

A Biblical Model for Giving, Part 2

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1-2

Code: 47-56

Well, let's open our Bibles as we come to the Word of God this morning. We are in the midst of a very appropriate series for Christmas, a series on giving. If there is any time in the year when we think about giving gifts, certainly it is at Christmas season. And here we are, lesson number two, in a series on the model for Christian giving. Not how we give so much to one another but how we give for the needs of the church and the advancement of the kingdom as the Spirit of God prompts us to lay up treasure in heaven.

One of the most familiar and, frankly, one of the most encouraging promises in all of the Bible is given in Philippians 4:19. This is what it says, "But my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." What a promise. My God shall supply all your needs. That is a basic bottom-line foundation of confidence that should have a tremendous effect on our giving. Let me give you an illustration of how. During World War II the death of millions of people occurred, as you remember. Masses of them died in Europe. And immediately there was a terrible problem with orphans all over the cities of Europe.

At the close of the Second World War the allies, in their attempts to rebuild Europe, had to take on the responsibility of dealing with all of these orphaned children. And so they built some camps to house them and care for them and feed them. They began to develop and obviously as the camps began to develop, the children were found and brought there and tested the capacity of the camps, and the camps had to be enlarged to contain all of these orphaned children. They received the finest care that could possibly be given to them and the best and healthiest food was provided.

But in one camp in particular the officials became very, very disturbed because after the children had been there for even several weeks they didn't sleep. They would give them three meals a day. They provided for their needs. They kept them clean. They gave them adequate places to sleep, but the kids stayed awake all night. They couldn't understand what was wrong and so they endeavored to do a study and talk to the children and find out the problem. And, eventually, they came to understand what it was.

So every night when they put all of the children to bed in those long sort of bunk lines that existed in a dormitory fashion, the last thing that would happen before they fell asleep was a lady would come down the middle with a big cart full of little loaves of bread and she would place into the hand of each little child a loaf of bread. And the last thing the child would experience at night would be to close his

little hand or her little hand around that loaf of bread.

In a matter of days they were all sleeping through the night. They realized that even though they were fed to the full during the day, experience had taught them that having food today doesn't mean anything for tomorrow. And it was the anxiety and the fear that they wouldn't eat the next day that kept them awake. But once they went to sleep with a little loaf in their hand, the fear was dispelled. They could enjoy what they had because there was some security in the promise of tomorrow.

I really believe that the little loaf of bread that God puts in the hand of every believer is Philippians 4:19, "But my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." We have nothing to fear for tomorrow. The promise of God, He will meet every need. That has tremendous implications on how we give. We are not alone in securing our future. Yes we want to be wise. Yes we want to plan. Yes, if possible, we want to save.

Yes we want to be good stewards of what God has provided for us and lay away something for the future as we've learned in our study. But at the same time, we can do that in complete confidence that if God were to come to us and ask us to take what we had planned for the future and invest it in His kingdom, He would replace it. We can go to sleep every night of our life with that little loaf of bread, "My God shall supply all your needs because that is His promise." And that is a promise that takes away anxiety and removes fear.

As we come to 2 Corinthians chapter 8, we are introduced to some believers who lived like that, who because they understood the promises of God and were so secure for their future they could give generously in the present. They are the Macedonians, the churches of Macedonia mentioned there in verse 1. They provide for us a model for Christian giving, a model for Christian giving.

The two chapters before us, chapter 8 and chapter 9, lay out the pattern for giving. They tell us all kinds of things about giving, principles related to giving, and we're going to be learning many of those. But the beginning of these two chapters looks at this model group of Christians in Macedonia and how they gave. And that sets the model for Christian giving. Now let me give you just briefly the background. Paul is urging the Corinthians to give. In fact he's urging them to give to a specific project and that is the need of the church in Jerusalem.

And what was the need? Well the church was very large, thousands and thousands of people in it. The first church, obviously, born on the day of Pentecost and it was very, very poor. In fact, the church at Jerusalem was destitute. And for over a year the Apostle Paul had been collecting money on his third missionary journey into the Gentile world, collecting money from Gentile churches to take back to the poor saints in Jerusalem to provide food and clothing and the necessities of life for them.

Now remember the causes of their poverty, basically threefold. Number one, much of the church was made up of pilgrims who had come to visit Jerusalem for religious events, heard the gospel, been saved and never went home. So they had no jobs, no homes, no livelihoods and they then became the burden of the already existing church there. The people who lived in Jerusalem, they had to take care of them.

They had a problem as well, they were converted Jews and they were under persecution and that's the second issue. Pilgrims constituted the first drain on their resources; persecution was the second. Immediately, when the Jews embraced Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, the very same Jesus that the Jews had recently crucified and totally rejected, they were then persecuted for believing in Christ. They lost their jobs. They lost their social status. They lost their careers. They lost their family. They lost everything. And so the poverty came as a result of that persecution.

Thirdly, the Roman economy itself during the occupation of Palestine had had an impoverishing effect on the land. So for those reasons, a combination of those reasons, the church was very poor. Initially the people who were in the church who did have land and did have houses and did have money and did have treasures and did have possessions, as we find out in Acts 2 and 4, began to sell it and take the money and distribute it to the people who had need.

So early on the church was extremely generous, and they literally made the most valiant effort to meet their needs perhaps of any church in history. But soon all that they had was depleted. The church continued to grow; new people were being added daily. The church was getting larger and larger. Persecution was getting worse and worse. The resources that were once there were now depleted and the need was profound. And that moved Paul to try to collect money from Gentile churches to take it back and provide for the church in Jerusalem.

Keep in mind, also, that he had a spiritual goal in mind. Since Jew and Gentile were now one in Christ, something that was not true prior to the coming of Christ; the Jew and the Gentile were at animosity with one another. But in Christ they were made one, the middle wall was broken down and they became one in Christ. He wanted to affirm that, solidify that by taking money from Gentile churches, making it a love gift to the Jews which would go a long way to taking that spiritual unity and making it a practical unity.

So Paul's project was crucial both for help for the church and solidarity in the church. And thus, on his third missionary journey, he makes a major emphasis on this collection. The Corinthians had been told about it. They had already started to give. Apparently they had stopped giving, probably because of the rebellion that occurred there against Paul. Their giving had just sort of ceased. Paul wrote them in 1 Corinthians 16, told them to make collections, to collect money so it would already be collected and in place when he arrived. But apparently they hadn't fully followed through on that and so here in 2 Corinthians he encourages them to finish what they began.

Look down in verse 10. He says in verse 10, the middle of the verse, that the Corinthians were the first to begin a year ago, to do this giving. And then in verse 11 he says, "Now finish doing it." You remember now that there was a rebellion against Paul. That has been resolved. Paul and the Corinthians are now back on track. Their love has been reestablished. Their relationship has been restored and rebuilt. And now he wants to encourage them to go back and finish giving to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

That's what's behind these two chapters. He is exhorting them to give. And this then becomes a pattern to teach us all how to give. He begins by using the Macedonians as an illustration of giving with generosity. In fact, the first point that he makes, and we'll see several points in chapter 8. I gave them to you last week. The first point he makes in the opening eight verses is simply this, "Giving is the behavior of devout Christians." Giving is the behavior of devout Christians. In verse 9, for example, he gives another point and that is, "Giving follows the pattern of Jesus Christ who first gave Himself to us as well."

So, he's got a lot of points he wants to make. The first one is that giving is the behavior of devout Christians. Devout Christians give generously, and the devout Christians that he uses as a model are the churches of Macedonia. There were three of them, the church in Philippi, the church in Berea, and the church in Thessalonica. Macedonia was the northern part of Greece; Corinth was in the southern part of Greece. So they were not very far away but there were very different circumstances.

Macedonia was severely impoverished. It had been a Roman territory for 200 years. They had been treated cruelly by the Romans. They had been reduced to almost slavish relationships to Rome, their resources confiscated and their riches brandished. Also, for a number of years prior to this period of time, civil wars had been fought there involving the Caesars and other familiar military names like Brutus and Cassius and Antoninus and others. And the wars that they fought in Macedonia had also had an impoverishing effect.

The churches in Macedonia were objects of persecution. So much persecution and so much poverty that likely they were as poor as any churches in the whole Gentile world and, consequently, provide the best example of generosity out of the deepest kind of poverty. So Paul, in wanting to encourage the Corinthians, begins in verse 1, "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia." They are the exemplary churches. Their generosity is specifically referred to later in this epistle, chapter 11 verse 9. It is also referred to in Philippians chapter 2 verse 25 and chapter 4 verses 15 to 18, where Paul talks about how generously the church at Philippi gave one of those Macedonian churches.

So Paul says, "I want to draw your attention to the giving of the churches in Macedonia." He refers specifically to their giving in this next eight verses. Now, as we go through these eight verses we're

going to find a list of the characteristics of the giving of devout Christians. This is how devout Christians give. This is how committed, dedicated, selfless Christians give. And I'm going to take you down that list. We'll cover just verse 2, if you can believe it, this morning, because there are so many of them, verses 1 and 2, they're so many of them right there. Here are the characteristics of the giving of devout Christians.

Number one, their giving is motivated by God's grace. Their giving is motivated or initiated by God's grace. Verse 1, "Brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia." He doesn't even mention their giving, really. He just alludes to it all the way down and it's added in italics down in verse 3, "They gave of their own accord." He doesn't make any direct word reference to their giving. But he's referring to their giving all the way along, and he begins by identifying it as the work of the grace of God given in the churches of Macedonia. This is a very, very important starting point.

The primary motive of their generosity was not human kindness. The primary motive was not human philanthropy. It wasn't a desire to sort of satisfy their conscience. It wasn't a desire to do well, to share the milk of human kindness. What motivated them was the grace of God at work in their hearts producing this generosity. And listen, this kind of giving which we will see the Macedonians did is not normal. It is not just human giving.

It is prompted by something far beyond anything that you can find in the noble character of the human heart made in the image of God. And I would agree that though man is fallen there are still vestiges of the image of God in him, and there is still a knowledge of right and wrong and still a conscience excusing or accusing. Man can still do something that is humanly good, but at its highest level, human good will not reach the proportions of that goodness and that righteousness prompted by the transforming grace of God. And that is true in giving as well.

I have this illustrated, and you do too. If you watch some of these telethons and you see people sending in pledges and pledges and pledges and, occasionally, some famous person will send in a \$500.00 or a \$1,000.00 pledge or a \$5,000.00 pledge. And you know they're a millionaire and they have millions and millions of dollars. They will always stop far short of any sacrifice. It's not sacrificial giving in the main, that's not typical human giving.

Oh, occasionally, where the love bond is profound, where we have family or someone to whom we are deeply attached there is a measure of sacrifice at that point, and there are times when humans do sacrifice for noble causes. But, generally speaking, there is a level of human giving that stops short of altering one's chosen life style. And so their level of generosity might be considered a human level. What you have here is something way beyond that. It is prompted by the work of the grace of God in the heart of a transformed person.

Sensitivity to new life, longing for godly things, loving heaven more than earth, desiring to fulfill kingdom purposes, that's what's behind this giving, saving grace, sanctifying grace. The transformation, for example, that comes to believers and causes them to seek first the kingdom and let everything else go. The transformation that causes believers to set their affections on things above and not on things on the earth. The transformation that leads us to love God and not the world. The transformation that causes us to hunger and thirst after righteousness and godliness. The transformation that makes us long for the Word of God and obedience, and to follow the leading of the Spirit.

Those are all the effects of grace. And one of those is a longing to give generously and sacrificially. It is all part of working out the salvation work that God is doing in you. It is God who is at work in you, to will and to do of His own good pleasure. But "you must work out your salvation," Paul says in Philippians 2:12 and 13. We don't give like the unsaved rich. The Macedonians didn't give like the unsaved rich. They didn't give tokens of their riches. They didn't give out of their riches. They didn't give without sacrifice.

And, furthermore, they didn't give like selfish Christians whose love of the eternal is matched by their love of the temporal, so that everything is a battle because they're still holding on to the world. They didn't give like selfish Christians and they didn't give like the unsaved rich. They gave like totally devout, dedicated, committed, sold-out Christians give, and that is they gave magnanimously and generously in response to the work of the grace of God in their hearts.

Generous giving is one effect of saving, sanctifying grace, where you look at someone and you see that sacrificial generosity, you know God is at work in that heart. The grace of God operating through love of the truth and obedience to the Spirit in gratitude prompts giving. And Paul here holds up the Macedonian believers as the example or the model of devout Christians who give generously. Now, notice he does this in such a way that he protects the whole issue of grace. Let me say that another way. We are drawn to the commendable character of the Macedonians.

We can use them as a model, but Paul shuts out all human merit by saying what they did they did because they were prompted by what? The grace of God, the grace of God, that being the primary motive of their willingness. So, their giving, which is model giving, is prompted and initiated by God's grace. And Paul wants the Corinthians to respond to the same saving grace, the same sanctifying grace, the same enabling grace and so must we. We give, not like the world gives. We give way beyond that because we have received the transforming grace of God.

Secondly, giving is not only motivated by the grace of God, giving transcends difficult circumstances. Giving transcends difficult circumstances. Would you notice now verse 2? "That in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality."

Notice, they're giving, it says, came during a great ordeal of affliction. Difficult circumstance had no negative effect on their giving.

It wasn't like, "Well, you know, we're in very difficult times. We don't know what our economic future is. And Macedonia is crumbling economically and we are being persecuted mercilessly. We don't know if we're going to have enough for tomorrow. We are anxious about all of that. We do not know what the future holds since we've identified with Jesus Christ. We have hostility from the Jews."

And if you go back to Acts 17, for example, the church at Thessalonica. You remember when they believed on the gospel there the Jews came after them very viciously. They was even Gentile persecution, of course, in that part of the world to the church. So they didn't know what the future held. Paul defines their circumstance as a great ordeal of affliction. He loves to pile up words to fill out his description.

Great ordeal, let's take the word "great." It means severe, mega, big, large, grand, massive, severe. "Ordeal" is *dokim*. It means a test, and it's used of putting metal in the furnace to test it. So here you have a severe test by fire, suffering, suffering. First Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 14 and 15 refer to that suffering. He says, "You are enduring the same sufferings at the hand of your own countrymen who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out."

He acknowledges the church in Thessalonica was suffering. Chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians verse 6, "In much tribulation you received the Word." Chapter 3 of 1 Thessalonians, verses 3-10, he talks about afflictions and temptation and endurance and distress and more affliction. They had a difficult time. Second Thessalonians 1:4 talks about it. Philippians 1:29 talks about suffering and persecution in the church at Philippi. So they were in a great ordeal, a great time of testing and suffering. And, of course, as always a test reveals spiritual character, and they really came through shining.

Macedonia had been reduced to grinding poverty. They were crippled by the taxes of Rome. And those taxes, of course, left the people destitute. In fact, it got so bad that at one point Rome eliminated the taxes just so the people could crawl out of the holes they were in and reach the level of survival. And then on top of that persecution a severe ordeal. He uses another word, a great ordeal of affliction, and that's the word *thlipsis*, a somewhat familiar word to any Greek student. It describes the crushing of grapes, pressure, crushing, crushing mental, physical, spiritual pressure from poverty and persecution.

And yet in the midst of this there is no "poor me" mentality. There is no "why are you asking us, we've got our own problem" mentality. In the midst of prolonged intense suffering and deprivation, they gave. That's what devout believers do. Devout believers live above their circumstances. In the case of the Macedonians, they passed their test with an A-Plus. Their severe hardship had no negative effect on their giving, even in the middle of such dire circumstances. They weren't thinking about

themselves. They were thinking of others they had never even met.

That's the amazing part. They had never even met the saints in Jerusalem; they didn't even know them personally, and yet they would selflessly out of their own terrible distress sacrifice for folks they had never even met who were a part of the body of Christ in another place. That's how it is with devout Christians. Devout Christians give because God's grace is the controlling influence in their life and motivates them, and devout Christians give because even the worst circumstances cannot hinder their devotion to Christ.

Thirdly, and here is another element in their giving, giving is with joy. Giving is with joy. You might say, "Well they gave out of duty, they gave out of pressure, they gave because they felt that they needed to give. They gave because they knew God would punish them if they didn't, or reward them if they did." No. While those are certainly all considerations in the matter of giving, it says in verse 2, "That in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy."

They weren't just satisfied to do it, they just... they weren't just content to do it. They weren't just willing to do it. They were happy to do it and they were abundantly happy to do it. It was not reluctant. Down in chapter 9 verse 7, it says, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion because the Lord loves a cheerful giver." And that's the way they were. They gave with an abundance of joy. Literally the word "abundance" means a surplus, a surplus. Lenski, the commentator says, "They made a joy of robbing themselves."

They were happy to rob themselves. That's how deep their devotion to the Lord, to the kingdom, to the church, to their brothers and sisters they had never even met. Their joy rose above their pain, it rose above their sorrow, it rose above their circumstance. It was joy in spite of, not because of comfortable circumstances. Their joy was deep. It was untouched by their sufferings.

They were able really to do what Paul had encouraged them to do in the Philippian letter, "Rejoice always and again I say rejoice." Not only in the difficulty of their circumstance, but listen, in even making their circumstance more difficult by their generosity. It was their joy to divest themselves of what little they had. They had joy in laying up treasure in heaven, joy in seeking the kingdom, joy because they were more blessed to give than receive, joy in knowing that God would give back in greater measure. And so they gave. That's the attitude that God wants.

Number four in the characteristics of their exemplary giving. Their giving was not hindered by poverty. Their giving was not hindered by poverty. Please notice that he says, "They gave out of a great ordeal of affliction, they gave with an abundance of joy and they gave in spite of their deep poverty." High taxes, high rent, slavery, persecution; we've talked about all of it. They had very, very little. Paul wants us to know how little they had, so he uses an interesting, interesting phrase here.

First of all, he says what is translated here the word “deep.” That is actually two words, *kata* which is a preposition, *bathos*, *kata bathous*. In the Greek it means according to the depth, according to the depth. Or to put it another way, extremely deep. We would say it, “the pits,” rock bottom. You can’t get any deeper than *kata bathous*. Down according to the depths.

The reference is to extreme poverty. In fact, the word “poverty” here, *ptcheia*, is a word that literally expresses the most difficult kind of poverty. It is used elsewhere in the Scripture coming from a very to mean “to shrink, to cower, to cringe like a beggar in embarrassment and shame because he is destitute.” It refers to a person reduced almost to nothing, to a beggar. It’s not the ordinary word for poverty, *penichros*, which refers to someone who has very little. This is somebody who has nothing, bare existence. It is used, for example, this word is, in Luke 14:21 to refer to cripples, blind, lame and beggars.

It is used in Luke 16 to refer to the poor man Lazarus, you remember, whose sores were all over his body and they were being licked by the dogs, and he was begging and asking just for a crumb to fall off the table, that’s poor. That’s poor. And out of their rock bottom nothing, they gave generously. How could they do that? They didn’t have a little loaf in their hand. Yes they did. They had Philippians 4:19 too. “For my God will supply all your needs.” They believed it. They also knew that Jesus had said, “Give and it shall be given unto you.” And they knew they couldn’t out give God. And they also knew it was more blessed to give than receive.

They lived by faith, not by sight. They held in their hand the promise of God, and on that promise they could trust Him for their future. People say, “I’d give more if I had more.” I don’t believe that. Giving is not a matter of what you have; it’s a function of the heart. Devout believers don’t need more, they don’t wait for more. They give from their poverty like the widow Jesus saw who gave everything, two mites. In Luke 16:10 Jesus said it this way, “He that is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much. He that is unrighteous in the least is unrighteous in the much also.” It is not an issue of how much you have. That has nothing to do with it. It is an issue of the heart.

If you are faithful you are faithful. If you believe faithful, meaning if you believe God, trust God. If you hold in your hand the little loaf of bread of Philippians 4:19, that’s enough to sustain your future and you have no problem yielding up what God puts upon your heart to give. How much you have is not the issue. Generosity is a heart issue that gives no matter how little. So they gave. They barely had enough to live, but whatever little tiny bit extra they had, they gave. Their giving is the model for the Corinthians and for us. Giving then is motivated by the grace of God, transcends difficult circumstances, gives with joy and has no relationship to how much you have. It’s a heart issue.

Number five...and this is the last one for today; we’ll do the rest next time...giving was generous. Giving was generous. In spite of their condition, he says, “Their giving overflowed in the wealth of

their liberality.” There he is piling up those words again. Overflowed. That’s literally the word used to speak of a river at flood time that overflows its banks. Something gushing, a fountain, a well, something flowing over the brim, just super abundant.

Their poverty a stated fact, and yet their giving literally overflowed. Now, notice the word “wealth.” That’s what it means, riches. It’s translated riches a number of times in Ephesians, also in Philippians and Colossians. They were rich but it doesn’t say they were rich in money. It doesn’t say they were rich in houses. It doesn’t say they were rich in possessions. It says they were rich in liberality. That’s an attitude, that’s a heart attitude. Their riches had to do with their hearts.

That’s a marvelous word, by the way. I’ll take a minute just to explain it to you ‘cause in the English you don’t really get the picture of this word. It probably would be better translated generosity, generosity. But liberality is a good synonym for generosity. It’s a word that means the opposite of duplicity, or the opposite of being double-minded. It’s a word that is translated in the Bible liberality, generosity and even sincerity. But it has the idea of single-mindedness rather than double-mindedness.

And that is a wonderful way to see what generosity is because generosity is this: Generosity is the attitude that triumphs over duplicity. Duplicity says, “Well, I certainly understand your need but I’ve got to take care of me, too. I would certainly love to be able to meet your need but I’ve got needs.” That’s duplicity. That’s where I’m double-minded. I’m concerned about me and I’m concerned about you, and I’m sort of paralyzed in this deal here. And I’ll be glad to give a little over there, and keep a little over here and that kind of thing.

But not the Macedonians. They were literally rich with single-mindedness. That is the state of the devout Christian who has absolutely no regard for self. The duplicity is gone. The battle over “a little for you and a little for me” has ended and you’re the only one to be concerned about. It’s Philippians chapter 2. It’s “humbling yourself, considering others better than yourself, be more concerned with the things of others than your own things.” They were rich in that.

They were not rich in money, not rich in possessions. They were rich in single-minded selfless, humble devotion to others and to God. Their generosity came from having a single purpose. To put others first, to put the purposes of God first, the purposes of the Apostle Paul, the messenger of God. And it wasn’t the amount that was so rich; it was just the richness of their hearts. And that’s what God evaluates. That’s why Jesus said the woman who gave the two little, tiny copper coins, the two mites, gave more than everybody else because the heart had no duplicity.

Paul wants the Corinthians, who were likely more wealthy than the Macedonians, to be rich in their unselfish, single-minded generosity. And where there is a generous heart, the amount doesn’t matter to God. He just wants that heart of generosity. So, these precious Macedonians, though they had

very little, gave. They gave because it was motivated by the grace of God in their lives. It transcended their difficult circumstances. They gave with joy. Their giving was not at all hindered by their poverty, and their giving reflected the magnanimity, the liberality and the generosity of their hearts. What an example.

There's more, by the way. We'll save those for next time. But what an example to us. They had so little, they gave so much. We have so much, who give so little. God isn't asking you to strip yourself down to poverty level. We've already covered that in our past messages. He is simply saying, "Be generous to a measure sacrificial, and trust God to meet your needs in the future."

How that all sorts out, what are you going to do with your money? Take care of your own needs. That's why God provides it. Take care of the family around you, if you don't do that you're worse than an unbeliever. Save and plan for the future, that's being a wise steward, and give. All that is clearly laid out in Scripture. God has given us all things richly to enjoy. He wants you to enjoy the magnificent beauties of this world, all the comforts that it yields to make life wonderful and rich.

As long as you have a heart like the Macedonians you're going to respond when it's time to give. And bless God, how good He's been to us, we can give out of our wealth, we don't have to give out of our great poverty. Some of us obviously are poorer than others. Some of us got that way because of the way we mishandled our finances.

We need to start the road back with the model of giving, these wonderful churches, persecuted, beleaguered, battered and poor. And they show us how to live and hold in your hand a little loaf of bread that secures your future, "My God will supply all your needs." You believe that? Then you can hold nothing tightly, it's all there. If the Lord wants it, if the need is there, you give it and trust Him to out give you. He'll do that. Well, more next time, let's pray.

Father, we know there are many of us who can give personal testimony to the fact that we have given and given and given in times of distress and times of need, and it wasn't very long until all of a sudden we were full and You poured out blessing back. Lord, there are some who have also the ability to give testimony that they didn't give, and they had less and things got worse. There is one who withholds and it tends to poverty, the Bible says. And there is one who scatters and becomes prosperous.

Help us just to live by faith. Take the bread and the beauty and the goodness and the richness and the joys of today, hold them lightly, willing to share, willing to distribute, willing to meet needs, willing and eager to give to Your kingdom whatever You ask, and know that our future is secure in Your promise. We will never have our needs unmet, You'll supply them all. What a confidence, and what a joy to live in that confidence as a foundation for our giving. Thank You, Father, for what You've taught us this morning and may it apply in our lives in ways that will bring You honor. For Christ's sake,

amen.

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