One of the notable qualities of the early church in the New Testament was their generosity in giving. In Acts 2, the early church is described as one that continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, in prayers, being together, having all things in common and one that has a generous heart to give. We read in Acts 2:42-45, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.”

In Acts 4:34-35, their generosity is again displayed, “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.” And again in Acts 11:29, “Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea.”

Today, while we find the church emphasizing on doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers, there is a very obvious want in the area of giving. The cheerful and generous giving that best described the early church is just missing in many of today’s churches. Yes, that quality of giving that moved the early Christians to sell their possessions and goods to be able to give to the Lord and support the work and their fellow believers is obviously
lacking in our time. Thus the need for today’s Christians to learn from the generosity of the early church.

Among the early churches, it was the Macedonian church (comprised the churches in Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica) that was well known in the area of giving. Though known to be poor, they had been generous in their giving and had contributed with great cheerfulness and liberality. In his second epistle to the Corinthians (in chapter 8), the Apostle Paul was trying to encourage the brethren to contribute and give liberally for the relief of the poor brethren in Jerusalem, citing the good examples set by the churches of Macedonia. Consider their generosity:

1. They joyfully and generously gave despite their being poor. The Apostle Paul described the Macedonian churches in 2 Corinthians 8:1-2; “Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.” Even when they themselves were in the midst of great difficulties and deep poverty, their joy abounded to move them to give generously. They did not allow circumstances to hinder them from giving.

Generosity in the midst of poverty! Though being poor is often the reason why many of God’s people hold on to what they have and excuse themselves from giving, we ought to realize that it is possible for one to be poor and still be generous in giving.

2. They willingly gave as much as they were able. 2 Corinthians 8:3, “For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;” The churches in Macedonia acted spontaneously and did not wait to be urged and pressed to give. Paul testified that they gave beyond what could have been expected from them or beyond what would have been thought possible in their condition.

This kind of giving is similar to that of the widow who by giving her two mites did more than the rich men who gave out of their abundance. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 12:43-44, “…Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”

Generosity is best measured not by the sum of what was given but by the sacrifice that comes with it. The Macedonian Christians were willing to forego of that little that they had for the sake of others, trusting the Lord to provide for them.

3. They were determined to give to help meet the needs of others. 2 Corinthians 8:4, “Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.” They insisted that Paul should receive their contribution and pass it on to the poor and needy brethren in Jerusalem. They have strong interest and intense desire to relieve the needs of others!

Generosity comes from a sincere and a pure desire of the heart to give. When you have that genuine concern for the brethren, as constrained by the love of Christ, you will naturally want to give and to give generously.

4. They first gave their own selves to the Lord. 2 Corinthians 8:5, “And this they did, not
as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." Their generosity is founded in true piety and on right priority. They first yielded their own selves to the Lord – an act of total surrender of one's life and one's possession to God. Only after they had given themselves unto the Lord, that they gave themselves unto men according to the will of God.

Learn that he that does not totally yield himself to the Lord will neither yield his possessions to Him. But he that joyfully gives himself will keep back nothing that the Lord requires from him. And it is only when we give ourselves wholly to God that we are able to sincerely give ourselves and our possessions to others.

5. They generously gave to support the work of the Lord. Philippians 4:10, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.” Philippians 4:15-16, “Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.”

Of all the churches in Macedonia, it seems that the church at Philippi was the most distinguished for its generosity. Paul commended them for their care and concern which obviously included their commitment to support him in the Gospel work, as he mentioned in Philippians 4:18 of “having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.”

Generosity knows no boundaries. They generously gave to the poor brethren in Jerusalem and went out of their way to send Epaphroditus to bring their gift to Paul who was then inside the cold prison in Rome. This is far beyond today’s “Out of sight, out of mind” attitude pertaining to the manner of giving to support the workers of the Gospel in missions.

Realize that one’s generosity to support the Lord’s work goes beyond the ministries of the home church to missions in regions beyond, and thus accomplishing great things for the glory of God.

Learning of the generosity of the early church, it would be well to examine ourselves. Have we been generous in our giving? Consider what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:7, “Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.” Like the church in general, we should be steadfast in doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers but is found wanting in the grace of giving. May we abound in this grace too!

Generosity is a wonderful blessing, which when acquired, could lead to the receiving of other blessings. “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Remember, God loves a cheerful giver!