

## Let's Go Deeper...

### Wednesday, October 19

*Grace and Gratitude*, our fall stewardship emphasis, commenced on Sunday with a whimsical look at the Macedonians' unfathomable response to the Apostle Paul's stewardship campaign. They *begged* for the favor of making an offering!



**“I have to tell you, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God which was shown in the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. They gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, **even begging for the favor of taking part in the campaign!**” (2 Corinthians 8:4)**

We pondered the Macedonians' response in my Sunday School Class during the 9:30 a.m. hour.

I passed out a just-for-fun quiz on Christians and our giving. The answers are at the end of this week's "Let's Go Deeper."

### **By the Numbers: Christians and Generosity**

- 1) Studies consistently estimate that 21<sup>st</sup> century American Christians give on average \_\_\_\_% of their income to the church.
- 2) The average offering by adults who attend U.S. Protestant churches is about \$ \_\_\_\_ a week.
- 3) During the Great Depression, Christians were putting \_\_\_\_% of their income into the offering plate.
- 4) \_\_\_\_% of church *members* report that they give nothing at all to the church.
- 5) \_\_\_\_% of American Christians say that they tithe (give 1/10<sup>th</sup> of their income).
- 6). The largest majority of people who tithe say they started giving 10% or more of their income during which decade of their lives?
- 7) On average, \_\_\_\_% of a local church budget goes toward staff.
- 8) On average, \_\_\_\_% of a local church budget goes toward property.
- 9) On average \_\_\_\_% of a local church budget goes toward program.
- 10) On average \_\_\_\_% of a local church budget goes toward outreach.

After taking the quiz, I wrote an equation on the dry erase board that just doesn't seem to add up.

Severe test of affliction + extreme poverty = abundance of joy + wealth of liberality

How do you explain that? I asked the class to come up with a list of reasons why people give. I told them to list all the reasons they could think of—the good as well as the bad. Here's what they came up with:

- God's directive in Scripture.
- Knowing others will be blessed/ benefitted by my gifts
- Tax deduction
- Jesus' example
- It feels good to give
- Being able to make a difference in others' lives
- Acknowledgement and recognition
- Saving and/or rebuilding lives
- The joy of helping others
- Empathy – I've received help in a time of need. Now I want help others.
- Pay it forward
- As a way of saying Thank You to God
- Guilt
- Peer pressure
- "Fire insurance": Giving in order to "get into heaven."
- To create a legacy: giving a gift that keeps on giving.
- To exert power: If you don't do what I want, I will withdraw my giving.
- Because I ought to: a sense of duty.
- Sharing with others: I have more than enough.
- Joining my gifts with others' gifts: we can do together what we can't do alone
- "The Prosperity Gospel": my giving will come back to me and increase my material wealth

This year's theme of *Grace and Gratitude* suggests giving is a response of gratitude to the grace we have received from God.

Graced by God's hands, we are grateful;  
Grateful, we extend our hands and graciously offer our gifts.

In the case of those Macedonians, amazing grace stirred profuse gratitude from which some amazing generosity proceeded. Here's to those amazing Macedonians... and to the Centralians for whom grace and gratitude yield generosity beyond measure.

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Answers to the quiz: 1) 2.2% 2) \$17 3) 3.3% 4) 35-50% 5) 17% 6) 20s 7) 50% 8) 25% 9) 15% 10) 10%