To review lesson 1, let's look at the stewardship campaign promoted by the Apostle Paul during his third missionary journey: He was collecting funds for famine relief efforts in Judea, and the churches in the north of Greece (Macedonia) had given generously. In *1 Corinthians 16:1-4,* Paul reminded the Corinthian church that they too had an obligation to help. The response was not as positive as he had hoped, and so, in writing back to them, he devoted two chapters, *2 Corinthians 8-9*, to this subject.

DISCUSSION:

- ***Verse 1:*** The Macedonian churches were in northern Greece and included the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea *(Acts 16-17, Philippians and 1, 2 Thessalonians)*. Paul was writing to the church of Corinth, in southern Greece, seeking to use the example of the Macedonian churches to motivate the Corinthians towards generosity. "Grace" is used here in an unusual way. He is talking about the gracious generosity God had placed in the hearts of the Macedonian churches. Our giving is a reflection of God's grace in our lives.
- ***Verse 2:*** The Macedonian churches had made a sacrificial gift which, in one sense, they could hardly afford because of their severe trial and their extreme poverty. The Christians in Macedonia had endured a period of persecution, which was undoubtedly affecting them financially. They nevertheless gave generously to Paul's campaign out of overflowing joy. Even though their "want to" was greater than their "can do", they found a way "to do" what was necessary for God's work to be supported and accomplished.
- ***Verse 3-4:*** How can someone give beyond his or her ability?
    - In what way is giving a "privilege"?

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- ***Verse 5:*** Their giving was the overflow of a deep inner spiritual commitment to God's will and to God's work. Stewardship is not about raising money as much as it is about raising disciples. God wants us before He wants what we have.
- ***Verse 6:*** Paul was letting them know that he was sending Titus, his troubleshooter, to oversee this stewardship campaign and the collection of this gift. The Church utilized the experience and oversight of "outside" help to assist them in this financial undertaking.
- ***Verse 7:*** The church in Corinth was the most immature and trouble-ridden of any in the New Testament, yet they seemed to boast about their faith, speech, and knowledge. Paul was saying, "Since you think of yourself as excelling in these areas, why not excel where it really counts – in the kind of generosity that proves God's grace is really working in your hearts."
- ***Verse 8:*** While Paul was strongly urging them to give (and using the example of the northern churches to inspire them), he stopped short of issuing a command. For the gift to be pleasing to God, it had to be a voluntary act of love.
- ***Verse 9:*** Why would Paul place this verse – one of the greatest and most beautiful verses in the Bible on the love and redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ – in the middle of a passage about stewardship?
    - In what ways are we poor?
    - In Christ what do we become?
- ***Verse 10-11:*** If the Apostle Paul showed up in our class today to advise us regarding our stewardship campaign, would you jump at the chance to do as he said?

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CONCLUSION:

1. Giving Expresses Our Love (*v. 8*) – Notice again that when we give to the Lord, we aren't so much obeying a command as we are expressing our love to Him. "I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love...." How else can we express our love except through giving?

How do you love your wife (husband, friend, parent, child)? You must express that love by giving this person your time, your attention, your affection, your help. You must give up your own preferences at times to look to the needs of the one you love. How do you love your Lord? How can you express it except by giving? We give Him our hearts, our praise, and our obedience. Paul is saying that the way we give our money is also a test of our love.

2. Giving Exemplifies Our Savior (*v. 9*) – *Psalms 50:10* says that God owns "the cattle on a thousand hills." What an understatement! He also owns the thousand hills. He owns the seven continents in which those thousand hills are located, and the spinning planets on which those seven continents are placed. God owns the solar system. The entire universe is His, all the galaxies from here to infinity. So consider the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor. The Greek word Paul used there for "poor" conveys the idea of crouching and cringing. It was the word used for beggars. He had little money, a sparse wardrobe, no house or land, not even a pillow on which to lay His head. What little He did have was stripped away, and He was nailed to an upright post and robbed of even the blood that flowed through His veins. Why? That we through His poverty might become rich. That we might inherit eternal life and be heirs to the kingdom. The Apostle's point is that when we give to the Lord our tithes and offerings, we are in a tiny way exemplifying the giving nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. What else needs to be said?

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If that doesn't move us to be givers, what will?

3. Giving Enriches Our Lives (*v. 10*) – Even so, Paul goes on to make another point: "Here is my advice about what is best for you…" Paul is concerned for the Corinthians, and he wants what is best for them. How is giving best for us? Giving is good for us. It is for our best. It enriches our lives.

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