

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5 on October 18, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Live Like No One Else
Today's Focus: A Disciplined Life

"A Promise Kept Shows Proof of Love"

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus Christ who *"although he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9). Amen.

I want you all to know...I have the best of intentions. I intend to exercise every day for at least 30 minutes. I know it will improve my mood, increase my energy, relieve stress, and help me sleep better at night. And in fact there is a gym right across the parking lot outside. From my house I can drive there in about 5 minutes. I even enjoy working out. But you know what? Sometime I find that my good intentions don't always translate into actions when it comes to exercise.

You ever find that to be true for you? Do you ever make plans to set your alarm early to get up for a workout, but find yourself sleeping in? Do you ever intend to get up and get outside, but instead find it comfier to stay on the sofa? Of course you do, right?, because you're human beings like me. But what if you've got a workout partner who helps hold you accountable? What if you have a personal trainer who helps you set goals? What if you have a pastor to encourage you?

I mention the role of pastor because in a way that's what our verses today are talking about—encouragement from a pastor towards spiritual exercise. Remember what's going on in this series. We've been studying 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 in the Bible. The context of these two chapters is that an offering is being gathered. And this isn't a high pressure thing. It's not a guilt thing. It's actually something that the Corinthian church wanted to do. They heard that the church in Jerusalem was struggling with poverty and persecution. The people there were in need. So when the Corinthians heard about all this, they wanted to help out. In fact they were eager to do it. And their eagerness was inspirational. That's the cool thing about eager generosity. It inspires others. So other churches in the region of Achaia and up north in Macedonia were inspired when they heard about the commitment of the Corinthians. Other churches voluntarily decided to join in and make commitments of their own not grudgingly, not out of spirit of competition but gladly out of a spirit of mutual compassion.

And when Pastor Paul, the apostle, the guy who had started these churches heard about this, he was overjoyed as you can imagine. He was pumped up because spontaneously and joyfully, God's people said, "We may not have a lot of material riches ourselves, in fact we're got our own issues, plenty of them. And the economy over here can't be that much better than it is over there. But since we have shared in the spiritual riches that we have received through faith in Jesus, how can we not join together in this ministry to our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem...even if we've never met them and

never will probably meet them until heaven? This is a great opportunity to put our faith in Jesus into action. Let's show our brothers and sisters over there in Jerusalem the proof of our love with no strings attached."

And so Pastor Paul has been helping with the plans to gather this generous offering. And as we're going to hear in just a minute, he's gone to great lengths to make sure everything involved with gathering this offering is above board because he doesn't there to be any hint of impropriety or anything that would cause the name of Jesus to be discredited. So he's now writing to the Corinthians to encourage them to follow through with their commitments. I think that's also what the Holy Spirit wants to get through to us. And that's why our theme today is this: **A Promise Kept Shows the Proof of Love**. Paul writes,

¹⁶ Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. ¹⁷ For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. ¹⁸ And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. ¹⁹ What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. ²⁰ We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. ²¹ For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

²² In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. ²⁴ Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it. [There's our theme today: "A Promise Kept Shows Proof of Love."]

9 There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the Lord's people. ² For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. ³ But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

So, what are you thinking about right now? When I read this, what strikes me is that there's a big difference between something generously given and something grudgingly given. You can see it in kids. "Give your sister a box of Nerds. Do it now." You can almost see the look on that child's face as she grudgingly gives her sister that little box from her Halloween candy. "Here!" Needless to say, relationships aren't strengthened on the basis of gifts given grudgingly, are they? On the other hand,

“Here you go sister, would you like a box of Nerds?” is entirely different. That kind of attitude can turn a frown upside down and strengthen a relationship. And that’s just with something as insignificant as a box of Nerds! Why? Because generosity has little to do with the extravagance of the gift but with the attitude of the giver. A little box of Nerds might not seem particularly generous but it becomes generous when the attitude is giving instead of grudging.

Also what struck me in reading this is how often my own good intentions don’t always translate into God pleasing actions. For some reason grudging giving seems to come more naturally than generous giving. You ever find this to be the case for you too? I think about all the things I’d like to do to help others...but my list of excuses to not do those things starts to get pretty long in a hurry. “That would be a lot of work. Do I really have time for that anyway?” “That would cost a little bit of money. Can I really afford that anyway?” “I’d like to help, but I’m sure other people will step up and take care of that anyway.” You ever think like this? Even the Apostle Paul would say, “Yeah, I do too.” I thought about this in my Bible 101 class this week where we read these words that Paul himself wrote: *18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing* (Romans 7:18-19).

You get what this is saying? Even the Apostle Paul admits that it’s a struggle to translate good intentions into God pleasing actions...and he’s a mature Christian pastor! It’s one thing to have a good desire. It’s another thing to turn it into a correspondingly God pleasing action. It’s one thing to hear a sermon on Sunday. It’s another thing to go home and start applying it on Monday. Why? Because we all have this sinful nature part of us that always stays a part of us.

And yet....and yet!...what strikes me about our sermon text today is how gently Paul talks to the Corinthians not to beat them down but to build them up. It’s as if even though he knows they have a sinful nature, he also knows that’s not who they really are anymore. Who they really are there in Corinth isn’t Corinthians, it’s Christians. In other words they aren’t defined any more by their culture, by their sinful nature, or by their sins. They are defined by the simple fact that they are redeemed children of God, bought with the holy, precious blood of God’s one and only Son, Jesus. Yes, they still have a sinful nature, just as we do, and yet who they really are is the their new selves who have been changed by Jesus Christ and his forgiveness. And so in these chapters of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 it’s as if Paul’s talking to that new self in each of them with the assumption that because they’ve been covered by the grace of God they actually want to be encouraged to become disciplined givers who reflect the generous heart of God. Paul assumes that as Christians now they will welcome the words he has to say. He assumes they’re going to be spurred on to follow through with their commitments just as Jesus followed through with his commitment to us in going to the cross to give his life as a ransom payment for our sins. Keeping His promise is the ultimate proof of God’s love for His People like us. Keeping His promise is what spurs on love in His people like us.



Friends, I've been spurred on by the love of God's people too. Just this week in fact, after a particularly long meeting at our building site where we talked about change orders and our construction budget, I came home to open the mail. There was an envelope from Divine Peace Lutheran Church straight up the road on 76th St in Milwaukee just south of Oklahoma Ave. As I opened it, I couldn't believe what was inside. Inside was a letter and a check for \$1,500 to our church. I mean what generous people! I didn't solicit this. They simply wanted to give this! It was their idea. So what makes this gift so especially generous? The attitude of the givers. And friends, there are so many ways to give generously instead of grudgingly.



Did you see this picture on our church Facebook page this week? A great way to connect with us on a regular basis during the week is through social media. This is the picture of generous giving. On the left is Mark Pamperin. On the right is Merlin Stuebs and we posted the caption, "It's 8 pm...do you know where your builders are? #noCurfew". You see they'd been working all day, up at dawn before the sun came out, working past dark to get their work done. And they're still smiling! They're still smiling even though they had hoped to be home days earlier. They're still smiling even though Mark has been to the doctor recently for his throat. Even though Merlin fell a week earlier and gashed his head one day because he started working while it was dark before the sun came up. They just keep plugging away. Why? Because they're thankful to Jesus for his mercy and grace and because they want to give of their time, their skills, their expertise as God has blessed them.

Paul tells the Corinthians, ² *For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians.* There is a time and place for boasting in the Lord. I've been boasting about our Builders For Christ friends and I'm going to boast just a little bit about you now too. One of the things I'm most proud of in our church is our More Than Bricks campaign. This is our campaign where we asked all of our members to make 3 year commitments to help us secure our building loan and pay the mortgage for our new ministry center. And you responded generously with commitments just shy of \$400,000. But you did this knowing 20% of the funds we gather in the More Than Bricks we've promised to give away to other missions. Why? Because we've been transformed by the gift of Jesus who gave himself for us. Because we're a mission church and we want to be generous in the name of Jesus. Just the Corinthians wanted to help the people in Jerusalem, so also this campaign isn't just about us. It's not just about our own ministry center and our own needs. Our commitments show proof of our love for others.

So right now we've committed almost \$80K to other mission efforts including outreach in Nepal—the earthquake stricken, mountainous nation in East Asia where there is some extreme poverty. But the

greatest poverty there? It's the lack of the gospel. Less than 1% of the people in Nepal know the victory of Jesus. They don't know who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. They don't know that eternal life is theirs as a free gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus. And we get to help share that message with them! The same is true for our missions in St Lucia and in Minot, ND and we'll be talking more about them the next two weeks too.

⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

Friends, God's Word today encourages us to be disciplined in our giving, to keep our commitments, and to give generously because our promises kept show proof of our love. Faith is never just a personal thing to keep to ourselves. It's a public thing that helps show the love of Jesus to others. So like the Apostle Paul I'm not talking today to tear you down. Not by any means. My goal through the Holy Spirit is to build you up. And to say, "Keep it up!" Keep following through, trusting God, because after all, that's what Jesus did for me and you. He committed himself to us. He followed through all the way to the cross. He gave sacrificially and unconditionally when he gave himself. And now he promises to be with us always to the very end of the age. He says, "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you." The proof of his love is that he has kept every promise of God and he always will. So now we get to show the proof of our love in Jesus' name. Amen.

My Next Steps

Point to Ponder: Good intentions don't always translate into God pleasing actions. Has this been the case also in your life? Why or why not?

Treasure to Share: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."
(Philippians 2:13)

Action to Take: To become more generous, choose one area of life where you want to become more disciplined which you think will have the biggest impact on your life. For example: time priorities, spending habits, budgeting, daily devotions and prayer life.