

# STRANGE Generosity

A sermon on 2 Corinthians 8

Have you ever seen the Garfield Christmas special?

It starts out with the lazy, lasagna-loving feline dreaming about a special Christmas gift. The mind-reading device uses a mechanical Christmas hat that reads your thoughts and instantly delivers whatever gifts you can think of.

Immediately Garfield begins thinking of gift after gift after gift until he is literally swimming in presents.

But then he wakes up...

Over the course of the 20-minute special, Garfield's opinion on Christmas changes. He meets his owner's grandma and befriends her. Even going so far as to find old love letters from her deceased husband that Garfield gives to her as a gift. It's a heartwarming moment and Garfield learns that Christmas is wonderful...even if you don't get a magic, mind-reading, gift-giving device.

Christmas is a time for giving.

Believers know that.

Unbelievers know that.

Even Garfield the cat knows that.

But God calls believers to be the light of the world.

That implies that they live differently.

How do believers give in such a way that is different at Christmas?

In a way that's unique?

That's...

Strange.

Today we're going to talk the concept of STRANGE Giving. Before we do, a prayer: **O Lord, strengthen us by the truth. Your Word is the truth. Open our eyes to see what you want us to see; open our ears to hear what you want us to hear; and open our hearts to believe what you would have us believe. Amen.**

## I. STRANGE Generosity

The lesson is found in 2 Corinthians 8. A bit of background on this section:

In Acts 11:29, it is revealed that **a severe famine had ravaged Jerusalem**. The effects of the famine were intensified in part by the harsh taxation of the Roman government and the severe persecution of early believers.

This means that if you were a believer in Jerusalem, you might head to your backyard garden looking for some kind of veggies to roast for dinner. But as you look out back, you see the vines are dry because of the famine. There hasn't been rain in days.

You head to the grocery store with a few coins you scraped together from work and under the sofa cushions. Along the way you get stopped along the way by a Roman centurion, who tells you that he has just instituted a walking tax. You owe him ½ of your coins to avoid getting stabbed in the stomach. You decide you like your stomach and hand him the money.

When you get to the local grocery store you try to buy some potatoes with the coins you have available, but the merchants see the cross necklace you are wearing. He says, "I'm sorry, but we that's not enough money. You'll have to put that food back," even as his hand reaches out to accept the exact same amount of money for the exact same amount of potatoes from the very next person in line -- who happened to not be wearing a cross necklace.

Poverty was a part of life for believers in Jerusalem.

Neighboring churches wanted to help. They organized a special offering for the church in Jerusalem.

One of those church was located in **Corinth**. This group had pledged a significant amount of money to the church in Jerusalem. Something that lifted people's spirits. "If only we get the money from Corinth, we'll be in much better shape. We can stop eating Ramen noodles. We can introduce veggies back into our diets. We can hold potlucks again!"

But after their incredible pledge, word had gotten around to their former Pastor, a guy named Paul, that the people were talking about not fulfilling their financial commitments to the offering. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians is a letter he writes to them, in part, to encourage them to complete the offering.

In chapter 8, he begins the section on fulfilling their offering by writing about the incredible generosity he had already seen from the church in Macedonia.

A generosity that was a bit *strange*...

**We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. During a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. (2 Cor. 8:1-2)**

Did you catch that part?

The Macedonian believers were also undergoing severe trial.  
They were also dealing with persecution.  
They were also struggling with poverty.

You might expect them to say, "I'd like to help. But I have to put food on my own table first."

Nope.

Their poverty welled up in rich generosity. This leads to the first principle of *Strange Generosity*.

## **1) Strange Generosity Gives when in Need**

If ever there was a year to NOT give, 2020 might be it.

You might have lost your job.  
You might have lost your childcare preventing you getting a new one.  
Everyone else losing their job might have affected your sales.

Isolation might have emotionally affected your ability to apply for jobs.  
Your 401k might have gone down.  
Your grandma's 401k might have gone down meaning you didn't get that early Christmas monetary gift you are used to.

Many will forego giving this year because they don't have what they normally do!

God calls you NOT to give up giving.

Even if you're hurting.  
Even if it's difficult.  
Even if it's hard.

Don't give up giving.

Because God has still given to you.  
Because God will still give to you.  
Because God will give through you.

Maybe you're saying:

*Ok.*  
*That's fine.*  
*I can budget a dollar or two out of my couple thousand-dollar paycheck for a trip to the Dollar Tree.*  
*But not much more.*

Before you finalize that number into your Excel spreadsheet. Read Paul's next description of the Macedonians:  
**For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. (v.3)**

Did you see that?

I'm not even entirely sure what that means.  
It's as if they looked at their budget.  
Saw that they could give \$5 to the offering without holding a negative balance.  
And said, "Let's put down \$20. I'm sure God will take care of us."  
Then, went home, sold their last jar of olive oil, and gave the money to Paul.

Wow.  
Strange.

But...  
Wow.

## **2) Strange Generosity Gives ABUNDANTLY**

It's like the time that Jesus and his disciples were hanging out near the temple treasury. One by one they watched people enter into the temple courtyard to drop off their offerings. Rich person after rich person came one by one and dropped off a big old bag of money.

But finally, it was a widow's turn.  
She didn't have a big old bag of money.  
She just had a handkerchief with two small coins in it.

She dropped them into the jar.  
*Plink*  
*Plink*

And Jesus looked at his disciples and said, "I tell you the truth. She gave more than all of them. Because they gave a small portion.  
They still have plenty in their accounts.

But she...?  
She gave it all.  
Because she trusts God with it all.

This concept is all about trust.  
That woman trusted that the God of the Universe who created such fine gems as diamond, rubies, gold and silver...

...would be able to replenish her copper coins.

Do you?

Unbelievers have to chalk it up to luck or hard work.  
But you know you have a God who loves you abundantly dearly taking care of you.

Trust him.  
Give abundantly.

.....  
The strange generosity continues. Read verse 4:

**Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.**

Pay attention to that.  
This group of believers were begging to be a part of giving.

That's not usually how our world works.

Usually, it's the reverse.

Christmas fliers stuffed in mailboxes asking to be GIVEN some money.  
Christmas emails stuffed in your Junk folder asking to be GIVEN some money.  
Text messages from people on Facebook, that seems fishy because you already were friends with that person, asking to be GIVEN some money.

In a world where people BEG to be given....

### **3) Strange Generosity BEGS to Give**

It begs to give to family.

It begs to give friends.

It begs to give coworkers.

It begs to give church family.

It begs to give to the guy down the block that you talked to that one time.

It begs to give to that guy on the corner asking for money.

It begs to give to anyone.

It begs to give for any reason.

It begs to give.

Can you imagine this in action?

Urgently texting your friends...How can I give to you?

Running from your car to the guy on the corner? How can I help you?

Standing on the corner with signs as cars drive by – Have Help & Ready to Give!

This is godly.

God loves giving.

He was thrilled in giving us a Savior.

He is thrilled in giving us blessings.

As part of his family, God wants to delight in giving to others

As he delights in giving to us.

This applies to more than money. Read verse 5:

**And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves.... (v.5)**

They said to Paul:

Here's my time. I'll donate it to the project.

Here's my feet. I'll use them to go door to door to collect.

Here's my mouth. I'll use it to encourage others to give.

Here's my mind. I'll use it to count the money.  
Here's my right bicep. I'll use it to carry the collection in a big old money bag.

The strangely generous know that giving means more than giving money.

It means giving yourself.

#### **4) Strange Generosity Gives SELF**

This is important.

Because you might not have a lot of money this year.  
You might be listening to this sermon and feeling disappointed.  
You might feel if you're unable to participate in giving.

Nope.

Giving involves your time.  
Giving involves your talents.  
Giving involves your treasures.

Giving involves some time to listen to a friend's relationship struggles.  
Giving involves your graphic art skills to design a Christmas greeting for a coworker.  
Giving involves your extra Tupperware to your neighbor because they were baking Christmas cookies and ran out of storage containers.

Giving can involve all kinds of things.  
But one thing giving always involves?  
Giving.

Check out verse 6. Paul stops complimenting the example of the Macedonian's giving and turns to the matter of the Corinthians. He writes,  
**So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. (v.6-8)**

Because the Corinthians had made big plans.  
They had promised big amounts of money.  
They had created big expectations.

And were about to bring a BIG disappointment.

Paul reminds them that...

#### **5) Strange Generosity Takes ACTION**

It doesn't just talk a big game.  
It doesn't just say it's going to be generous.  
It doesn't just nod in agreement at pastor's sermon on strange generosity.

It does the strange thing.  
And actually takes action.

There was a study done recently about people on Social Media. It found that when people get angry at the poverty and injustice in the world and they say mean things about society and are outraged that people are struggling. People who post about those problems on a day to day basis?

They aren't the people that actually give in such a way to change it.

Who gives then?

People who don't use time complaining.  
Probably because they are too busy giving.

Be that kind of giving.  
The kind that sees a need.  
The kind that doesn't lament the need.  
The kind that takes action.

## II. The STRANGEST Generosity

There's one more aspect of strange giving that motivates all these principles of strange giving. It's found in verse 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.**"

There's no one richer than God!  
He owns storehouses of lightning.  
He built the golden streets of heaven.  
He owns everything.

But he gave it all up.

About 2000 some years ago, God gave it all up.

He was born in a barn.  
He was placed in a feeding trough.  
He was clothed with a few pieces of old cloth.

He grew up the son of a blue-collar worker.  
He took to the streets at age 30.  
He was homeless as he taught others about the riches of God's kingdom in the sandals on his feet and the clothes on his back.

Then...  
He lost that.

The only thing he had at the end of his life?  
His underwear.  
A crown of thorns jammed into his head.

And your sin.  
All of it.

But he did all of this, so that you might become rich!

Because Jesus became poor.  
You have the riches of heaven.

Because Jesus became poor.  
You have the riches of eternal life.

Because Jesus became poor.  
You own the rich news that you are forgiven.

## **6) Strange Generosity Gives FOR JESUS' SAKE**

We give because we have all we need.  
We give because we have a savior.  
We give because we have a place in heaven.

And we give that others might learn about the Savior too. Amen.