

And 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. ⁹ *As it is written:*

*“He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”*

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. (2 Corinthians 9:8-11)*

Who is Truly Generous?

What is the most generous thing that anyone has ever done for you? You might have to think about that question. You and your spouse might even disagree about what the most generous thing has been. I haven't discussed this with my wife, but there is something which has to be a candidate, at least. About eight years ago, my dad was working for Oracle computers in their international division. He and my mom flew our whole family to Germany to stay with them for three weeks. I think we'd all agree that was very generous. If you think about it, you'll come up with examples of generous acts from your life. I've known parents who bought cars for their children or who paid for their college educations. I've know grandparents who dug deep into their own savings to make home purchases possible. If we took a survey this morning, I'm sure we'd get a list of very generous acts.

I.

So if we did list all those gestures, could we decide who is the most generous person we know? Are my parents more generous than anybody related to you? We probably couldn't reach a unanimous conclusion – unless we moved beyond physical considerations. Every Christian should know that there is someone far more generous and, I'm sure you all knew where I was going from the moment I asked the question. **Who is truly generous? God, the source of all good.**

St. Paul says, **“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.”** God makes all grace abound to us. What is grace? I teach my catechism class that grace is God's undeserved love. But that definition can be a little abstract. The idea behind the Greek word is simply a gift. A gift is not something you're entitled to. It's not something that you've worked for or earned. A gift is something someone gives to you. When my parents paid for all five of us to fly to Germany, that was a gift. If they had never paid for a European vacation for my family, could I complain about that? No! I have no intention of flying my kids to Germany when they have families. No child has a right to expect that of their parents. And if we had acted like they owed us this rich gift, how do you think my dad and mom would've felt? Angry? Frustrated that they raised a kid like that? At the very least.

God's grace is a rich gift that he simply chose to give us. What did he give us? Paul says, **“God is able to make all grace abound to you.”** There's more than one kind. The greatest grace is Jesus. Our God loves us so much that before we could even try to earn his love, he gave us eternal life. And he sought us out and made sure that we were baptized and heard the gospel. He made us believers.

There are no greater gifts than those. But there are many more. God gives us pastors and teachers to proclaim the word to us. He gives us a congregation. He gives us a synod through which we proclaim the gospel in every corner of the world. He gives opportunities to show love and to help each another. He gives us even more gifts. How many of you went hungry this morning because you couldn't afford to buy food? How many of you couldn't afford the gas to get to church this morning? God takes care of us, even in this recession. God gives us all that we need and more.

God isn't stingy with us. His gifts don't come once in a blue moon. He showers us with blessings. Just walk through your home today after church and count the furniture and the appliances, the TV's and cable hook-ups, the computers and internet connections. Look at your children. Then run your hand across the cover of your Bible and your catechism and think about all that God has given you through his word. We didn't earn any of it. God simply gave it all to us.

And why? “... so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” God wants us to live our whole lives as a reflection of his love. Now, God is not trying to guilt anyone into doing things for him. He doesn't want us to sigh and do what we have to because we have to and if we don't, we're just going to feel terrible. He wants us to joyfully live in love for him and for each other because we have felt his love. It's not about guilt, but love.

Do we live like that? Is our whole life a reflection of the joyful love of God who didn't hesitate to bend down to this earth and save us? Do we follow in the love of Christ who sacrificed his life to for us? Or do our lives tell another story? We have so much grace in our lives. Yet, it can be very difficult to be generous. Sometimes, at the heart of our struggle to be generous lies a simple math problem: if I gave this much to the Lord, I'll have that much less left for my needs and for my family's. The truth is, math isn't our problem. Selfishness is. Our sinful hearts are greedy and selfish. We aren't born equipped to trust in God. Think for a moment about the richest people you know – people whose kids will never have to worry about anything. Are their children generous and kind and thoughtful? Sometimes. But all too often, they're selfish. They think the whole world owes them. They don't care about the rest of us.

My friends, spiritually speaking, we are those rich kids. God has given us everything and it's very easy for us to fall into thinking that we deserve the blessings he piled up around us. It's easy for us to think that we have a right to be happy and to have all our needs supplied. But we have no such right, no matter how hard it is for Americans to accept that. Every blessing we have is a gift God gives us, a gift we don't deserve. He gives them all so that he can reach into our sinful hearts and change us so that we abound in every good work. So that we live our whole lives in generous, giving love toward God and toward the people around us.

When we don't live that way, we slap God in the face. But the grace of God is greater than our sin. It's greater than our ingratitude. It's greater than our inborn sense of entitlement. God sent Jesus to defeat that sin in our hearts. Jesus alone had a heart that truly and humbly responded to God's grace. His perfect, lifelong response to God counts today for us. You know, when you're working on your computer and you save a file that has the same name as another file, the computer asks you if you want to erase the file that's already there. God saved Jesus' life under your name. So he erased the sinful life you've actually lived. When he looks you up on his database, he finds the perfect, generous love of Jesus. And he also finds Jesus' blood. Jesus died because we don't appreciate all that God has given us, because in our heart of hearts, it's natural for us to think that God owes us all that he's given us and maybe even a little bit more. Jesus died because that sin deserves death and hell. On the cross he paid for all that sin and pride. He stood where we should stand. God the Father, in his grace, called him to do that. And Jesus did. That is grace, my friends.

II.

That grace does change us. But it's hard for us to see the change sometimes. Sometimes, when we hear God's call to abound in good works – in love and in generosity – all we feel is guilt. We feel like failures. But by God's grace, we're not failures. God has changed us. The point Paul is making today is that Christians really are different. **Who is truly generous? The Christian who abounds in God's grace.**

Every time we come here, God piles his grace on us. Which means, we are abounding in his gifts and in his love. That means we are abounding in good works. St. Paul quotes from Psalm 112: **“As it is written: ‘He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’”** Who is “he”? Who scatters abroad his gifts to the poor? Whose righteousness endures forever? Well, it's natural for us to assume that's God. And 99% of the time, we'd be right. But not this time. If you turn to the psalm, you'll find that says, **“Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands.”** It's his righteousness that endures forever – the psalm says it twice! The righteousness of the man who trusts in God endures forever, because it is a work that God himself does in our hearts. It will last until eternity.

So who scatters gifts abroad to the poor? The man who trusts in God. My friends, we do. That is the gift of God that we have. When God forgives our selfishness and pride, he changes us. He sends his Holy Spirit into our hearts through that gospel and he makes us abound in every good work. Now, we'll never be perfect in this life, but the more we receive his grace through the word and the sacraments, the more we scatter God's love abroad.

Now, to a certain extent, we have to accept what God promises here on faith. It's always going to be easier for me to see my failures than for me to see the success God is working in me. In a sinful world, that's a good thing because that keeps me humble. It keeps me focused on the grace of God. Every time I fail to be

generous to the Lord or to people in need or to fellow Christians, I show how much I need the forgiveness Christ won for me and seeing that keeps me from thinking that I'm earning heaven when by God's grace I am generous. I earn nothing by being generous. But the gift of God is that I am generous, even if I have trouble seeing it. First of all, because Jesus was generous for me and that's what God sees. Secondly, because the gospel is working in my heart and every halting step that it takes in changing me is the work of God. Even if it seems like it's nothing to me, it's still part of God making me rich in the gospel. When you hear the message, God is working on you. It's that simple.

But that does not mean that we can be passive and just wait for God to hit us with a thunderbolt from heaven so that we change. We are new and different now. And part of God's grace is a determination to keep growing. The new believer God put inside us hates sin and pride and selfishness. He understands the opposition from the sinner that still lives inside us, but the new believer comes to hear the word, repents of his sin, and strives every day to live a new and better life under God.

That believer does live in you. Give him free reign. Not because you feel guilty. But because you are forgiven. God is not going to punish you. God loves you. Now he calls you to reflect his love. He calls that grace, too. In the chapter before this one, God calls us to excel in "the grace of giving." Helping the poor, working for the benefit of others in our homes and our jobs and our lives, contributing to the work we do here at Peace and throughout the world is a gift God gives us. A major step in our growth in grace is changing the way we look at those opportunities. How do you feel when the collection plate comes down the pew? How do you feel when someone sticks a filthy hand out to you looking for a handout? How do you feel when someone from church or some other area of your life asks you to give up your Saturday and come and do something for them?

God wants us to look at those moments as gifts of his love, not as burdens that we hate. Do you? I don't, not always. It's a struggle. My sinful heart rebels. But that's why Jesus came. He died because we don't like this gift of God – I'd much rather he gave me another free trip to Europe! Jesus paid for my sinful attitude. And he rose to declare me and you forgiven, totally and absolutely.

Live in forgiveness. Change your attitude. Remind yourself that God gives you these opportunities because he loves you. Forget about the math that says if you do this, you will have less time, less money, less whatever. God promises that he will make you rich in every way. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that you'll consider yourself to be rich in the way the world thinks of wealth. But it does mean that you will not be able to make yourself poor by being generous because God promises that he will bless you beyond your ability to give. Trust in him and his promises. That will make you truly generous, even as Jesus is. Amen.