

**8 God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work. 9 As it is written:**

**He scattered; he gave to the poor.**

**His righteousness remains forever.**

**10 And he who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed for sowing, and will increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you may be generous in every way, which produces thanksgiving to God through us.**

When you give a donation, sometimes you hear that the money never actually goes to what it was designated for, but instead goes to the workers at the organization. You hear about how Haiti is still struggling mightily yet even after millions of dollars were given to help them out, and you wonder, “Where did all the money go?” It makes you more leery of giving donations when you hear things like that.

When my brother used to live in India I would try to mail him things, and half of the time the package would never reach his residence. The postal service was corrupt and they would steal things from the mail all of the time. It made me not want to mail him anything out of fear that someone else would take it.

God is the generous giver. We see the generosity of God in each of the stories for this Sunday from 2 Kings 4 and John 6. The disciples find themselves in impossible situations. People come to learn, but they are hungry and they need food. There are too many people to feed, but God tells His disciples to feed them ANYWAY. In both stories, not only does God miraculously provide enough food as it is distributed, but He provides MORE than enough so that there are leftovers. In the case of the disciples, there is one basket for each of the disciples left over: more than enough.

Paul told the Corinthians and he tells us that this same God continues to give generously: more than enough. Notice how many times he repeats the word ALL. In ALL things, at ALL times, having ALL that you need. You might read this and think, “That’s great, God will give me everything I need. I’ll always have enough - just what I need - not what I want.” That is true. But notice that Paul doesn’t only tell us this so that we will relax and not worry about what WE have. He tells us this so that we will feel confident to give what we have to other people who are in need. This “need” that He provides is a need that other people have. Paul quotes Psalm 112. It would be good to read the verse in context -

- 1 Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands.
- 2 His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.
- 3 Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.
- 4 Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.
- 5 Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice.
- 6 Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever.
- 7 He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.
- 8 His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.
- 9 He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever;

The Psalmist describes a person who is not worried about what he has, and is more than willing to share with those who are in genuine need. He's glad to do it. His attitude and willingness to help is obvious to all.

Think of Paul's attitude. He wrote many of his letters from prison. He didn't have his manuscripts. He was cold and without his coat. Most everybody had abandoned him. Yet in his letters, he wasn't filled with bitterness and anger and despair. He was filled with thankfulness. You would think that Paul had nothing to give. Yet through Paul God gave a gift that keeps on giving to this day - the Word of God! He gave the Word to the churches in the midst of his suffering, reflecting what a God pleasing attitude we can have in the midst of suffering. In the recent movie that was released on the life of Paul, they depicted Paul as having a smile on his face as he was being beheaded. I wouldn't doubt that to be true. What a wonderful way to depict his death.

Think of Jesus. He had all of the gifts in the world and all of the power in the world. Yet notice what happened with all of His gifts and all of His power. Time and again He is being called from one place to another to heal this person and save that one. Yet He never complains about how tired He is. When the disciples try to hold back the children, He says, "Let them come!" He almost never says "no," and when He does, it is only so He can end up saying "yes." (Think of the Canaanite woman with the demon possessed daughter. (Mark 15) The one time He is tempted to turn stones into bread for HIMSELF, He says "no" to Satan. We never find Him using His gifts for His own self, even when He was in need.

This all leads to the cross, where Jesus gave His everything, His all, His very life, so that we would have complete forgiveness and holiness in God's sight. Jesus held nothing back. He went through hell to give us heaven. When He said "**It is finished**," from the cross, He gave it all and He paid it all. When He gives us our gifts, He doesn't hold back at all. All of His holiness is given to us in our baptism. All of His righteousness is ours through faith. All of heaven is ours when we die. If that were not enough, He even promises to provide us with all that we need to be generous with other people too. This is a generous God we have. He is a giving God.

Do you believe that? Or do you believe Paul should have said God gives us "some" gifts "sometimes" instead. Is Paul exaggerating or telling the truth? Satan wants you to think this is an exaggeration and maybe even a lie. Think back to the temptation of Satan in the Garden of Eden. He made God sound out to be a cheapskate, like God was holding something great back from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: when God had provided them with EVERYTHING they needed to thrive. The Garden of Eden was full of beautiful trees in a perfect atmosphere to grow wonderful plants. But Satan was able to convince them that God was being CHEAP. What a lie! Satan's temptation to us yet today is two-fold.

1. He wants us to think that God is holding out on us. He hasn't been generous enough with us. There is always bigger and better stuff out there somewhere else. Someone always has gotten more than us, and we need what they have or we should have gotten what they got.
2. Satan also wants us to think that we need to be primarily concerned about ourselves, to keep for ourselves, not to share with others. We have to hoard our stuff if we want to keep our stuff. If we don't, we could end up broke. We don't have the time and energy to look after everyone else.

And we fall for his lies! We constantly set goals for ourselves and our budgets that have nothing to do with our neighbors or those who are in need. We put more time into our 401k's and our retirement than we do thinking

about those we could help. We so eagerly schedule our lives around our vacations and what we want to do rather than what other people need or ask us to do. When someone asks you to volunteer, do you immediately look for reasons to say “no?” Do you ignore phone calls and refuse to answer texts from people you know are probably asking you for something? Are you honored that they would ask you or angry with them for asking you? Are you so selfish of your time that nobody would ever call you for help in a thousand years because they know how you’ll respond? Are you too busy for church? Too busy for Bible study? Too busy to go on a date with your spouse? No time to play catch with your child? Are you really that broke that you can’t give an extra ten dollars a week or a month? Or is it that you have selfishly been spending your money on things you don’t really need? Where is the generosity?

Lord, have mercy. Yes, it’s true, isn’t it? But God doesn’t withhold his gifts because of our selfishness. He doesn’t quickly withdraw His donations and say, “I’m not giving to that person anymore.” He keeps on giving forgiveness. Every time we take the Lord’s Supper, He still says to us, “Given FOR YOU! Yes, YOU! The selfish one. The angry one. The tired one. I give my all, my forgiveness, my holiness, to you. Eat and drink of salvation for free.” He keeps on dwelling within us through our baptism, showing us more avenues to give. He keeps on encouraging us, to the point where all of us would have given up long ago. Thank God for His mercy in Christ. He keeps on giving generously at all times and in all places and in all ways so that we can always be giving to others.

Think about the promise of time - at ALL times. It’s true, even if we don’t think so. When you are in the prime of your working career, maybe from 35-60, you can sometimes produce a lot of work and make a lot of money. You can maybe afford more stuff when you have your house paid off or your children move out. You don’t have as much debt and you can still work full time. So you might think, “God is really being generous with me NOW.” But that’s not the way God’s Word says that God provides. He isn’t only generous with you in the prime of your life. He is generous with you all of the time. When you’re younger you have more energy to give. When you’re older you have more time to give or more prayers to give. Maybe you have more insight or more patience or more kindness. He is just generous in different ways at different times. But He is always superabundantly generous with you.

I think of my grandmother who had to live off of social security for a long time. She didn’t have a car. She walked to the grocery store and got a ride from her neighbor when she needed it. Her husband, who was a pastor, died at age 64. She didn’t have much, and we didn’t ever get huge birthday gifts from her. But she was always glad to see us. She always welcomed us. She made simple meals like goulash and applesauce, along with potato pancakes. She went to church with us, and gave us a Lifesaver breath mint before the service started. That was a special treat. She had a thankful attitude and a cheerful disposition, and she was generous with who she was. She never got to see me preach, but she did see a video of my first sermon, and she had tears in her eyes I was told. That meant more to me than whether she had an inheritance of money to give. She wasn’t rich with money, but she was rich with her spirit, and she let her generosity show with what she had.

Go back to that word . . . **God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.** You will ABOUND in every good work: not just have a few leftovers to give: but that you will ABOUND in them at every stage of life. The same God who provided food for 5,000 people out of a few loaves of bread can still work through you, no matter what point of life you are in or how busy you are or how tired you are or how poor you are.

**10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.**

Notice how Paul keeps going back to God. He will supply seed. He will supply bread for food. He will increase your store and enlarge your harvest of righteousness. There's no doubt in these words. You won't be made rich in some ways. You will be made rich in every way. These words are meant to encourage your soul and to open up your heart to give of what you have in whatever way you can. Why? So that people will thank GOD for our ministry and service. It seems that it's so hard to find thanksgiving in our society. It's also harder and harder to find people that want to help. Everyone always seems to be angry and outraged about something, when we have so much to be thankful about. So many people have secluded themselves from their friends and their neighbors. It's hard to get time to talk to anyone. Imagine how you could give such a great witness, just by having a thankful and generous life?

It was a scary thing. Not too long after I got here, EJ and Shannon were in their motorcycle accident. They nearly died. But when they were in an hour of need, our congregation gathered together and helped. We had a fundraiser for them. We helped them move homes. It was wonderful, through the tragedy, to see people volunteer their time and their money to help them out.

They had a friend who saw the generosity of our congregation. She was amazed at what she saw in the love and the compassion for them. She said, "I want what they have." It was the generosity of fellow Christians that gave a strong witness to her, and she is now a member of our congregation as well.

That's how it's supposed to work. How many opportunities like that have we missed, because we were just too focused on ourselves? God have been more than generous with us. He has been more than giving. All, all and all. Not some. Not a little. All - for the needs of others. Think about the way God has given to you in Christ, and look for ways to be generous to those who need your help. In the end, God will be praised, and you will be blessed in ways you might never know. Amen.