

## INFORM WEEKEND SERMON RESOURCES

**“How to Excel in the Grace of Giving”** – 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; 9:7-8; Luke 21:1-4

### **Why We Need to Learn to Excel at Giving**

Turn to someone and ask them what do they think are most commonly the first words out of a baby's mouth.  
(Pause, then ask for responses)

I think a baby's first word is usually “mine,” because everything they get a hold of they stick it in their mouth, as if to say, “mine!” We come into the world believing that everything we see and can hold on to is “mine.”

That shows us just how much we need to be born again. That moment the water of your baptism fell to your forehead, or that time when the Word first did its work, the Spirit entered us so that we understand that what was “mine” becomes “yours” (God's). That moment also is the beginning of a struggle that lasts our entire lives: the struggle between our holding on to things and saying “mine,” and our holding out our very lives to God, and faithfully saying, “Yours.”

God's desire is that we would excel at giving; to excel, as Paul put it, in the grace of giving. What does that mean, and... how can we do that?

### **A Story of Those Who Excelled in Giving**

Greece is the setting for a magnificent story of grace today. In the early days of the faith, the churches in Jerusalem were in great need because the economy was poor, the harvests had been bad for several years, and they were undergoing persecution. In the letter of 2 Corinthians, Paul is writing to the church in Corinth about the giving of the churches in Macedonia. Paul has been taking up collections at every church he visits, to send to the impoverished church of Jerusalem. The churches in Macedonia had been planted by Paul on his second missionary journey, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea.

Macedonia was in poverty: Alexander the Great was a Macedonian and had established the Greek empire. When the glory that was Greece declined, Rome came to power, and Rome devastated Macedonia so couldn't return to power.

Yet, these people are the ones Paul points to as the most generous, gracious givers.

Paul's first words are not: look at what great givers they are, but: “We want you to know about the grace God has given the Macedonian churches...In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.”

Who would have blamed them if they had given grudgingly? Instead they responded the way they did because of the grace they had received, and they were grateful to be a part of what God was doing in his world.

When grace is in your life, you don't give because you're grateful for what you have or don't have; you're grateful because God loves us, as shown in the cross of our Savior, even though we don't deserve it.

### **How Can We Give That Way?**

We realize that our giving is not a requirement, but a response. Giving is not a requirement, because we are no longer under the law. Paul: "I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others... they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."

Their giving was not something God required. It was a response to God's love.

No one "guilted" them into it or put the squeeze on them, just as no one during our campaign is going to guilt or compel someone to make a commitment.

Our campaign, after all, is a response to the opportunity God is giving us. (Give examples of how, in your context, their commitment will change lives and serve as a resource for the case you have).

Maybe we could even be so inspired by the possibilities that we, like the Macedonians, "plead" for the opportunity to be a part of our *Immeasurably More* campaign! In vs. 4 Paul tells us that the Macedonians "Urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people."

We are invited to be cheerful about this opportunity! After all, our campaign is not about raising money, but raising people: People who give cheerfully, not because they feel compelled to respond.

"...everyone should decide in his heart how to give..."... not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

The last thing we want to do is just endure this campaign until it's over, so you can be relieved because we're not talking about it anymore. The leadership of this congregation and I are hoping we will excel in this grace of giving.

So, the Macedonians, poverty-stricken as they were, became the model for excelling at the grace of giving.

Who modeled generosity for you when you were young? Do you want your sons and daughters to be those kinds of givers – cheerful, generous because that's the way their Lord has made them, and that's the way they've learned from watching generous people?

Are you the kind of giver that you want them to become? If so, what a blessing. If not, there's good news: you still have time.

(Share with the congregation the times of commitment we have planned)

Let's pray that when the time of commitment comes, we will respond as those who have been baptized and "graced" and say to God, "yours!" rather than "mine!"