

Back to the Future

discerning God's purpose for our life as His church

Every so often it's important to pause and take stock. How are we doing? What are we seeking to accomplish? Are we growing, making progress?

Such seasons of 'reflection' are as important in our communal life as a local church as they are in our individual lives.

This series of studies aims to provide a focus for such a season, a chance to let the Word of God inform our understanding of all that he calls us as His church to be and to be doing in these days of great turbulence and change.

You can find the background to this short series [here](#).

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7. The grace of giving

(Acts 11.25-30)

[w/b Sunday 23rd February 2020]

“.. see that you excel also in this grace of giving ..”

This study concentrates on the fourth of the five main effects which the teaching of the Word of God had on believers at Antioch (Acts 11.25-30), namely the way we respond to people and situations in love - and in particular the way in which we become essentially a people characterized by *giving*.

Paul's 2nd letter to the church in Corinth provides, in chapters 8 and 9, the most extended teaching on the subject of giving in the New Testament: this study looks particularly at 2 Cor.8.1-15.

[Although there are 7 questions as ever, all of them important, your Community Group may choose to concentrate on just some of them. Key questions in this study are probably 2, 5 and 7. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]

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1. **Read Acts 4.23-37.** This cameo from the early days of the church illustrates how what Paul calls a 'rich generosity' (2 Cor.8.2) was a hallmark of the Christian's living.

What factors lay ensured that these early believers 'shared everything they had' (v.32)?

How did their 'rich generosity' find expression?

In what ways have you seen that paralleled in Christ's church today?

2. Read 2 Cor.8.1-4. Paul starts his teaching by referencing the 'rich generosity' of the churches of northern Greece, as both an encouragement and challenge to the church in Corinth.

What does he mean when he explains their generosity in terms of 'the grace that God has given'?

What aspects of the giving of the Macedonian churches stand out for you, and how does this challenge you?

3. Read 2 Cor.8.5. The consistent teaching of the Bible on the theme of giving is that it is essentially and primarily *relational*: we give in the context of relationship.

In what way did the Macedonian churches 'exceed' Paul's expectations?

What brought you to the point where you gave *yourself* to the Lord - and, with yourself, everything you had?

4. **Read 2 Cor.8.6-8.** Giving is to be a delight, rather than a duty: Paul is thus careful to avoid 'commanding' them, but instead seeks to cultivate their generosity by other means.

What three tactics does Paul take in these verses as ways of encouraging a rich generosity on the part of the church in Corinth?

What prompts a generosity in your heart?

5. **Read 2 Cor.8.9.** This verse is huge! It's the verse around which all of Paul's teaching on giving ultimately pivots, as he expounds 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ'.

Our giving, like our loving, flows from that of the Lord Himself: what does Paul set out as the component parts of 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ'?

How might you be more purposeful in seeking day by day to enrich others?

6. **Read 2 Cor.8.10-12.** Paul had sent Titus to receive from the church at Corinth their promised offering: he wanted now to be sure that the offering would be there for Titus to receive!

Do you struggle sometimes to turn your good intentions ('the willingness') into action ('your completion of it')?

Read 2 Cor.9.2-5: what motivations does Paul here suggest stir believers into action when it comes to giving?

7. Read 2 Cor.8.13-15. The New Testament makes it clear that there is a mutual bond of commitment and love between believers: Paul alludes to that now.

What is the point Paul is making here and how might it apply to ourselves?

“What should rise is not the Christian’s standard of living, but his standard of giving” (the words of John Wesley who lived his whole life on that basis - he lived on £28pa, no matter how much he earned, and gave away the rest): do you think that’s a valid application of these verses?

How has this whole study challenged you, and how has it inspired and encouraged you?