

On April 25th the country of Nepal was rocked by a devastating earthquake that registered 7.8 on the richter scale. It triggered avalanches in the Himalayas killing hundreds. But the real tragedy struck the towns and villages of Katmandu. In total, over 8,000 people were killed, over 19,000 were injured and hundreds of thousands lost their homes.

Last weekend I was at a missions conference at a large church in Arizona. I was there representing Orchard Group, the church planting organization I serve. Our exhibit was next to the exhibit for an organization called IDES – International Disaster Emergency Services. Whenever disasters, such as the Nepal earthquake, strike, IDES begins receiving cash donations from churches and individuals all around the country to address the needs. The funds are distributed through churches and missionaries who are serving in the effected region.

Another ministry represented at this conference is Central India Christian Mission. I've had the privilege of visiting CICM personally. I know the founder, Dr. Ajai Lall well. Their work in India is impressive and they have churches and missionaries they support along the Nepal/India border. A portion of the funds received by IDES for Nepal have been distributed to provide aid through CICM.

Orchard Group has been on the receiving end of generosity like this in the past. After 9/11, Orchard Group received over a million dollars of relief aid from churches around the country to provide help to people who had lost loved ones and small business owners who lost revenue. The assistance was offered in connection with local churches and in the name of Jesus.

After Hurricane Sandy struck New York two years ago, \$500,000 was given and distributed. New churches Orchard Group has helped to start in New York rallied to provide generators and gasoline and food and clothing. Church buildings that sustained major damage received funds for repairs. People who were displaced from their homes were offered housing.

Not only has Harbor participated in meeting the needs after 9/11 and after Hurricane Sandy, your ongoing support of our church planting efforts means that there are churches on the ground in the city serving in ongoing ways. You've helped us to plant Renaissance Church in Harlem. They are 9 months old and reaching over 150 people every Sunday. When an explosion leveled a building in their neighborhood a few months ago, the church responded to serve the families who lost their homes. You've helped us to plant The Foundry Church on the inner harbor in Baltimore. When the riots took place there a few weeks ago and buildings were burning and schools were shut down, the church provided breakfast and lunch to students who depend on the free school meals.

I mention these stories because this is one of the things the church has been doing since its very beginning. We're going to look today at a story from the Bible about the church responding to the needs of others. Throughout its history, the church has

been on the leading edge of responses to tragedies. In the aftermath of 9/11 and Hurricane Sandy we had plenty of leaders of homeless shelters and small business owners tell us that the church was on the ground helping people and providing aid long before government assistance or insurance companies were offered relief.

This has been part of the DNA of Harbor of Hope all along the way, too. In addition to your generosity toward Orchard Group and the new churches we are helping to start, you have given generously to support people with deep physical and personal needs, right here in Lowell and around the globe. You've given your resources and energy to serve The Wish Project and My Fathers House and the Merrimack Valley Food Bank and so many others, both locally and internationally.

Next weekend you will be, once again, giving generously to support these important efforts. 100% of the offerings will be given to ministries outside of Harbor. So, in some ways, I am here today to encourage you to do something you are already doing! Have you heard the phrase, "preaching to the choir?" That's what I'm doing.

BUT... that doesn't make our message today any less compelling. While generosity toward those in need has been part of the story of the church from its very beginning, right up to today, and while it's been a part of Harbor of Hope's story for the past 15 years, that doesn't mean it's part of your individual story. Let me be right up front with you today. My goal is to challenge you to take giving to a new level. If you aren't giving to God and the causes God cares about, I'm going to challenge you to start. If you are giving a little, I'm going to challenge you to give more. If you're giving a lot, but have the means to give more, I'm going to ask you to stretch yourself to do just that.

In the passage we're going to take a look at today, the Apostle Paul is challenging the people of the church in Corinth to give to respond to a major famine plaguing Jerusalem and the surrounding area. He mentioned the need to them in his first letter to the Corinthian church and, apparently, they committed to respond to the need. Now in the second letter, Paul is following up to make sure they make good on their commitment to give. And he's asking them to give as generously as they are able.

II Corinthians 8

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. **2** In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. **3** For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, **4** they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. **5** And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. **6** So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. **7** But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. **9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

10 And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. **11** Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. **12** For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

13 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. **14** At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, **15** as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little." [b]

Principles:

Giving should be joyful

v. 2 - "In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."

v. 9 - "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

Grace is the motivator, not guilt.

II Corinthians 9:7 - "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

*Some of the most rewarding things I've ever done with the money entrusted to me involved giving it away.

Giving should be sacrificial

v. 2 - "In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."

v. 3 - "For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."

Response to the sacrifice of Jesus...

Giving should be proportional

v. 11-12 – “Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.”

Tithe = 10%

I've known plenty of people who have made it their habit to give well beyond 10%. Even a reverse tithe (living off of 10% and giving away 90%)

My jobs as a kid and giving...

BUT... joyful, sacrificial, proportional giving won't happen if it's not **planned**.

I Corinthians 16:2 – “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

This is Paul talking to people in the city of Corinth – likely people who were paid daily or weekly wages. So, on the first day of every week, set aside...

In the Old Testament, in an agricultural environment, the people were told to set aside their “first-fruits” – the first portion of the harvest.

People earn income in all kinds of ways. You may have a steady salary. You may have annual bonuses that fluctuate. You may have contract work that varies dramatically. But if you don't plan to give joyfully, sacrificially and proportionally, it's not likely to happen.

Two applications:

1. If what we've talked about today is not a regular part of your life, I want to challenge you to put it into practice. I don't think you'll ever regret it. In fact, I believe you might just look back on this day years from now and see it as one of the best decisions you've ever made.
2. Will you pray and plan about what God might want you to give next weekend?