

Sermon on the Amount

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Rev. Henry Pascual

Prayer: *Spirit of God, descend upon us and spark us with a word of life—a message we may share with others as we seek to be channels of your grace. Amen.*

I read about a little girl who finally learned to tie her own shoes.¹ You'd think she'd be thrilled—but instead, she burst into tears.

Her dad asked, "Sweetheart, why are you crying?"

She said, "I have to tie my shoes."

"Well, that's wonderful! You just learned how. It's not so hard, is it?"

"I know," she wailed, "but I'm going to have to do it for the rest of my life!"

Sometimes, that's how some of us feel about stewardship. We want to give, but then it hits us. "Oh no... I'll have to keep doing this for the rest of my life!"

Well, it's stewardship month in our church, so the Stewardship Committee asked me, as it does every year, to preach on giving. So, here we go again—another sermon on giving. Pastors are not always thrilled to talk about money. It's not easy. Money talks, as the saying goes—but talking about money from the pulpit? That's hard.

Some of you may remember *The Flip Wilson Show* in the '70s— one of the first TV shows to feature a Black actor in the title role. One of Flip Wilson's favorite characters was a preacher named Reverend Leroy, pastor of *The Church of What's Happening Now!*

In one episode,² Reverend Leroy is leading Sunday worship. He stands before the congregation and makes an announcement.

"The church," he says, "is planning a musical pageant!" The people cheer.

¹ Heidi Husted Armstrong, *Preaching Today*,

<https://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2010/july/thesermonontheamount.html>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkxESYwawmY>, 3:02

“But we’ve got a problem,” he continues. “We don’t have enough money for costumes.”

So Reverend Leroy starts to make his appeal.

He says, “Now, I know you all want this church to progress. This church must progress!”

The room is silent. So he leans in a little louder.

“Before this church can progress, it’s got to crawl. This church has got to crawl!”

Now the people wake up. They start shouting, “Make it crawl, Reverend! Make it crawl!”

Reverend Leroy smiles. “After this church has crawled, it’s got to stand up and walk. This church has got to walk!”

And the congregation shouts, “Make it walk, Reverend! Make it walk!”

He keeps the energy rising. “And after this church has walked, it’s got to run. This church has got to run!”

They’re on their feet now: “Make it run, Reverend! Make it run!”

Finally, Reverend Leroy says, “Now, brothers and sisters, for this church to run—it’s gonna take money. It’s gonna take money for this church to run!”

Someone from the back shouts, “Let it crawl, Reverend! Let it crawl!”

And isn’t that just like us sometimes? We want the church to move, to grow, to reach more people—but when it comes time to give, we say, “Let it crawl!” We hit the brakes.

As many pastors know, preaching about money isn’t easy. Let’s be honest—getting people to reach a little deeper into their pockets is hard. Most pastors would rather preach on almost *anything else* than the annual stewardship sermon. It’s one thing to talk about economic justice or the wise use of resources. But it’s another thing entirely to do that without sounding like a fundraiser.

And yet—that’s exactly what Paul does in our passage today from 2 Corinthians.

When Paul wrote his second letter to the church in Corinth, he was in the middle of a major fundraising campaign for the Jerusalem church—what he called “*the collection for the saints*.” It was a huge undertaking.

You see, Jerusalem had gone through a severe famine. Many believers there were already poor, and the famine made things even worse. So Paul appealed to the Corinthians to give—to send a gift “for the saints,” “for the poor,” in Jerusalem.

But Paul wasn’t just trying to raise money. He was teaching something much deeper. He saw this as a chance to remind them who God is—and what God is like.

Because how we use our resources—our time, our money, our talents—reveals what we truly believe about God. It shows what we believe about how God works in the world.

To help the Corinthians understand this, Paul pointed to the churches in Macedonia. These were poor, persecuted, and often overlooked believers. Yet they were rich in generosity. They gave—not from abundance—but from deep poverty, giving beyond their means.

Even today, studies show that those who have less often give more. In North America—and likely elsewhere—poorer Christians give a higher percentage of their income than the wealthy. Missionary and humanitarian reports tell the same story. For example, Sudanese Christians are showing profound generosity despite facing poverty, war, and persecution. Some even send missionaries to other parts of Africa. Their example echoes the Macedonian churches, which gave generously despite their own poverty. Their giving wasn’t transactional—“if I give, I’ll be blessed.” They gave because they knew God as their Creator and Redeemer.

What a striking contrast to the spirit of giving among the pagans of that time. In the old pagan world, religion was often a kind of deal. You gave the gods what they wanted, and they gave you what you wanted. It was a trade. Offer the right sacrifice, say the right words, and you might get their favor.

Each god had a specialty. If you were giving a speech, you’d turn to the god of communication—Hermes for the Greeks, Mercury for the Romans. If you were heading into battle, you’d call on Zeus. And if you were taking a sea voyage, you’d offer something to Neptune.

It was a religion built on exchange—a kind of spiritual tit-for-tat.

But not so with the Macedonian churches. Their generosity flowed from their devotion to Christ. They gave themselves first to the Lord—and then to Paul’s ministry.

Paul then turns to the Corinthians. Their church had many strengths. They were a big church. Cosmopolitan. Diverse. Strong in faith. Evangelistic. Gifted in speech and knowledge. But he urges them to grow in one more area—*the grace of giving*.

Likewise, many churches today are known for their strengths: preaching, praise and worship, discipleship and faith formation, missions, and advocacy for justice and peace. But Paul’s message is clear: “*See that you also excel in this grace of giving.*”

When I lived in the Philippines, I often heard about the generosity of the American people. Many had criticized Americans for economic exploitation in developing nations. Yet their generosity was often forgotten. According to the *Charities Aid Foundation World Giving*, the United States—though no longer number one—remains one of the most generous countries in the world.³

And here’s something surprising: Americans became even more generous during the pandemic. Even while worrying about jobs and the economy, people gave. Our generosity crosses every line—religion, region, age. According to the *Giving USA 2025: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2024*, Americans gave an estimated \$592.5 billion to charities in 2024. A new record!⁴

What about churches? While there’s no single giving index for American churches, statistics give us a picture: in 2022, the median giving per person was about \$2,262, and total giving reached \$143.57 billion.

Generosity is part of who we are. It’s part of our witness. It’s part of God’s work through us. Generosity tests our faith. It asks if we trust God enough to give freely, believing God will provide.

³ https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/research-archive/giving-around-the-world/world-giving-index-reports/2019_caf_wgi_10th_edition_report.pdf

⁴ Giving USA, June 24, 2025, <https://givingusa.org/giving-usa-2025-u-s-charitable-giving-grew-to-592-50-billion-in-2024-lifted-by-stock-market-gains/>

And when God's people give with open hearts, the church doesn't just crawl—it runs.

My favorite billionaire is Bill Gates because of his philanthropic work. Gates has been one of the world's wealthiest people for decades. He currently has a net worth of roughly \$122 million, which places him as the 15th richest person in the world, a significant drop in rank due to his commitment to give away most of his wealth to his Foundation.

But Gates has a surprising take on extreme wealth. Speaking to students at the University of Washington, Gates said that while millions of dollars provide "meaningful freedom," the difference between having a substantial amount and having billions is not as life-changing as it might seem.⁵

"I can understand wanting to have millions of dollars; there's a certain freedom, meaningful freedom, that comes with that," Gates said. But he added a surprising twist: "Once you get much beyond that, I have to tell you, it's the same hamburger."

Maybe my wife will now allow me to eat more hamburgers. It seems to be the favorite fast food of billionaires.

Back to Gates—his point is simple: once you have enough freedom, more money doesn't buy greater happiness.

Gates uses this philosophy to guide his life. He's donated billions through his Foundation. He focuses on global health, education, and poverty. For him, what matters is what you do with what you have—how you use it to make a difference.

That's Paul's message too. In addition to all our strengths—faith, knowledge, love, and zeal—Paul calls us to grow in one more area of the Christian life—*the grace of giving*.

May we continue to be generous in our giving. For the work of the gospel. To the glory of God. Thanks be to God! Amen.

⁵ Bill Gates: "Being Rich is Overrated," October 28, 2011. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gates-being-rich-is-overrated/>