

Generous Giving- 2 Corinthians 8-9

Why we give

The big idea for the series

This series unpacks 2 Corinthians 8-9 where Paul is writing about the gift/donation he is taking to support Christians living in Jerusalem. Through these two chapters he provides helpful principles for why Christians should give generously and enthusiastically to support God's work and God's people.

Background Information

Recommended viewing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62CliEkRCso>

This video gives a great overview of the bible's teaching on generosity. It talks about how we respond to situations of both abundance and scarcity.

Accompanying this video is a series of podcast discussions which are well worth listening to if you'd like to go a lot deeper (which we would definitely recommend). Over five episodes, the Bible Project Team unpack all their thinking behind their summary video and look at the theme of generosity across the entire bible in some detail.

- The series site, linking to different podcast apps, can be found here: <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/series/generosity/>
- To listen to the first episode: <https://thebibleproject.simplecast.com/episodes/abundance-or-scarcity-generosity-e1-dhuSTHPU>

St John's did a series called 'The Generous Life' a few years ago. It was a broader series than this one, touching on a range of topics including hospitality and service.

You can find the study series for that at: stjohnsdc.org.au/teaching

What about tithing?

The topic of tithing will often come up when discussing giving. It is not mentioned specifically in our 2 Corinthians passages but it's good to be aware of the history of giving that God's people have practiced. Here's a brief overview:

Tithing is the Old Testament practice of providing 10% of 'everything from the land' (remember, they lived in a primarily agrarian-farmer culture) to be set aside for use by God. In practice this meant that what was given was used to support the priesthood and those who worked in the temple, so that they could dedicate their time to serving God without worrying about where their next meals came from. There was a second Tithe gathered every third year, of another 10%, whose purpose was to support the needy, primarily widows and orphans (note how God's love for the poor is not limited to the N.T). Freewill giving (over and above tithing), called

offerings, were another accepted practice; however they were not mandated in the law or seen as 'owed', rather they were encouraged and seen as an act of love.

There is a clear sense in the O.T. that God will repay the tithes given. For example, in Malachi 3:10, where God Promises to honour the full tithing by pouring down blessings until there is no need, and the only/one of the only places in the entire bible where God actively encourages His followers to put Him to the test; also of note is how not paying the tithe was seen as robbing from God (as seen by the context of Malachi 3:10)

Importantly, *the New Testament does not call for a tithe to be given* as it was in the Old, merely a request that full-time priests/pastors/ministers be supported. The N.T. writers also call for those who have material possessions to care for those who are needy. Beyond this, Jesus presents us with some deeply challenging teaching around what we do with our wealth and possessions. Being wealthy is not sinful but putting our trust in wealth is clearly not the way of Jesus. To 'love money' or to *have* and do nothing when we see those who *have not* is clearly against N.T. teaching, percentages are irrelevant.

Reference:

Richards, L. O. (1987). [*The teacher's commentary*](#) (pp. 886–887). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Study 1 – A tale of two churches (2 Corinthians 8:1-15)

1. Think of someone that you consider to be a generous person. What makes them generous?
2. Would you describe our church as generous? Why or why not?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

3. In these verses Paul speaks about the Macedonian churches (including Philippi) and the Corinthian church. What do we learn about:
 - a. Their wealth and material circumstances?
 - b. Their generosity in giving?
 - c. Their motivations for giving?
4. Do you think we are more like the Macedonian or Corinthian church in each of these areas? Discuss this both from an individual and group point of view.
5. Paul makes these statements about giving. Have a discussion about what each of them means:
 - a. 'See that you excel in the grace of giving' (v.7)
 - b. 'If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have' (v.12)
 - c. 'Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality' (v.13)
6. How does Jesus give away his riches to make us rich? How should this impact our own generosity?
7. What is one thing from this passage that you need to put into practice?
8. Pray together asking God to help us excel in the grace of giving.

Study 2 – Maintaining the Enthusiasm (2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5)

1. Have you ever been part of an organisation where money was mishandled or defrauded? How did this happen? What impact did this have on people's trust and generosity?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:15-9:5

2. As Paul collects the offering from a variety of churches to take to Jerusalem what safeguards does he describe in this passage for protecting this money?
3. What specific characteristics do the people collecting the money have?
4. Discuss the statement: '*we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of people*'. Is this a principle we should apply today?
5. How might the Corinthians lose their enthusiasm for giving to this collection despite their initial enthusiasm? Have you seen this happen in a group you've been part of? Or in your own life?
6. There seemed to be a very high level of accountability connected with the gift the churches organised. How do you feel about accountability being so closely connected with generosity and giving?
7. How can we encourage each other to maintain our enthusiasm for generosity? Likewise, how can we avoid greed and selfish living?
8. Bad governance and administration can be disastrous for the church and undermine gospel ministry. What can we learn from this passage about the good running of our churches and organisations?
9. Spend some time praying together
 - a. Pray that as a church and as individuals we would continue to grow in generosity, never losing our enthusiasm to give.
 - b. Pray for godly and competent leadership in our church and our diocese (wider church organisation), especially in the area of handling finances.

Study 3 – A call to be Generous (2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

1. What motivates you to give to a cause?
2. What motives you to give specifically to God's mission?
3. Can there be bad motivations for giving as well as good ones? What might these be?

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

1. What do you think Paul means by using the image of sowing and reaping in relation to giving in verse 6?
2. What do we get out of giving generously to others? In what ways does God bless us when we give?
3. Why is compulsion (i.e. someone makes you do it) a bad motivation for giving? (v.7)
4. Would you describe yourself as a cheerful giver? Why or why not?
5. Are you confident that God will provide your needs? What impact does this have on your ability to give generously? Think deeply about this question. What about during times of scarcity like panic buying during a pandemic or a recession?
6. Generosity and Thankfulness are linked together in this passage (verses 11, 12, 15). How do they relate to each other? What is your experience of these two things being connected?
7. In v.13 Paul speaks about how other people praise God for the obedience of the Corinthians in giving generously:
 - a. Whose generosity are we at St John's the beneficiary of?
 - b. Who might later praise God for the generosity we show in 2020? Use your imagination to describe a future scenario in 2040 where this happens.
8. Pray together about the following:
 - a. Thank God for those who have enriched us with their generosity.
 - b. Pray God make give us the right motives for giving as well as the actions
 - c. Pray that our obedience and generosity in the present would produce a harvest of righteousness and thankfulness in the future.