

*"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?"*  
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.*

Some of you may remember *The Flip Wilson Show* from the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> One of Flip Wilson's favorite characters was Reverend Leroy, pastor of the *Church of What's Happening Now!*

In one episode, Reverend Leroy announces that the church wants to put on a musical pageant, but there's a problem. They don't have enough money for costumes. So he launches into a fundraising appeal.

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

So he raises his voice: "Before this church can progress, it's got to crawl! This church has got to crawl!"

The congregation responds enthusiastically: "Make it crawl, Reverend! Make it crawl!"

Reverend Leroy continues. "And after this church has crawled, it's got to stand up and walk! This church has got to walk!"

"Make it walk, Reverend! Make it walk!"

"And after this church has walked, this church must run! This church has got to run!"

"Make it run, Reverend! Make it run!"

Finally, Reverend Leroy gets to the point. "Now, brothers and sisters, for this church to run, it's gonna need money. It's gonna take money for this church to run!"

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<sup>1</sup> *The Flip Wilson Show*, Reverend Leroy sketch:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkxESYwawmY>

And a voice from the back hollers out, "Let it crawl, Reverend. Let it crawl!"

As many pastors know, money is one of the hardest topics to preach on. We would much rather talk about God's love, forgiveness, or justice than stand before a congregation and ask people to support the church financially. How do you talk about the church's budget without making people feel we care only about money?

Yet that is exactly what Paul does in 2 Corinthians. He wasn't afraid to talk about money.

And by the way, Jesus also talks about money frequently in the Gospels, addressing not only wealth but also generosity, greed, stewardship, and contentment. A couple of verses among the many:

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). "You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matt. 6:24).*

His main point is simple: money isn't just a matter of the wallet—it's a matter of the heart.

Back to Paul. He was leading a major fundraising campaign for the church in Jerusalem. A severe famine had struck the area, leaving believers struggling to survive. Paul appealed to the Christians in Corinth to help their fellow believers, whom he called "the saints" and "the poor"

What interests me is the word Paul keeps returning to when he talks about generosity: **grace**—*charis* in Greek. Bible scholar Jane Patterson notes that English translations often render it as favor, privilege, or blessing. But those words, Patterson claims, miss the heart of the concept: grace is

God's power that brings life and draws people into relationship with one another.<sup>2</sup>

And Paul thinks of grace as a circle. God's grace comes to us. We pass that grace along to others. Then grace flows back to God in heartfelt thanksgiving as we worship the God who first gave generously to us.

Grace is not meant to stop with us.

And that brings us to the Macedonian Christians, whom Paul holds up as an example to the Corinthians. These believers were experiencing severe hardship and deep poverty themselves. Yet they gave generously to help the poor in Jerusalem. In fact, Paul says they pleaded for the privilege of participating in the collection (2 Corinthians 8:3–4).

That reminds me of something that happened in my youngest daughter's youth group at a United Methodist church in Bridgewater, New Jersey.

The group was raising money for a relative in the Philippines who desperately needed surgery after a severe leg fracture. Without the operation, an infection threatened to cost him his leg. His family had no insurance and couldn't afford the medical care.

One church member had missed the initial announcement. When she learned about the situation, she approached the person organizing the effort and asked, "Why didn't you tell me? I wanted to help, too!"

And she gladly gave what she could.

That's the Macedonian spirit. Giving wasn't simply an obligation. It was a privilege—a chance to share God's goodness.

Of course, generosity also has a practical side. Churches have ministries to support, bills to pay, and people who depend on their work.

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Lancaster Patterson, "Commentary on 2 Corinthians 8:7–15," *Working Preacher*, June 27, 2021: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-13-2/commentary-on-2-corinthians-87-15-5>

And the financial picture facing churches today is challenging. Recent reports suggest that church giving is becoming increasingly concentrated among a relatively small number of donors. Data from *Tithe.ly*—a church giving and management platform—shows that top donors account for nearly two-thirds of all giving.<sup>3</sup>

That kind of dependence creates vulnerability. When a few households make up such a large share of a congregation's giving, a retirement, a relocation, or an unexpected change in circumstances can leave a significant hole in the budget.

We know that our own congregation has to take this seriously as we plan for the coming year. We need to be honest about our financial needs and thoughtful about how we sustain the ministry God has entrusted to us.

But I don't believe the answer is simply to ask a few generous people to give more. We also need to remember why we give in the first place.

People want their generosity to mean something. They want to know that their gifts make a difference—that someone is welcomed, a person in need receives help, a child grows in faith, or a community finds hope. They want to see the church putting God's love into action.

And I believe that is true with us. Our ministry is not just about maintaining a building or keeping an institution running. It is about the people we serve, the relationships we nurture, and the ways we make God's love visible in the community.

That's why I remain hopeful about our church and your generosity.

And the good news is that generosity extends far beyond the church. According to Giving USA 2026, Americans gave an estimated \$617.2 billion to charitable causes in 2025, the first time the total surpassed \$600 billion.<sup>4</sup> That is an extraordinary amount of giving, even as economic pressures

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Dunagan, "Church Giving Statistics 2026: What the Latest Data Reveals," *Tithe.ly*, October 2, 2026: <https://get.tithe.ly/blog/church-giving-statistics>

<sup>4</sup> *Giving USA 2026*, Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy: [https://philanthropy.indianapolis.iu.edu/news-events/news/\\_news/2026/giving-usa-report-2026.html](https://philanthropy.indianapolis.iu.edu/news-events/news/_news/2026/giving-usa-report-2026.html)

continue to affect many households and religious giving faces its own challenges.

Generosity is about more than dollars. It's found in the kindness we offer to those who struggle. We see it in our churches every week—in the meals we prepare for the hungry, in a phone call to someone who is ill, a helping hand, or quiet support for a family in need. These acts may not show up in financial reports, but they are at the heart of a generous congregation.

And they all begin in the same place: with the grace we have received from God.

Paul reminds us of this elsewhere when he asks, "What do you have that you didn't receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). And the First Letter of John puts it even more simply: "We love because God first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

We give because we have received. That is the heart of Christian stewardship.

On that basis, I make this straightforward appeal: **please support our church's ministry through your financial gifts.** Give as you have been blessed. Give in a way that reflects your gratitude to God and your commitment to the work we do together.

And when you give, you do more than help balance a budget. You are helping God's grace reach another person. You are becoming part of something that extends beyond any one of us.

Which brings me back to the title of this sermon: *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, to borrow the title of a gospel bluegrass song. Or will the flow stop with us?

I hope we will choose to share. Because that's how the circle continues: God's grace comes to us, flows through us, and returns to God in thanksgiving.

And when that happens, the church doesn't just crawl. It gets up and walks. Maybe, by God's grace, it even runs. Thanks be to God. Amen.