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GOD'S BLESSING CYCLE (PART 1)

2 Corinthians Series | *2 Corinthians 8:1-24*

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I ask that you would settle my heart and allow me to think clearly now. I just come before you and ask for your grace to impart truth today that you impressed on my heart. Lord, I'm just impressed with how gracious you are, how much you're a good, good Father. You give good gifts to us and I want to be like that. I want to be like someone who's gracious. Gracious in my speech, gracious in my interactions with people. So this morning as we look at your word, we ask that you'd use it to prick some things inside of our hearts to be more like you and to follow your ways. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

At Calvary Chapel Living Hope we teach the Bible verse by verse. That means we take a book of the Bible and we just go through it as it comes. We look for practical principles that we can apply to our own lives. The idea is we want to take Jesus home. We want to not just leave it here. We want to go home, we want to be different people, we want to respond to the way God has initiated with us and we want to follow His ways. We want to think differently, we want to act differently, and God's word is the tool that He uses to conform us in that special way, to transform our minds.

Today we're going to look at an invitation. In fact today this is an invitation to God's blessing cycle. In order to understand God's blessing cycle, we have to understand four truths and I'm not going to get through them all today. I already know that. But we're going to get through some of them today. Because we want to understand and receive God's blessing in our lives. We want to maximize that blessing and take advantage of all that God has for us. I mean that's what I want. I want all. Whatever you have for me God, I want it all. And so today we're going to learn more about what that looks like as we look at 2 Corinthians 8.

We're in 2 Corinthians 8 because we've gone through chapters 1-7 already and now we enter chapter 8. As we go into chapter 8 we're switching subjects here from the subjects we talked about in the previous chapters and Paul is addressing a new topic as he enters into this passage.

So the first thing I want to do is I'm going to look at the whole passage today, twenty-four verses, but I want you to stand with me, if you would. Please stand. We're going to look at only the verses 1-9 to give you an idea of what's happening in the passage and then I'll bring the rest of them in as we go. You can look in your own Bibles please, if you'd like, in this passage or your electronic Bible. We used to say "open your Bibles," now we say "turn on your Bibles." But anyway. This is a passage from 2 Corinthians 8:1-9.

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

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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.

There's a lot more in the passage. You can go ahead and sit down. Let me give you some backstory so you understand what's happening as Paul is writing these words to the Corinthians.

There was a church where all of this Christianity started. It was the church in Jerusalem. There was the day of Pentecost where 3,000 people were saved. Many of those people had come to the city from all over the world and they had come for Pentecost, the holiday, and so when they went home, they took the faith with them.

But God had more ideas about how to pass the faith onto the world than just these people who visited. So there was a persecution in the area. Paul was part of that. He's Paul the apostle, but his name was Saul. He came in and he wanted to kill Christians. He was part of this persecution that took place that pushed all the Christians all over the place. So they too are traveling and they're carrying with them the gospel of Jesus Christ. So churches are being established all over the place.

Paul is a missionary. He's going to start some of these churches. He's going to encourage some of the churches that are here. Peter is also traveling around. We see churches growing and flourishing.

Well now in our story we're about twenty years later. There was a famine in Jerusalem and in Israel and because of that the Christians there were suffering. They didn't have the food that they needed because of the famine and the poverty now that existed there. So Paul, representing the church and the churches, decided that we're going to collect an offering, a gift for them. It's as if there was a disaster in Florida or in Texas or in Louisiana. So we're going to look for a way to bless those people. So a collection is gathered from the different churches.

Now Paul is writing to the Corinthian church and he's explaining to them there's this need. He's going to actually say in the next verses when I read them to you that they were the first ones to step up and say we want to give. But now they've really kind of not given for a while. Paul is saying let me tell you about the Macedonian churches. They're across the big bay there. They're

in another group of churches and they're amazing, he's saying, and I want you to learn from them. Because the Macedonian churches, even though they're experiencing their own problems and trials over here, it caused them to want to give. And they themselves have given significantly to this collection that we're taking to Jerusalem. So that collection is going to be going and now he's writing the letter to encourage the Corinthian church to participate in that. It's really an invitation to this cycle of blessing. And he wants them to know this has been official for you. Not just for the need that's in Jerusalem, but it's going to be beneficial for you. You want to be blessed? Participate in this, is what he's saying to the Corinthians.

So he sends the letter by way of Titus. So Titus now is going to take the letter back to them and he's going to encourage them and he's going to give them instructions and they're going to collect the offering and bring it back.

Now in the midst of that whole story, God has a message for us and it's this message of joining into this cycle of blessing. It's an invitation. I want you to see how this develops. Because I don't think normally when we hear about this subject it starts in the right place. So I want to help you understand how this cycle of blessing takes place.

In order to do that, let's lay this out on a screen with some boxes and circles to get the idea of what this blessing cycle looks like. You have to understand that it starts with the fact that God gives grace. That God is a gracious God. He's a good, good Father. He loves us. That's who we are, as the song that we just sang reflects. God is gracious and He gives us so many things.

Let's look at the verses and then I'm going to comment on them some more. These are the verses. If you saw in the box there were some verses underneath because I want you to see that every one of these parts of the blessing come from specific verses out of this passage in 2 Corinthians 8. There are other passages of scripture that I'll refer to that further develop this or even repeat it in some different ways. We'll look at those verses too.

But in 2 Corinthians 8:1 (and then we'll jump to verse 9) it says this: *And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.*

I want you to understand the word *grace* is used two different ways in the passage. You'll see this develop. The first way is the grace of Jesus Christ coming to us to be our Savior. We recognize that Jesus Christ came as a gift (I guess is the best way to say it). He is a gift for us that disrupted the thinking of the Jewish people at the time. They knew a Messiah was coming, they just didn't know who the Messiah was. So now the Messiah comes and a number of the Jews became Christians at that point and then the message starts to extend to people who were not Christians. So the Corinthians are non-Jewish people. There's this whole wrestling in the New Testament about is this Jewish or not Jewish and so they're wrestling with this whole idea.

But the fact is that the gospel message didn't just come for the Jewish people; it came also for the non-Jewish people. It's a message that's not just about Jesus Christ died on the cross, but it's so much that He gives us as a result of that. God is gracious. He is known for being gracious. So there's that one definition of grace.

The other definition of grace, which is really fascinating in the passage, is this grace of giving. Those are the exact words that are there in the passage. We'll see them in a moment. There's a grace of giving. Now He's given this grace of giving to the Macedonian churches. I just want you to understand this, he says to them. The Macedonian churches have received the blessing cycle, this grace of giving, and all of it's involved in that grace. You've got to understand this, he says. And I want to encourage you guys to do the same thing.

So it starts with God. Even our giving that we do, our generosity starts with who God is. If you start generosity with yourself, do you know what you feel like? Maybe a sense of obligation. Oh. Rules. I got to do this. In fact there are some churches that heavily emphasize rules. It's all about the rules. You've got to do this, this, this, and this. And those rules you better abide by or you're not going to be in the good graces of the church. That's a problem. God wants to know it doesn't start with rules. It starts with God and who He is, and then it comes to us in a very powerful way.

The second verse, verse 9, in the passage illustrates the first kind of grace, which is that Jesus Christ came. *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.*

We are rich ourselves. We have all kinds of blessings. So our blessing account is rather large. So I want you to get the idea, first of all, as we enter into this blessing cycle it doesn't start with you or me or a church. It starts with God and His graciousness and who He is and what He's done for us. That's where we start in this passage.

Now if we go back to our diagram we go to the second part that it's an invitation, not a command. Very interesting to look at it this way because it's an invitation to something bigger that God wants to do in our lives. We see that in verse 8 of chapter 8. So let me just show you that verse so you can look it up in your own Bible.

It says – *I am not commanding you.* This isn't a command. It's an invitation. *But I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.* I want you to be able to see what other people are doing and I want you to see the blessing that they are receiving because I want you to experience the same thing. That's what he's saying. It's an invitation. Join into the blessing cycle.

Now notice, all of this so far we haven't even gotten to the cycle part. You just have to know where it starts. Because if we know where it starts then it changes our whole perspective on giving itself. It starts with God. He gave His only begotten Son, but He's also given us peace to deal with the challenges that we face in our lives. He's given us the perseverance to hang in there, even after we feel like quitting. He's given us the ability to overcome an addiction. He's given us the friendships that we enjoy in the family of God. God has done amazing things for us and those blessings are huge.

So He gives this invitation and I want to show you what that's going to look like. So the first part of the blessing cycle, the first principle within these four principles is this one: It starts with thankfulness on our part that prompts dedication. I want you to see that there's a motivation that

we have to participate in the blessing cycle. It's not by obligation. It's an invitation that comes from another motivation. In the passage we're going to see in 9:15 it's thankfulness.

In fact let me just show you the verses that illustrate this from our passage. Now today we're looking at 2 Corinthians 8, but the whole passage where he's talking about the giving principle and how to give to these churches in Jerusalem is in chapter 8 and 9. So I want to zip all the way to the end of chapter 9 as a preview and I want you to see the last verse, verse 15, and I want you to see the motivation there.

He says – *Thanks be to God for his indescribable, incredible, awesome gift.* There's a motivation that Paul is bringing to this of thanksgiving that prompts them. Because of God's graciousness, they're going to get involved in this cycle because they're so grateful for all that God has done. And because God has done so much, I want to give back. I want to contribute to what's going on there.

Now I lead a small group during the week on Wednesday evenings. It's a Take Jesus Home group where we get together and talk about the sermon from last Sunday and I use it like a think tank for the sermon coming up this next week.

So I asked the people in the group this week, "What motivates you to be generous?" I was wondering if they would say thankfulness because that's what the passage says. And yes, thankfulness is one of those. But there's a couple of others that I think motivate us to get into the blessing cycle.

Another one they mentioned was compassion. I definitely experience that in my own life. I'm motivated to give because of the compassion that I have for our world, a hurting world that needs help. Christians are known for their compassion, aren't they? Not only Jesus, but the word *compassion* is a great word in the New Testament. It's the word *splagchizomai*. I just like to say that it's one the fun words to say. It's the Greek word that describes compassion that Jesus had that motivated Him to leave His itinerary and go help someone in particular. Oh it's such a great word and that's what motivates us too. We have this sense of compassion for the needs of people out there.

It's Christians because of their compassion that contribute so much. You know how much Christians give. It's primarily Christians who are donating money to causes all over the place. So we help build hospitals, we build schools. When there's a disaster, we are sending down. Lisa Dammann is going down to Texas and she's going to be helping rebuild houses. Why do we do that? It's part of who we are. We're following after a gracious God. God is known by giving and we also are givers and have compassion on this hurting world. And so we're looking for ways to do that.

God has chosen His church to be the vehicle for change in our world today. So in the Old Testament when God first started with people and so on, He chose a family, Abraham's family. It's a beautiful story about how God chose Abraham and He says to Abraham, "*Through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed.*" There was this huge family, all the Jewish people, and it's through them that God would bring this blessing to the world.

Now when we come to the New Testament, we see that God makes the switch. Now He still has a very important place for Israel (and when you study end times, you see where that is), but now Jesus Christ has come in to the picture. Because He has come into the picture there's this switch that takes place now and God has called the church to be this vehicle through which the world is blessed today. That's His vehicle for change.

It's not the family primarily. It's not the government. Although we really want the government to do the right thing and we hope the government is going to bring peace and all these other good things, they have a responsibility, it's not through the government that primarily God is bringing about change to our world.

It's not through the education system. There are some people who say we just got to educate people more. If we can get them to go to school or stay in school or get to college or whatever, then we'll do a lot better. It's not the education system that's going to change our world. The primary vehicle for change is God's church. So as God's church we are compassionate people and we're looking for ways to bless others.

Another motivation mentioned in this small group this week was the one about how I want to be part of something bigger. I really like that. Because I do want to be part of something bigger. I want to make a difference. Young people today as they're growing into their maturity and wanting to start their life, many of them are saying, "I want to make a difference. I don't want to just follow the plan of going to work every day, coming home at night, watching TV, and going to bed. I want to make a difference." People are putting a lot into making a difference today. So when we give generously, we're making a difference. We're participating in God's big picture of what's going on. It's amazing.

So there's some motivation that gets into this blessing cycle. It's this gratefulness or this thankfulness of who God is. It's this picture of God. It's just this I want to be part of what He's doing in his world. I have compassion on other people. So what is the very first step of giving? It's not getting your checkbook out. You guys have got to get this. It's so valuable.

He says to them in verse 5 – *And they exceeded our expectations.* What did they do? *They gave themselves first of all to the Lord.* That's what they did. *And then by the will of God also to us.*

See, when you experience God's graciousness and you recognize that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you personally, this is a personal thing. It's not just a historic thing. It's not just something for the church itself. It's a personal thing. It prompts you to want to do something about it. And that something is to say, "I want to dedicate myself to Jesus Christ. I want to give myself to Him because I know that that is the right way to live. I'm not doing this just so I'll get a blessing. I'm doing it because I'm just so grateful for what He's done." God has aligned our world and set up things in our world. He created it and we follow the instruction manual by asking Him to come into our lives and He does an amazing thing. He changes who we are and good things happen.

So I just want to say, I know some of you have come from a background where rules are really heavy in the church. That might be a Catholic background or this week I'm working with a family from the horse-and-buggy kind of people, from old Mennonite group that have come out of that and they're just trying to recover from the challenges of the rules.

The gospel of Jesus Christ isn't primary about rules. It's about grace. It starts with the character of God and He is so gracious to us. Because He's so gracious to us, we have this thing inside of us, this internal motivation. Not an external motivation to please someone or to abide by the list of some kind, but something that comes from within us that's prompting us to dedicate ourselves to the Lord. That's the very first principle of the blessing cycle is to recognize that we are dedicating ourselves to the Lord.

Ray Stedman is a pastor or was a pastor, a great theologian, wrote a tremendous material, preached so many sermons. There's a quote that he gave that struck me this week. He says – “The only true motive for giving is the grace of God, the goodness of God to you. If God has not done anything for you, then for goodness sake do not give Him a dime. But if He has, pour it out according to the measure that you have received.” A wonderful Welsh pastor and author, Selwyn Hughes wrote: “Remember this: You cannot serve God and money, but you can serve God with money.” I liked that. It's about dedicating your heart to the Lord, recognizing that the grace of God is where it starts and then it comes down to us and our actions.

So the very first and most important principle of the cycle as we get down to this cycle is that there's thankfulness. We're thankful and that thankfulness produces in us this dedication of our whole selves.

I like to picture it this way: When we pass the offering buckets around, we all should be getting in it. That's what should be happening. So if you're giving a portion of your funds into the offering bucket, what you're doing is basically saying, “this is symbolic of me giving you all of what I have.”

The second principle or the second part of the blessing cycle is practice the grace of giving. Think about it as this grace of giving. That's how it's referred to in the passage. It's a grace of giving and something that God allows you to be a part of and it's a grace. It's something that enhances your life. It's something that God has given.

There are two verses there that I want to refer to, verse 7 and verse 24. But notice how he's describing giving and how it integrates into your life, how it fits in. He says this: *But since you excel in everything—in faith.* In other words we're building our faith, we're trying to grow in that, allowing God's grace to strengthen us. We're trying to excel in all these things. We want all our faith to grow. Yeah, that's true. We want our speech to be gracious, like our heavenly Father's work in our lives. We want to be gracious in speech. In knowledge, we want to grow in that grace.

In complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. It's just a piece of who you are, in other words. It's not just an add-on. It's all part of your spiritual walk before God. But as God is growing you, there's a grace that you want

and that's a grace of giving. It's just a strategic part of our spiritual growth and God wants to grow us in that kind of way, to advance us on in the grace of giving to enhance what goes on inside of our hearts.

Verse 24. This is the very last verse of chapter 8. He says – *Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.* What he's saying is grow up. Grow up in your faith. I'm not trying to nurture you. I'm the apostle Paul. I'm trying to help you as a church be strong. As individuals you want to grow in that grace and be the people that God wants you to be. So we grow in this grace of giving. Think about it as this grace of giving. It's kind of a different way for us to think about it in those terms. We're growing in it.

Let me show you another way of looking at this. This is a generosity ladder that describes how this grace of giving grows in our lives. It starts with an occasional giving. That's you come to church and you see what's going on, so you give here at this time and then there's another time you give. There's this occasional giving that you do in the time of the church. Great.

In fact it makes a very important statement. This occasional giving makes a very important statement about you and who you are. So when someone gives at Calvary Chapel Living Hope for the first time, I ask those people who are dealing with finances to let me know and I send the letter to that person. When they give the first time, I say, "Thank you for your gift." I do that for several reasons. One is it makes a statement about the person that God is doing a work in their heart and they're being generous. But it also makes a statement about their commitment to Calvary Chapel Living Hope, that there's something here at this particular church that they see that God is doing and they want to be a part of it. Occasional giving is how a lot of people start and it makes a statement of who they are and their relationship to God's church.

A second advancement then as we're working on our giving is to move to regular giving. That's when you have a kind of systematic way where you are determining how much you're going to give and it you set it up somehow. You can write a check every time you come to church or a lot of people use online giving or Bill Pay or something like that so if you're not here it still happens. That makes a statement about you and what you're doing inside, what God is doing inside of you in regards to this regular giving.

Paul wrote an earlier letter to the church in Corinth and He says in 1 Corinthians 16:2 these words: *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your own income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.* Do you see in the passage he's talking about being regular about it. So we advance from occasional giving to regular giving and Paul is encouraging that in that verse.

Next we move to tithing, which is giving 10% and that makes a statement, again, about making our finances a priority and making sure that God is a very important part of that. So there's tithing. And then there's extravagant giving, which is over and above that. That often takes place in our lives. So there's this generosity ladder, this moving in this direction of participating in the blessing cycle that God might have for us.

Now I work with children many times and sometimes parents are asking me how do we deal with this money thing? And I say that's a good thing for us to talk about. Let's talk about it because you want to build patterns with young people early in their lives.

Here's why. When they get to be teenagers and they get their first job... Let's say they're fifteen years old and mowing lawns and all of a sudden they've got some money or they're working for a fast food place and suddenly they're making 150 bucks or 175 bucks working twenty hours a week. One hundred seventy-five bucks a week? I mean this is amazing! Now they have money they never had before. They can hardly wait to spend their 175 bucks on their new shoes, get another cell phone. They start visiting fast food places now because now they've got enough money to stop at Dunkin Donuts every day.

You know, young people today have more expendable income than their parents do. And they're out here spending it like crazy. Right? So let's start this process a little bit earlier. I suggest that when parents are working with their children that they set up some kind of an envelope system to communicate how you're going to work with this.

Let's say a young child, seven or eight years old rakes some leaves or gets an allowance or something and he gets ten dollars. I would suggest something like this. You take five dollars and that's how much the child can spend. That's 50% that they can enjoy. That's more than most of us, right? We don't get 50% of our expendable income. But they get five dollars out of that. Then we suggest three dollars or 30% go to savings and then 10% they give to the church and another 10% they put in an envelope. I love this envelope. This is the giving envelope. It accumulates there until the child decides where to give it.

So the child is looking for needs that might be out there and saying, "I want to give to that need," or "I hear this lady's having trouble, could we do that?" I want to give my money to that missionary that came through," or something like that. So the child helps determine where that last 10% goes.

The idea is we're helping children develop patterns, ways to look at money because when they get to be teenagers and they start spending money like crazy, they start developing a pattern that way and then we have a problem.

Here's what the problem is. They start spending more money than they make. And they borrow it from somebody else. They got to pay it back, and that grows into a lifestyle. So there are a lot of adults (I'm sure none of you), but there's a lot of adults who spend more money than they make. I'm telling you, what we need to do is revamp this whole thing. We need to come back and attend Melissa's class that she does on Financial Peace University where they look at the biblical principles of finance and they try to rein all of this in in a way that gets rid of debt, comes back to a place. God is a priority in their finances and the blessings start to take place in their lives. That is big and that's powerful.

I want to read to you now the whole passage. I'm going to stop here after this. There's more here in the blessing cycle. You've got to come back next week and hear what it does for us, what it does for other people, and then where it goes from there. Really fun. But 2 Corinthians 8, I'm

going to read the whole passage through verse 24. You can look at it in your own Bibles, but I'm going to read what you already read because you're going to understand it more given what I've already shared with you.

It says in verse 1 – And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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.

I'm going to continue and read this. Some of it you'll understand because of what we've already said, but some of it you'll learn about more next week. But catch the whole passage in its context.

Verse 10 says – 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. 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.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. 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, as it is written... This is a quote taken from the story of the manna, when they went out and gathered the manna. Really interesting. We'll get into that next week. 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." What does that have to do with giving? Well you have to come back next week. It'll be great.

Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. You just see the internal motivation here, not the pressure from the top down. And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

Financial integrity in the management of God's funds. Really good. Important.

In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

The blessing cycle is an opportunity to be part of something big. Really big. God is doing something really big in our lives, but also something really big in our world. We have the opportunity to be a part of it. I just want to reflect back. It's not about money. We're going to continue to talk about funds and money next week. It's about who we are, our hearts. The first thing we do is we give our hearts to the Lord.

So if you've never committed yourself to Jesus Christ, now is the time. Say, "I want to give my heart to the Lord. I have been blessed so much. I want to receive more of a blessing and I want to be a part of what God wants to do in this world. I want to be part of something big." I encourage you to make that decision today.

And for those of us who are Christians, we just need to be reminded we are part of something really big. It's a privilege. It's a blessing cycle.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Our heavenly Father, we just thank you for your graciousness to us. At times we take that for granted and we expect things from you that we don't get or we wish you would do things that are not part of your plan. So we sometimes get frustrated and even demanding with you. Lord, forgive us for our sin in that way. Teach us to be responsive to you and your direction. Provide us with insight into our own hearts enough to know that we need you and we must rely on you regularly. Lord, grow us in our own giving to you and to your work I pray. Teach us what that means, each one of us, to be blessed and to bless other people. Lord, we do thank you for choosing people and using people to accomplish your work and your will. We consider it a privilege to be a part of that and we thank you for it. In Jesus' name, amen.