

Surplus: Fearless Generosity in 2 Corinthians 8-9 by Bryan Elliff, Christian Communicators Worldwide, Kansas City, MO, (2019). (14 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols.)

1. Experience the Joy of Radical Generosity.

A Christian leader once said, “Most of us only give enough to be miserable.” That may be true. Most of us have yet to experience the overflowing joy that results from radical generosity. [page 6]

2. God Is an Abundant Giver.

Why give? Because God is an abundant giver. We have both received his grace and have been made conduits of it, plugged into the coursing electricity of his generosity. So we can be free and fearless givers. It does not depend on us to work out all the figures and plan for all the contingencies. We let his plans run their course while we participate in them with joy. [page 25]

3. Do Not Love the Things of the World ...

I leave you to wrestle with these and many more questions in prayer alongside fellow believers in your family and spiritual community. There is an unending and holy tension that the Spirit places in our lives through such texts wherever they are found in the Bible. The answers are not intended to be easy, and herein lies the danger for the careless Christian. It is the danger of extracting the teeth from the teaching. We are not supposed to be comfortable in a casual camaraderie with surplus. God meant it when he said, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world” (1 John 2:5). The use of money, after all, has always been a litmus test of biblical spirituality. [page 34]

4. Given Much to Fill the Lack for Others.

Many of you have more than you need. Could you do something useful for God’s kingdom by giving to the needs of others? What about missionaries or Christian workers? What about those who live under the shadow of debt because of foolish decisions made years before. What about elderly brothers and sisters who struggle to get by now that they are past working age? What about that believer who just lost his job? Could it be that God has given you too much so that you can fill their lack? [page 36]

5. I Dare Not Save.

In 1836, George Mueller opened his first home for orphans in Bristol, England. The Prussian determined to use his growing orphan work to demonstrate God’s faithfulness by simply praying for the money and supplies necessary to support them, without

asking anybody for help. Over his lifetime, more than 10,000 orphans were fed, clothed, and taught, through prayer and God’s miraculous provision.

But Mueller’s uncommon perspectives on money touched his personal life as well, especially his use of surplus. One biographer notes something truly remarkable:

It is known that during his life he received about £93,000 for his personal expenses: of this he gave away over £81,000; at his death his sole estate was valued at about £160, including household furniture.

In other words, of all Mueller received for personal expenses over the nearly 70 years of ministry, he gave away more than 87 percent. What he kept was only what he needed to live on.

Once, near the end of his life, he was asked, “You never thought of saving for yourself?” Taking out a small purse from his coat pocket, he replied,

All I am possessed of is in that purse—every penny! Save for *myself*? Never! When money is sent to me for my own use, I pass it on to God ... I do not regard such gifts as belonging to me; they belong to Him, whose I am and whom I serve. Save for *myself*? I dare not save; it would dishonor my loving, gracious, all-bountiful Father. [pages 36-37]

6. Generosity from the Attitudes of the Heart.

True generosity emerges from an attitude of the heart. It comes from an eager disposition to bless others, from a heart that thrills at the prospect of meeting a need. It arises in a person who knows that, strangely, being generous makes you happy. [page 51]

7. Blessing Others Is a Delight.

When blessing others becomes the focus, giving is not an obligation but a delight. It is not a task to be avoided, but an opportunity to be seized. The delighted giver is the kind of giver God loves. It is, in fact, the kind of giver God is himself. [page 57]

8. God Restocks Resources So Righteous Deeds Can Go On.

... if we pattern our lives after God in righteous generosity toward others, we will never lack God’s supply, both for our needs *and* for continuing acts of liberality. Even when we open our hands to scatter our resources abroad and give to the poor, God will restock our resources (our “wealth and riches”) so that our righteous deeds can go on and on. [page 68]

9. Seed for Planting Multiplied.

In other words, joining God's generous project is like working with him as if he is a farm supplier. In this setup, enough grain is provided for your sustenance (there is ample "bread for food") *and* seed is also provided for planting.

But now comes the truly remarkable reality. Not only will you be provided with enough seed for planting, your seed for planting will be *multiplied*. For every one bag of seed you go out to plant, there will be more bags waiting to be planted. In other words, the more you give, the more you will *have* to give.

This is no "prosperity gospel." Yes, it is true that the Lord may multiply our seed as we plant it (give it away), but note carefully what the multiplication is for: "he will supply and multiply your seed *for sowing*." This is not surplus to use on ourselves. No, we continue to eat the bread that the Lord provides for our food. The surplus is for planting. If we give, God will allow us to give more. [pages 69-70]

10. The Christian's Standard of Giving.

John Wesley was known for saying that what would rise is not the Christian's standard of living, but his standard of giving. Wesley backed up this perspective by deciding early in his life that he would live on no more than 30 British pounds a year, approximately his income at the time. He stayed true to this commitment even when his income had grown to 1400 pounds a year. [page 70]

11. Enough for Needs and a Surplus to Give Away.

God is able to give you enough for your own needs and grow a surplus to give away.

You will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God (2 Corinthians 9:11). [page 71]

12. Overcome Barriers and Build Unity.

Giving can do much more than meet needs. It can be an intentional expression of love that overcomes barriers and builds unity. [page 80]

13. God's Resources Given To and Through Us.

We can be confident that he has begun the work in our hearts, that he will supply it, and that he will produce a harvest from it. Our generosity does not depend on *our* resources because it is not really our generosity at all. It is God's program that we participate in and *his* resources that are freely given to us and through us. [page 87]

14. Give Fearlessly.

Give fearlessly. Act on what you have now come to understand—that is, that your generosity is God’s work completely. Most are protectors of their resources, and desperate to maintain control. Such people die pitifully, clutching to their insignificant treasures. But generosity seen in the new light of God’s surplus of grace calls us to let go of control, to count on the abundance of his supply, and to become agents sent to carry out his project of grace.

And so, we end precisely where Paul ends—with what he calls God’s “indescribable gift,” a phrase that encompasses the whole of God’s generous action toward us. We can do nothing but thank him and live our lives now recognizing that he, in his unfathomable grace toward us, is the source and supplier of all generosity.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15) [pages 87-88]