

Copyright October 6 & 7, 2018. All Rights Reserved. Geist Christian Church

Title: The Discipleship Gene: Giving

Date: October 6 & 7, 2018

Preaching: Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

Scripture: [Mark 12:41-44](#)

Text: [2 Corinthians 8:1-12](#)

E-mail: [Randy Spleth](#)



Skeletons are in. You knew that already, seeing them in the stores and your neighborhood as we get ready for Halloween. October is always the skeleton month. But those aren't the skeletons that I'm talking about. I'm talking about some famous skeletons discovered lately. Did you hear that an archeologist found the skeleton of the

pirate "Black Sam?" Samuel "Black Sam" Bellamy flew the Johnny Rogers from 1716-1717 as he sailed up and down the eastern seaboard. According to Forbes magazine, he accumulated as much as \$120 million worth of loot. Despite his name, he perceived himself to be a Robin Hood of the sea. How do they know the skeleton is Black Sam? They know by comparing the DNA of living Bellamy family with the skeleton's genetic make-up. ¹

It is the same way another famous skeleton was identified, dug up in a London parking lot. When they discovered the skeleton, they noticed a curved spine which matched descriptions of King Richard the III. He was killed during the War of Roses in 1485 but the location was a mystery. A DNA test confirmed it. Two living descendants of Richard's sister, Anne of York provided samples and again, it was a match. It's why skeletons are in. The genetic material of living people can be used to identify pirates and kings hundreds of years after their death. ²

The question today is this. If someone asked you for a sample, would they discover that your genetic make-up matches Jesus? Do you have the giving gene?

This is the final week in an annual series looking at the genetic makeup of a fully committed follower of Jesus. We've discovered there is a gene sequence that one leads to another. We began five weeks ago with the gathering gene. We gather in worship to honor and praise God because God so loved the world that He gave his only Son. Gathering is about worship but it is also about giving, God's gift of grace.

The second characteristic is connecting. We connect with one another around the Word of God and are spiritually transformed into the likeness of Jesus, who though rich became poor by giving his life. Spiritually transformed, we become carriers of the third gene of discipleship, serving. Serving together we build the Body of Christ into a community giving to the needs those among us. But there are needs beyond us and the fourth discipleship gene is caring. It is expressed in works of love and compassion, in life-giving and sustaining support of those in need.

Now, we look at the final genetic characteristic, giving. Like the previous characteristic, the giving gene is clearly pictured in the early church community. There is perhaps no greater treatment on this gene than Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Two full chapters describe it. The context is a conversation about the collection for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, a gift that has enormous spiritual implications.

This collection is widely discussed in Paul's letters and is also found in the Book of Acts. It was a special offering to show love, appreciation, and support of the church leaders. Twelve months have passed since the wealthy Corinthians Christians agreed to make a contribution. But the collection stalled and the commitment is unfulfilled. Paul writes to them, not to shake them down and shame them into giving a certain amount of money. Rather, his strategy is to reveal a number of touchstones of how giving operates in the lives of a faithful follower. He does so pointing to the Christians at Macedonia who are demonstrating the giving gene. Grace is the framework.³

He begins saying, "We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia." (2 Corinthians 8:1). Paul doesn't want them to know about their grace; rather he wants them to know God's grace. He's not saying, look at them. He is saying, I want you to discover what motivates them. I want you to have what they have, the experience of the grace of God that begins, sustains, and deepens genuine Christian giving. The Macedonians know this grace because "...they gave themselves first to the Lord and, then by the will of God, to us." (2 Corinthians 8:5b) Paul says their primary giving was an act of worship; they were first giving themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. To put it another way, the only way the Macedonians were able to give was because of their commitment to Jesus. Too often, we get that backward. We think, "I give therefore I'm a Christian." It is the other way around. "I am a follower of Christ, therefore I give."

There is an old story about a very wealthy man who had never been known for his generosity to the church. The church was involved in a big financial program and they resolved to pay him a visit. When the committee met with the man one afternoon, they said that in view of his considerable resources they were sure that he would like to make a substantial contribution to this program.

"I see," he said, "so you have it all figured out, have you? In the course of your investigation did you discover that I have a widowed mother who has no other means of support but me?" No, they responded, they did not know that. "Did you know that I have a sister who was left by a drunken husband with five children and no means to provide for them?" No, they said, we did not know that either. "Well, sir, did you know also that I have a brother who is cripple due to an automobile accident and can never work another day to support his wife and family." Embarrassingly, they responded, no sir, we did not know that either. Well, he thundered triumphantly, I've never given any of them a cent so why should I give anything to you?"⁴ He makes a point. He had never given of himself so he never gave.

Giving is an outgrowth of a commitment to Jesus. It is only by experiencing the love and grace of God that the giving gene is revealed. This means the giving gene is inevitably the result of a warmed heart. That shouldn't surprise anyone. Jesus says it this way, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart." (Matthew 6:21) Paul drives this theme home by twice calling upon the Corinthians to demonstrate their love with giving. He says giving is a test of the genuineness of your love, it is proof of your love. Giving is never truly about money; it is a barometer of the heart.

In a previous letter to the Corinthians, Paul had already talked about how important the heart is to giving. He says, "If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body, but do not have love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:3) When challenging them to understand the genetic characteristic, he uses all sorts of heart-oriented words, words like "readiness," and "desire," and "earnestness" which reveal what our attitude about giving is really is. It is about our love of God or of money.

To illustrate this, a minister did an unusual thing with his congregation. One Sunday, when the offering was received, he had it brought back down the aisle. He took the plates and held them up in the air and he gave this prayer: "Lord, regardless of what we say about you, this is really what we say about you, this is really how we feel about you. Amen."⁵ He was driving home Paul's point. Your money follows your heart. Each week, the offering has much more to do with what's going on in our hearts that with what is in

our hands. The Macedonians gave because they experiencing the overflowing love of God and it filled their hearts.

The giving gene is not a way of showing God how much we can do for God. Rather, it is a way of illustrating how much we love God for what God has done for us. Why? Because Jesus doesn't want your money. What he wants is your heart. Once you give him your heart, everything else falls in place because God's grace changes your heart. The desire to love and express that love in giving comes directly from God through the Spirit. Without the grace of Jesus, we can become touchy, irritated sometimes even angry about giving.⁶

The giving gene is an outgrowth of commitment to Jesus. It reflects the condition of your heart. And it expresses your spirit, it demonstrates joy. Having given their lives to Jesus and in doing so, experienced the transforming grace that warmed their hearts, they had joy. "... their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part." (2 Corinthians 8:2b). There was something much deeper and more important than circumstances. It was the joy they experienced in the grace of God.

Joy depends on grace. The Macedonians giving wasn't an expression of a personal moral virtue or out of some misguided sense of guilt that it was the thing to do. They weren't making a public demonstration of compassion and expecting recognition for their benevolence. It wasn't about paying a bill or doing their part. They certainly weren't giving because they could easily afford it. They experienced the love of God and so filled them with overflowing joy that they had to express their joy by giving.

The giving gene comes from a commitment to Jesus which leads to a transformed heart filled with love and joy. And it is demonstrated sacrificially. The Macedonians were rock-bottom poor, yet the grace of God worked in them in that despite their extreme poverty, they begged for the privilege of giving. Like the widow, Jesus watches at the temple who was only able to give two small coins to the treasury, yet from Jesus' point of view, she gave all that she had to God, so it was with the Macedonians. Paul mentions nothing about an amount that they have given. Instead, he draws attention to the condition of their circumstances as an example that giving is not about what you have or don't have, whether you are rich or poor. To make this point he contrasts the poor Macedonians with the richest man to ever live, saying "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich." (2 Corinthian 8:9) The expression of their giving was sacrificial. They were what Paul would later describe as "imitators

of God" for just as "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2), so too the Macedonian's sacrificed.

This is not a challenge to be reckless or abandon our responsibility to care for ourselves. Nowhere in the New Testament is that suggestion. In fact, stewardship of your resources is important to planning your gift giving. We will see that in the next four weeks in our series on Defying Gravity. The point Paul makes is this. A life given to Jesus is filled with grace, love, and joy which leads to sacrificial giving. Commitment, followed by the experience of grace leads to joyful, sacrificial giving.

How are you doing with this genetic characteristic? Do you have the giving gene? It is a real thing. Scientists have discovered that COMT Val158Met is a genetic polymorphism that can determine a person's giving tendencies. There is even a test for it. I thought about buying kits for everyone. We could all swab our cheeks and send them in. Then, in a couple of weeks, we could find out if you have the gene. You can actually get two copies of the gene, one from your father or one for your mother. ⁷ It would be expensive and perhaps, a little uncomfortable, like trying to look at the skeletons in your closet. But it is October.

It would not be correct. Even though the science would be right, it's not the whole story. The giving gene isn't just passed along by your mother or father. It comes when you give your life to Jesus, experience God's grace and are so filled love and joy that you just have to give. I pray that just like that described the Macedonians, it will, if not now soon describe you.

¹ <http://mentalfloss.com/article/530694/archaeologists-say-they-may-have-found-skeleton-pirate-black-sam-bellamy>

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leicestershire-41174229>

³ Short D. Grace and Generosity: An Expository Reflection on 2 Corinthians. *Crux*. 2016;52(1):36-43.

⁴ Blair, B. Giving. <https://sermons.com/sermon/giving/1337456>

⁵ Blair, B. Giving.

⁶ Short, D. Grace and Generosity.

⁷ <https://easterseals.ca/english/giving-gene/>