



discussion paper on **Theology**

Giving in Grace is based on a theology of giving in response to God's love and his overwhelming generosity. It is based on the premise that giving is an act of worship, thanksgiving and discipleship and that giving in this way enables us to share in God's action in his church, his world and in us, as we are transformed by the grace of giving.

Throughout the Bible we learn of God's generosity and his desire for a response of love, worship and thanksgiving. This response has to come from right attitudes of the heart, *'to do justice to love mercy and to walk humbly with God'* (Micah 6:8 abridged).

Right from the beginning we learn of God's creation and generosity. In Genesis 4 we read of the first offerings to God from Cain and Abel. Within the Old Testament the tithes for payment of the Levites' priesthood, care for the poor, and celebration of God's goodness are established. Transgressions, both of the tithe and the principles of justice and charity are condemned by the prophets. *'Return to me, and I will return to you', says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' 'Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me!' But you say, 'How are we robbing you?' 'In your tithes and offerings!' (Malachi 3:7-8) 'You have sent widows away empty-handed, and the arms of the orphans you have crushed'. (Job 22:9)*

Within the New Testament the Gospels present Jesus speaking more on money and possessions than either prayer or faith. He gives no instructions on giving but it is clear that he regards money as a threat to faith, *'No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other, You cannot serve both God and Money'* (Matthew 6:24). The stories of the rich young

man, and the rich fool with his barns (Luke 12) show the futility of becoming wedded to possessions and wealth.

Jesus' teaching on the greatest commandments can be applied to how we spend our money as well as how we order our life. *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'* This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: *'you shall love your neighbour as yourself.'* (Matthew 22:37-39). If we claim to love God and our neighbour and do not show that in how we spend our money then we are not showing our faith in practical ways. *'What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?'* (James 2:14-16).

This very practical attention to the needs of others as part of our expression of faith is also expressed in the Pauline teaching on giving. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 he exhorts the Corinthians to follow the example of their brothers in Macedonia in order to help the church in Jerusalem. Not once in the whole two chapters does he mention the word money! For Paul the collection is a clear theological statement about grace, trust, interdependence of the churches, love and service.

For many Christians today this message continues to be a real challenge. Money can be a good servant and terrible master; like salt water it will never satisfy our thirst and always leave us wanting more. The interdependence of the church is a theological statement exemplified by the parish share system. But does your church plead as the Macedonians did to be allowed to share in the grace of giving to other churches? To trust God means to give

to Him first and trust that there will be sufficient for your own needs. This needs real courage in an age when those of us who can afford to insure against any possibility, do so. Many regard 'service' as a physical act - the flower arranging, the Church Warden's duty, singing in the choir etc. But giving is an act of ministry for both mission giving and our own churches' ministry; it isn't an either/or - it is both.

To love is to give; *For God so loved the world that he gave...* (John 3:16). It is a crime and a betrayal of trust to love one's children but not provide for them. It is an act of faith and love to care for God's church, and God's children in need, as part of our expression of love for Him. It is the only way we can respond - after all we can never out-give God. David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. *David said: 'Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you and of your own have we given you.'*

(1 Chronicles 29:10-14)

The grace of giving is a gift; we all know people who love to give. But it is also a discipline that can be practiced and can be received through this practice. *"Now as you excel in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you so we want you to excel also in this grace of giving"* (2 Corinthians 8:7)

Discussion points for small groups

1. What are our initial thoughts on this paper? Had we realised that there was so much about giving in the Bible? That Jesus spoke so much about money and possessions?
2. Do we agree that our attitude to giving takes the temperature of our faith in faith in Jesus?
3. Do we usually think of our giving to God as an act of worship?
4. Is our giving to our church our first priority in our giving – if not why not?
5. Do we regularly review our pattern of giving to our church?
6. What do we think about giving in proportion to what God gives to us?
7. What would we like to do about our giving and how can we take practical steps to move to where we would like to be?

