deploy those resources the way God desires...everything changes. The Macedonians re-

committed themselves to the Lord again that day and then with open hands said OK Lord where do you want us to put your resources? Opportunity came open, they went into action JOYFULLY and ABUNDANTLY. Paul says...man I want the same for you. This doesn't mean every opportunity...but it does mean they were excited, joyful, about opportunities to demonstrate the gospel through giving.

6 So we urged Titus that just as he had begun, so he should also complete among you this act of grace. 7 Now as you excel in everything — in faith, speech, knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love for us — excel also in this act of grace. 8 I am not saying this as a command. Rather, by means of the diligence of others, I am testing the genuineness of your love. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Now we come to the heart, don't we? It's the gospel in a verse. If we are going to give like Jesus, we need to know how Jesus gave. You need to know his grace.

He was rich. How? He was with God the father in heaven. He had everything. Yet he became poor. How? Several layers to this one.

- First, he came and took on human form. And the human body here on earth aint the glorified redeemed body we will have one day.
- But then he was born into relative poverty. In a lower class in society. His mom's birthing suite was a dilapidated barn stable.
- Then he became poor as a wandering teacher with nowhere to lay his head.
- But then...he became poor as a falsely convicted criminal...beaten, mocked, & scorned.
- THEN he became poor in blood. He EMPTIED HIMSELF. HE PAID OUR DEBT WITH HIS BLOOD DYING A HUMILIATING CRIMINALS DEATH ON A CROSS... FOR OUR SAKE!

Why? So that you through his poverty...by believing what Christ has done for you...you who had NO CHANCE to be with the father, but it was his joy to become poor for your sake.... YOU become rich! You receive NEW LIFE in Christ. You receive forgiveness of your sin. That's wealth. You receive eternal life. No kind of money in this world can buy that kind of wealth.

Giving like Jesus means giving sacrificially

Have you received what Christ gave you? Because if not, giving will be an obligation instead of a joy. The secret to joyful giving is that I get the privilege of following my savior. But If Jesus is ONLY a model, we'll never

measure up. We'll give out of guilt and eventually get tired of it. Cause we can't measure up. BUT, if we've received grace FROM Christ, Jesus will not only be our model, but he says his Holy Spirit within us will be our STRENGTH. He will recalibrate our heart to change what we love. We'll start loving what he loves. And so, we'll start giving away our money because...our love for it will lessen.

You can't give like Jesus until you've first received from Jesus

6 The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously.

And what does he mean? Does he mean you give a seed of money and then you will GET more money back? No, but that is how false teachers will wield this verse. And the underlying problem is - That wouldn't be giving like Jesus. He didn't give to make himself rich. He gave to make US rich. And that brought him JOY. So, we give not to make ourselves rich, but to reap a different kind of harvest.

It means if you keep it all for yourself, or maybe you give a little bit of your excess, you will miss out on so much of what it means to find Joy in Christ. Generous people will experience gospel joy in abundance. A reaping of REAL wealth. Relationships, contentment, joy, purpose, etc. In fact, the real wealth may be that he crushes your idol of

financial wealth so you can finally live free from the tyranny of the almighty dollar.

7 Each person should do as he has decided in his heart — not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver.

I've said this before when talking about giving. You know at the end of our service, most of the time, somebody closes out by talking about ways to give. WHAT IF we as the church started CHEERING. Like LaMello just made a sick lob to Mason & he thunder dunked on KD's head and spectrum arena erupts in cheering "YEAH!" Man, what if we cheered like that? I know it would feel a little silly. But I HOPE you will ask the Lord to set your heart aflame like that when you hear about the opportunity to give towards the advancement of the gospel. Because its far more significant & worthy of celebration than a bucket.

Giving like Jesus means giving cheerfully

This is kind of a check your heart moment, right? See guys the gospel is such a better motivator than guilt. I don't want to give out of guilt. That is so exhausting. But because of this stuff right here, ya'll I LOVE raising money and I love giving money. Because I get to get in on God's mission and I get the grace that comes from walking in the footsteps of Jesus. So, if today the feelings

of either guilt or shame are rising up - That narrative that you should be doing more - OR, if the feeling of anger or resentment is rising up - Don't talk about money - Man listen that is a sign of something deeper going on. It's not a money problem, it's a heart problem. So, my prayer today is that if that's you, this is a wakeup call about a MUCH more serious matter than money. It's about your soul! What is going on there? And let's let Giving Like Jesus be the day you decided to receive the loving forgiveness of God in Jesus! OF COURSE, for you, God would save you on a day about money. A false god got dethroned from your heart. Jesus was made to be better. SO, respond to him in salvation!

3M vision

Let me close by briefly sharing what God is up to here. I believe what we are seeing in this chapter and what we see throughout scripture is that God set his mission up so that the generosity of his people would fuel the advancement of his mission.

The Generosity of God's people fuels the advancement of his mission

In other words, he is setting this up, so we get to receive grace & joy AS WE GIVE towards others finding grace and joy in Christ. Man let me just tell you how we've gotten to be a part of that this year. And please

remember this year started with us meeting in one service on the lawn of Providence Rd with me preaching while wearing a toboggan. SO, didn't know what this year would bring.

You know we talk about helping people take their next steps in following Jesus. In January we talked about how in order to accomplish our long-range vision of seeing a gospel awakening in Charlotte carried to the ends of the earth, we need to take some steps to become the kind of church geared for that kind of work. So, we said over the next 5 years we want to become a Maturing, Multiplying, Multicultural church. Our shorthand for that is we are working on becoming a 3M church. Like in December of 2025 that would be us. Because we believe that to be an accurate living out of what God calls the church to be about in the New Testament. Man, here's what we've seen God do.

We talk about helping people take their next steps - we've seen hundreds of First Time Guests, over 250 people attend starting point, and over 80 people become members of mercy church!

We want to make disciples and we've seen dozens of people baptized & 470 people are in community groups. In fact, we've got a new leader interest meeting this weekend because we need to add about 30 more groups ASAP. Maybe that's your next step.

We currently have 9 people taking their next steps in our missions training program so that they can be sent overseas to live as missionaries with the gospel.

OH, SPEAKING OF multiplying - And I think this is a tangible way to see how generosity fuels the mission. because of how you gave - our previous Student Director was able to move into a church planting residency at Mercy without losing momentum in our middle & high school ministry. See our student director Alan has been called by God to plant a church in his home city of Nairobi Kenya next year. Because of your generosity, we were able to create a new position that is allowing him to train well for this big task. AND AT THE SAME TIME, we were able to fill his old position with our new student director Brett Bouldin. WHO by the way - Was trained for 2 years in our ministry residency which is possible because of the generosity of God's people.

ON TOP OF THAT - In 2021 we also sent out two of our staff who felt called to plant a house church here in charlotte. AND... we planted a campus of Mercy Church. We are PRO multiplying the gospel here. We saw an opportunity to plant a campus, so we went for it and on Easter we launched Mercy NORTHEAST! Now they are preparing for their grand opening of their new location on December 5th. Have you heard what happened there yet? We are partnering with a charter school that serves

a low-income community in our backyard and being a blessing to them by funding some of the up-fit costs - because of your generosity. We aren't just tenants paying rent, we are partners in bringing the love of Christ to a community there. We're prayerful that this new partnership will not just serve this school, but the staff, the families, the students, and ultimately the community. **GENEROSITY FUELS THE MISSION!**

SO, CAN WE CELEBRATE HOW GENEROSITY IS FUELING THE MISSION HERE AT MERCY CHURCH?

So yes of COURSE I believe you should give to the ministry here. You ask - well how much are we supposed to give? That's probably another sermon and we are out of time, so I'll say this. In the OT the people of God were to give their first 10% of their harvest back to God at the temple as a tithe that would then be used to care for the people. A way to say God it's all yours & I'm grateful and aware of it. Well, the same requirement is not on us now because of Jesus' grace. My question is do we have MORE or Less to be thankful for here on the New Testament side of the cross? MORE. So, I would view 10% as a floor, not a ceiling. BUT I will also say - start somewhere.

I want December to be our highest giving month in our 6.5-year history here. I DON'T want to set a goal though.

How about this: I'd love to send our largest gift ever to International Missions this Christmas. That's money for Mercy initiatives like planting Mercy Nairobi, and money to cooperative initiatives like the offering we give with other churches called the Lottie Moon Christmas offering. So instead of taking up a special gift, we are going to go bigger. **1/3 of everything you give in December will go to international missions.**

The other 2/3 will go to ministry development here so that we can give even MORE people and resources away NEXT year & in the years to come to God's mission. And when you come to see how essential present discipleship is to FUTURE missions, then you start to realize that in a church with its heart in the right place, every dollar is a missions dollar. That's going to cost some money as well. We need to expand our family ministries staff & support. That's going to help us reach, train, & send the next generation! We need to do some upfit work on our providence rd facility. Ya'll we believe buildings are tools. A good tool isn't flashy, but it is sharp. And this building is an old building that needs some sharpening. We need build a launch team for our union county campus & begin the search for a space there.

Our highest month of giving ever we gave _____. What if we - crazy - joyfully doubled that. Then made some big

moves for the kingdom next year trusting God still has some things to do here.

Giving opens December 5th. Pray & Fast. Ask the Lord.