

Overflowing toward Our Generous God

"Overflow: Series, October 25 26, 2025 (Parent-Child Dedication) | 2 Corinthians 8:1-5
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Do you ever well up and overflow?

A laugh overflows when you find something funny.

You're struck by something funny. Maybe it's not a good time to laugh or a good reason to laugh. (That's happened to me more times than I like to admit.) But you get tickled, a laugh builds, and soon you can't contain it. You're bursting, overflowing, with laughter.

Tears overflow when you're moved.

It may be grief welling up inside of you. Or you may find yourself overwhelmed by something good, something transcendent, or something magnificent. That happens to me in worship, frequently in ways I can't quite describe. But you feel tears building in the corners of your eyes and then slowly rolling down your cheek. They're overflowing.

Tears, laughter, and life overflowed when Donna Martin's mother died in 1996.

Donna's mother was a caring mother to 18 children, plus just about everyone else in Possum Trot. Possum Trot is a small town with no paved roads or stop lights in eastern Texas. Losing her mother shook Donna. She was grieving, but grateful for her mother's example, and looking for a purpose in her life. As she thought and prayed about her mother's example, she heard God telling her to foster and adopt more children—to be a mother to them the way her mother had been to her. She convinced her reluctant husband—Bishop W. C. Martin, the pastor of Bennett Chapel in Possum Trot, to join her. Life overflowed out of Donna's tears and laughter.¹

Paul watched joy and generosity overflow.

He saw it among the churches of the province of Macedonia. Those churches knew him well, and he loved them. He came to them with a big challenge, but the big challenge came at a moment of deep suffering for them. How would they deal with the challenge? He saw the grace of God cover them, the joy of the Lord well up in them, and generosity overflow.

He wanted the same thing for the church in Corinth, and I want it for us.

Our Scripture reading today is from the book of 2 Corinthians. In this passage, Paul is describing what the churches in the province of Macedonia had done, and he's doing so because he hopes that something similar will happen in Corinth. He is hoping that they will remember the grace that has been given to them, that their joy will well up, and that they will respond with overflowing generosity. But how does that happen? And what does that look like? Because that is exactly what I want for you and me.

Generosity is meant to overflow. But will it?

The Church in Jerusalem was in need.

¹ <https://theaquilareport.com/miracle-in-possum-trot/>

Roman taxes were very high. Many widows had become part of the Church, and the saints in Jerusalem were carrying them financially. They sent out missionaries to spread the Gospel. But because of persecution, they were shut out of jobs and lost business opportunities. A famine in the late 40s AD made the situation worse. When the Church in Jerusalem approved Paul's mission to the non-Jewish people of the empire, they asked him to help. In **Galatians 2:10** Paul wrote, Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

So, Paul called the Gentile churches to give.

He called on multiple churches to take up a collection that would give direct financial aid to the Church in Jerusalem (see 1 Cor. 16:1-4). After his first trip to Corinth, they were excited about the concept. In **1 Corinthians 16:2** Paul gave them specific instructions, On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. Generosity seemed ready to flow!

Then the Church in Corinth dropped the ball.

New apostles came to town. The Church in Corinth began to question Paul's authority. This led to a painful letter and a painful visit that Paul was continuing to heal in 2 Corinthians. But in this painful process, the offering had been forgotten. It is possible that some of the money that had already been saved went to other uses.

But the Church in Macedonia stepped up.

Macedonia was a region north of Corinth. Paul started several churches there on his second missionary journey—in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. You can find their stories in Acts chapters 16 & 17. But Acts also makes clear that these Christians were persecuted and ostracized. In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul adds that this continued. These churches suffered greatly and were impoverished as a result. But in their poverty, they were overflowing with joy at what God had done, and they insisted on overflowing with generosity by giving to the Church in Jerusalem. Paul praised their efforts.

Will the Church in Corinth rejoin the effort?

That's what Paul is asking here. Paul is saying, "You were ready to join the effort." Then he's adding, "Macedonia heard what you were doing, and they have given generously!" There is even a bit of competition implied here. "Now, what are you going to do?" Paul is asking. Generosity is supposed to overflow that way, but will it? The question lingers.

Generosity began to overflow in Possum Trot when Diann Sparks, Donna's sister, adopted two boys!

Donna knew nothing about fostering or adopting, so she reached out. She found the nearest training program and took her sister to the 13-week course. They learned that there were over 21,000 abused and neglected children waiting for homes in Texas. Diann was overwhelmed! What could a single mom living in a tiny two-bedroom mobile home do? But she took the first child. Pretty quickly Donna took two. Then together the sisters took two more. Something big was about to happen. Generosity was flowing and was about to overflow!²

With grace, joy and generosity overflow.

Principle #1: God's grace gets joy and generosity flowing.

That's where Paul begins in **2 Corinthians 8:1**, "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia ... Grace overflowed among the

² <https://www.cwla.org/a-rural-miracle-of-adoption/>

Christians of Macedonia and got joy and generosity flowing. Without grace, there would have been no joy or generosity in Macedonia. And grace gets our joy and generosity flowing. We can't just become generous by trying hard. Nor is generosity a new form of legalism. There is no rule you can break that will cost you your salvation or gain you a failing grade from Heaven. God gives grace, that grace changes us, then good things like joy and generosity begin flowing. Grace is the key to generosity.

Principle #2: The hardest times are when joy and generosity surprisingly bubble up.

Paul taught something completely counterintuitive in this passage, something we might argue with. In **2 Corinthians 8:2** he continues about the Macedonian Christians, ... for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. When they were suffering, when they were poor and without cash, that's when they were not only joyful (which is different from happy) but generous, too. We tend to think that when we have bills and obligations, that's the time to pull back from generosity. But that's the time to lean into generosity! And if you're paying attention to what happened in Possum Trot, you are seeing that start to unfold! Even when we're struggling, we can be generous!

Principle #3: Doing more than we think we can do is possible with God.

Paul was surprised by the generosity of the saints in Macedonia. They gave more than they could afford. They insisted on it according to **2 Corinthians 8:3-4**, For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints ... When we think about being generous, we tend to be afraid. We worry that we won't have enough for ourselves. Or that we will endanger our future. I suppose from a worldly point of view that's right. But that's not how God's economics works. When God calls us to be generous (and He does), then is the time to obey. And when we give, it may be costly. But with God, it will be okay. When we are generous, we'll get great joy from seeing God do miraculous things. Joy and generosity go hand in hand, they overflow together!

Do you sense God putting a next step in generosity in front of you?

Next steps are normal with God. We start a journey by taking one step, and generosity is frequently a journey. God may be putting a next step in front of you today. Maybe, He is calling you to be generous—to give something. Paul encouraged the Christians in Corinth to set aside something weekly for this great project. Perhaps, like them, God is calling you to be generous with a plan. Growing up, I was taught to tithe 10% of my annual income, and that's a great baseline in giving to consider. I think that when Jesus taught about tithing, He was talking about something more. And that's an important thing to remember. We never reach a point with generosity where we think, "I've done what I have to do." Our question should always be, "God, what can you do through me?" What is your next step in generosity?

Bennett Chapel overflowed with generosity to more than 70 children!

Bishop Martin preached about the fatherly love of God, Who adopts us as His sons and daughters and called all of Bennett Chapel to get involved and do something about those children without homes. And people listened. Eventually, more than 20 families adopted over 70 children in a just a few years. The world took notice. Help poured in. Eventually, one group even built a community center to distribute aid to help the families—most of whom were barely getting by before they took in more mouths to feed. That's generosity flowing and overflowing. That's the grace of God doing something ... miraculous.³

³ <https://theaquilareport.com/miracle-in-possum-trot/> , <https://www.cwla.org/a-rural-miracle-of-adoption/>

The grace of God has been given among us, too!

We have been forgiven a massive debt we could never repay.

Jesus never puts it in financial terms for us, but we have sinned and fallen infinitely short of an infinitely powerful and good God. Can you imagine if we tried to put that debt into financial terms? You could never pay that bill. But Jesus paid that bill when He died on the cross. Now it is cancelled, wiped away. That's the starting point when we come to faith in Christ. It's a gift, which is the essence of grace, and it has been given to us!

We have been blessed beyond measure.

Compared with the saints in Jerusalem and Macedonia, we are not impoverished. When you think about the lives most of us live, you realize that we have been blessed greatly. We are surrounded by monetary blessings, security, and beauty most of the time! There is no guarantee that we will always be prosperous, but we are, and it is all a gift!

We too have been adopted.

When we accept forgiveness in Jesus, we are reconciled to God. He adopts us as His own sons and daughters. He becomes our Heavenly Father, and He loves us now and for eternity. Nothing can take that love away from us! He did that for every Christian in Jerusalem, Macedonia, and Corinth, and it motivated them to great generosity. (Yes, that will be the ultimate outcome of Paul's appeal to Corinth; they will eventually be generous, too!) He has done for us what those parents in Possum Trot did for more than 70 children. That's a gift!

God's grace has gushed into us and will overflow unless we dam it up.

Grace naturally flows through us. Joy naturally rises within us. Generosity naturally flows out of us. The overflow process is a natural spiritual process. It's an inherent and essential part of the Christian life, unless we dam it up, turn off the spigot, and say "no" to God. Otherwise, grace abounds—and joy and generosity along with it.

Grace abounded in Possum Trot—especially when life there wasn't easy.

Journalists going to town to cover what everyone called "the miracle in Possum Trot" talked about worshipping at Bennett Chapel and seeing these families with their adopted children worshipping together. Children were learning to play musical instruments, participating fully, going to school, and looking toward the future. That's all true. But that can never mask the pain and difficulty that went along with foster parenting and adopting. One of the first children Bishop and Donna Martin adopted had been taught by her birth mother to steal food for the family to live. She didn't quit stealing immediately or easily. There were tearful nights and days for these families when they wondered if they could handle what God had called them to do. But God's grace overflowed even in these most difficult days! God was with these families, giving them the strength they needed, renewing their joy, and causing their generosity to keep flowing and overflowing.⁴

When we give ourselves to God, we overflow with generosity.

The Possum Trot story has overflowed in a book, a movie, and a movement.

Back in the 90s, this story was picked up by the press, including Oprah Winfrey. That attention unleashed waves of help and awareness. A decade after the families of Possum Trot began adopting children, Bishop Martin wrote a book about their experience. It touched lives and created awareness of

⁴ <https://theaquilareport.com/miracle-in-possum-trot/>

the need for foster parenting and adopting all over again.⁵ In 2024, the book was made into a movie. “The Sound of Hope” tells the story as it really is, so be prepared for some intense scenes if you watch it. But the movie was created not just to tell a good story or praise the people involved, but to further a movement of people giving themselves to God and overflowing with generosity toward children without homes. And that’s how generosity works!

Generosity is an invitation.

Generosity is like grace itself in that sense. Grace is an offer from God; we can accept it or turn it down and push it away. Joy is the same; it can well up inside of us by God’s grace, or we can turn off the spigot. Generosity is also something I want for you, not something I want from you. Whenever I talk about generosity, I know that some of you stop listening, thinking that I am just trying to raise the church’s budget. But generosity is not a tool for balancing church finances. It is a basic part of the Christian life, an invitation that we can accept that leads to incredible growth, blessing, and (yes) joy!

I want this for you because I’ve experienced it myself.

Generosity is critically important to me and my own spiritual life. When I got my first paycheck, I was thrilled to cash it, get the money, and put some of it in the offering plate that Sunday. I felt like a part of something good and much bigger than myself. When Tammi and I were living through the lean years of being young adults, generosity was a financial strain. I remember thinking every time I wrote a check that I could be doing something else important with that money, but each check was still a great joy, and our needs were always met. At this point in life, it is a joy to ask constantly what more we as a couple can give and see God do through us! I want that overflowing joy and generosity for you!

First, as Paul said, we give ourselves to God.

That’s critically important. This is not “works righteousness” but a relationship. The churches of Macedonia showed the way as Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 8:5, ... but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. God has given Himself to us in Jesus Christ, and we give ourselves back to Him. That’s the foundation of the Christian life and the starting point of generosity.

Then generosity OVERFLOWS.

God has given good things to us, and we keep giving those good things away. It is an act of obedience. Yes, we are doing what God has told us to do. It is an act of discipleship that shapes us spiritually. But it is an act of worship. It says to God, “Thank You! I trust You! I love You.” May generosity overflow from us.

⁵ <https://theaquilareport.com/miracle-in-possum-trot/>