

VISION TO VICTORY, GOD'S GRACE IN GIVING
II Corinthians 8.1-13

We've just turned the corner; we're just over ½ way through our Vision to Victory Fund Raising Campaign. Actually it isn't just a fund raising campaign, it's a **FAITH RAISING CAMPAIGN**.

The campaign will raise the funds for the new Living Center but **more importantly**, we want to take advantage of this opportunity to **raise our faith**.

It's often hard for us to think of fund raising as faith raising isn't it? We just don't put the two together. But when we do, it will free us to give.

It is just too easy to compartmentalize our lives. Home and family here, work here, play here, finances here, church and faith here, and so on and so forth...

To be whole we really need to integrate all these different aspects of our lives under the banner of faith, faith in Christ.

When we were in Dell Rapids I remember Pastor Bob Brown asking one of the good old boys at the ritual coffee hour at a downtown café why he didn't come to church. George said, "because all you want is my money." Bob chuckled and say, "no that's not it. Actually God wants more than that. God wants all of you...and if he gets all of you, he gets all of your money too."

We talk about money because what we do with money, the attitudes we have about money are central to our spiritual lives. It isn't healthy to separate finances and faith.

Know that your giving has and will continue to make a difference in this church. Your giving has provided and supported so much ministry in this church.

But it is also important that it make a difference in your life. Your giving should... make...a...difference...in...your...life.

Don't let this just be a fund-raising campaign. Don't just give your money and say ok, we're done with that, let's move on.

Let the grace of God free you to just be the person God wants you to be.
Let this Vision to Victory campaign be an opportunity to mature in your faith.

Consider our children. How many of you have seen the Sunday School Church in the back covered with coins? The children and adults of our Sunday School Classes, which you have provided for, have given to Vision to Victory in that offering. So far they've given \$1,272.15.

Our children are learning that they are giving to God and that they are making a difference. I believe that being part of this campaign will help them grow in faith.

So, whether you've been in this church all your life, whether you've been a member or friend a few months or years, whether you are in grade school, junior high, senior high or college age, or whether this is your first time here in these pews...don't let these scriptures be intimidating, let them be informative, insightful, and inspiring.

Let the Holy Spirit teach you and me something about giving.

In II Corinthians, chapter 8, Paul tells us about the Macedonian Church. Let's look for some clues about being **freed** to give and to grow in our faith.

II Corinthians 8.1, "*And now brothers we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian church.*"

"The grace that God has given" means that God gave freely to the Macedonian Church, God was present in that church, and God was working in that church,

And we might ask, "How do we really know they grew or matured in faith as a result of experiencing God's grace?"

And then we might ask, "how do we know that FUMC has experienced God's grace?"

1. First, for the Macedonians, we know they grew in faith because they **GAVE GENEROUSLY** regardless of the circumstances.

Verse 2, "*Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in (triggered) rich generosity.*"

The secrets out. We know they experienced God's grace,
we know they grew in faith because of their giving and that is true of FUMC,
too.

They **gave generously**.

The formula, **indwelling and overflowing joy + extreme poverty = rich generosity.**

They gave first and foremost not to something,
BUT they gave because of something given to them.

That something was God's grace.

Isn't that absolutely, positively incredible.

In the midst of a severe trial, maybe it was due to weather, maybe war, whatever,
these people, even though dirt poor managed to give an offering.

In fact they were just so happy that they could give.

Usually it goes the other way, doesn't? I know when I'm struggling,
I'm not as willing to give nor do I go looking for opportunities to do so.

It is only by the grace of God one gives generously in those circumstances.

2. Secondly we know they **GAVE SACRIFICALLY**.

Verse 3, "***For I testify they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.***" They gave far more than they could afford, so they gave sacrificially.

Giving is truly more a matter of the heart than a matter of the pocketbook.

Paul even associates that with Jesus and his sacrifice. Verse 9 he says, "***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for our sakes, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.***"

Jesus gave up something of himself, in birth and death. He **gave sacrificially**.

The Macadonians gave of themselves. They gave sacrificially.

3. Third, we know they grew in grace because they **GAVE VOLUNTARILY**.

What do we mean by that?

Verse 4, "***Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.***" (Verse 10b reinforces this point, "***Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.***")

In the Living Bible it says, "***they didn't do it because of any nagging on my part.***"

Whether Paul nagged or not, they didn't give for that reason.

"They begged us to take the money so they could share in the joy of helping."

*in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness
and in your love for us-see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

We need to understand Corinth is a great city of international commerce.
They are wealthy and the church is wealthy.
They were not only people of great wealth.
Their church was rich with the gifts of the Spirit.

So Paul is saying, it is wonderful you're good at these things, that is who you are.
And if you're good at all of these other things, you can be good at giving, too.

A Native American was walking down a busy street in New York with his friend.
The Native American stopped and said, "Do you hear it?"
"Hear what," asked the friend.
"The cricket," said the Native American.
"Ya right?" the friend stated in doubt.
"Come on," said the friend from the West.
They crossed the street at the light and walked to the middle of the block.
"Here," said the Native American. He reached down by a tree
planted and potted on the sidewalk and picked up a cricket.
His friend shook his head and asked, "How did you ever do that?"
"I learned to listen and then it just, came naturally."
"Ya right?" the friend doubts again.
The Native American says, "Ok, listen and watch." He reaches in his pocket
and takes out handful of change and throws it down on the sidewalk.
All the people going both ways on the sidewalk all of a sudden stop and look.

God wants us to learn to give as if giving were just part of us like it is with God?
That giving would just freely flow out of who we are? It can, by God's grace.

6. The Macadonians also **GAVE EQUALLY**. What do we mean by that?
Verses 11-13, "*Now finish the work*(the work was this vision),
so that your eager willingness to do it,
may be matched by your completion of it (the completion, the victory),
according to your means. Here this, according to your means.
For if the willingness is there, (this is the second time for willingness,
we could add that as a characteristic of Grace.)
the gift is acceptable to what one has, not according to what one does not have.
Our desire is not that others are relieved and you are hard-pressed,

but that there might be equality.”

Did you catch that? “*The gift is acceptable to what one has, not according to what one does not have.*” That is part of our struggle isn’t it?

And know that the idea is not to help others and to make you poor by doing that.

I had a couple of heart to heart conversation about this last week.

A friend asked, how do I decide what to give? Just how do we do the math?

How does this come out equal? It’s not equal gifts or even equal %’s.

From God’s perspective it isn’t going to be equal gifts but equal sacrifice.

Some say give till it feels good. Some say give till it hurts.

And some say give till it helps.

In God’s economy the Victory to Vision **Faith** Raising Campaign is not about equal gifts, but equal sacrifice.

I know we have some folks who are hard pressed now.

Some might be struggling with how much to even give let alone sacrifice.

But the neat thing is they’re asking, they’re asking, now can I do this?

7. It might help to know the Macadonians **GAVE PRAYERFULLY.**

Listen, Chapter 9, verse 7, helps us here,

“Each one should give what he has decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion.”

The Living Bible says, “*don’t force anyone to give.*”

The Message says, “*I want you to take plenty of time to think it over, make up your own mind what to give.*”

Now the implication is that you are working this out with God when you are thinking this over. That frees you from the amount to give, not the struggle.

I’ve listed seven characteristics of giving found in the passage.

They are produced by the grace of God. I’m sure there are more.

Read through this passage and I’m sure you’ll find more.

I want to close with this story. It’s about a mother and her three children.

They were certainly not rich by most standards. Rich?

They were poor by most standards but rich in grace.

Fall turned into Winter that year and Christmas was coming.

At church, each family was to collect money for a special offering. The pastor announced that the love offering would be collected on the Sunday before Christmas and given to a “poorer” family. One of the girls got excited about the special offering and asked her mom if they could do something for that family. Mom said sure, and they were off.

You never saw so much excitement and enthusiasm, determination and delight.

Junior worked Saturdays at the grocery store. After he got paid he would run home, well walk fast anyway, and put most of his wages in the Christmas gift box.

The sixth grader got babysitting jobs in the neighborhood. Most of her money went into the Christmas gift box, too.

Mom pitched in as well. All the extra money she got paid for sewing found it’s way into the little gift box.

And so that their second grader didn’t get left out. When it snowed they all shoveled the neighbor’s sidewalks. Afterward they ducked and dodged snowballs screaming and giggling with glee. They managed to make a family of snowmen or snow women, or snow people, as well as leave angel imprints in the snow.

They truly enjoyed the season. It was the best ever. But the most fun they had, was putting the money had earned into the special offering. It was exciting to see it fill up with dollar bills and coins.

Sunday finally came. They just couldn’t wait. They had saved \$77.32

During the service they waited and waited. It was finally time for the offering. The youngest sister got to take the offering up and set it by the manger.

They left church pleased. They were grateful they could give something back to God and give to someone in need. They just knew their gift would make a difference.

So, it was a great surprise that the pastor showed up a couple of hours later. They were please to see him and began to chit chat some.

Eventually he said, “We had a special offering for a family in our church and we want you to have it.” He handed mom an envelope with just over \$87. Each heart stopped for moment...they shook their heads in confusion. Had their ears heard this right? “The offering was for them.” A wave of sadness swept over each one but following mother’s lead they remained polite and grateful.

They thanked the pastor and he left. No one said anything.

This news had put a damper on a delightful day.

Finally one of the girls broke the silence and said, “I didn’t know we were poor.”

Mom said, “We’re not. Do we want to keep or give this to someone else?”

Their voices sang together, “Give it to someone else!!!”

Well, if you haven’t pledged already, in a couple of weeks you’ll have that opportunity.

You’ll have an opportunity to help this church move from Vision to Victory.

You’ll have an opportunity once again make a difference for the Kingdom.

And I believe you’ll have an opportunity to make a big difference in your own

life. We can be confident there will be a difference because of the **GRACE OF GOD.**

Let’s stand sing Freely, Freely we have received...

