

During the monthly meeting of the church's stewardship committee, one of the members posed this question to the entire group, "What causes a Christian to lack generosity in their giving?" Diane, the real estate agent responded, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." David, the insurance agent noted, "Church members can't afford to tithe in today's economy." The chairman of the stewardship committee opened his Bible and read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 to the group and asked them another question. "How has giving changed your heart?" After a time of discussion, the group came to a decisive conclusion: Christians will be generous givers when their hearts are encouraged to grow in grace, faith, love and commitment to Christ and His church.

Let's examine the text selected by the chairman of the church stewardship committee. As Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about the offering he was collecting to help the destitute Christians in Jerusalem, he attributes the generosity of the Christians in Macedonia to an outpouring of God's grace. The apostle Paul was leading from the heart as he conveyed his passion to want the Corinthians to know of the grace of God.

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Encouraging Givers' Hearts

Now I want to tell you dear friends, what God in his kindness has done in the churches in Macedonia.

Though they have been going through trouble and hard times, their wonderful joy and deep poverty overflowed in rich generosity.

For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. They did it of their own free will.

They begged us again and again for the gracious privilege of sharing in the gifts for the Christians in Jerusalem.

Best of all they went beyond our highest hopes, for their first action was to dedicate themselves to the Lord and to us for whatever directions God might give them . . .

Since you excel in so many ways — you have so much faith, such gifted speakers, such knowledge, such enthusiasm, such love for us — now I want you to excel also in this gracious ministry of giving.

I am not saying that you must do it, even though the other churches are eager to do it. This is one way to prove your love is real.

You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was very rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9 (NIV)

The following are characteristics of heart-felt giving and give evidence of changed hearts:

- They gave out of their own affliction and poverty. (8:2)
- They gave of their own free will. (8:3)
- They gave themselves, not just their money. (8:5)
- They gave out joy. (8:3)
- They gave according to their means. (8:3)
- They gave because He first gave. (8:9)

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