

The Book of 2 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: The Grace of Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1-24

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Second Corinthians 8 begins Paul's two-chapter treatment of Christian giving, and the teacher should present it as Paul does: as a matter of grace rather than law. The doctrinal stakes here are significant and need careful handling. Paul presents New Testament giving as free-will, purposed, proportional, and joyful, flowing from a heart surrendered to God and modeled on the self-giving of Christ. He explicitly refuses to make it a command, and he never appeals to the Old Testament tithe as a binding rule for Christians. The teacher should be ready to show that, under the new covenant, believers are not bound to a fixed ceremonial tithe as law, but are called to a generosity that often exceeds it, given freely from the heart according to what they have.

Two errors should be guarded against, both common in churches today. The first is to bind Old Testament tithing on Christians as a law, as though giving ten percent discharges an obligation and the rest is ours to do with as we please. Paul's framework is different and, in a sense, more demanding: everything we have belongs to the Lord, and we give as grace has gripped our hearts. The second error is the prosperity teaching that turns giving into an investment scheme, give in order to get rich. Paul's motive is the opposite: Christ became poor for our sake, and we give sacrificially in imitation of Him, not as a technique to enlarge our own bank accounts. The teacher should present generosity as cross-shaped self-giving, not self-interested speculation.

At the same time, this chapter is deeply formational and should not be reduced to a lecture on money. It searches the heart. Our giving reveals what we love and whether we have truly given ourselves to the Lord. It calls us to grow in generosity as a grace, to follow through on good intentions, and above all to let the grace of Christ, who made Himself poor to make us rich, reshape the way we hold everything. So aim at both targets. Help students understand clearly why Christian giving is grace and not law and not a prosperity scheme, and lead them into the joyful, Christlike generosity that flows from a surrendered heart.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul describes how the Macedonian churches, in deep poverty and affliction, "overflowed in a wealth of generosity," because "they gave themselves first to the Lord" (vv. 1-5). What does this teach about the true source of Christian generosity, and why does Paul say their self-surrender to God came before, and produced, their generosity with possessions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the surprise of the Macedonian example. These churches were poor and afflicted, yet they overflowed in generosity. Paul deliberately chooses them to dismantle the assumption that generosity is mainly a function of wealth. Their giving did not come from surplus; it came from joy.

Point to the secret Paul names: “they gave themselves first to the Lord.” Their generosity with possessions was the fruit of a deeper surrender. Once they had given themselves to God, giving their money was a small thing. The order matters: self-surrender first, then open hands.

Help students see why this is so important. Many people try to become generous by sheer effort, gritting their teeth to give. But true Christian generosity is not primarily a money problem; it is a heart matter. When the heart belongs to God, the wallet follows. When the heart is withheld, no amount of pressure produces real generosity.

Note that Paul calls their giving a grace, the same word used for God’s saving gift. Their generosity was itself a work of God’s grace in them. We do not manufacture this; we receive it as God captures our hearts, and it overflows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Generosity as the fruit of a heart surrendered to God, not a function of wealth
- Self-surrender to the Lord as the root of true giving (v. 5)
- Giving as a grace worked in us by God, not merely a duty we perform
- The challenge to the assumption that only the wealthy can be generous

Discussion Prompts

- Why did the Macedonians’ generosity flow from poverty and joy rather than wealth?
- What does it mean that they gave themselves first to the Lord?
- How does this challenge the idea that generosity is mainly about how much we have?

Question 2

Student Question:

Examine your own giving honestly. Does it tend to overflow from joy and surrender, or does it feel like a reluctant duty squeezed out under pressure? What does your giving reveal about the condition of your heart toward God right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to look honestly at the spirit of their own giving. The same act, writing a check, can flow from very different hearts: joyful overflow or reluctant obligation, glad surrender or calculated minimum.

Help students see that giving is a kind of spiritual diagnostic. Jesus said that where our treasure is, there our heart will be also (Matthew 6:21). The way we hold our money reveals a great deal about the way we hold God. Reluctant, pressured giving often signals a heart not yet fully surrendered.

Be careful to keep this from becoming mere guilt about amounts. The question is not first how much, but from what heart. A small gift given in joy can be more pleasing to God than a large one given grudgingly, as the widow's mite shows.

Encourage honest reflection and, where needed, repentance, not toward giving more under pressure, but toward giving themselves more fully to God so that generosity can flow freely. The aim is a changed heart, from which changed giving naturally follows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Giving as a diagnostic of the heart's condition (Matthew 6:21)
- The spirit of giving as more fundamental than the amount
- Reluctant giving as a sign of an unsundered heart
- Repentance toward fuller surrender as the path to free generosity

Discussion Prompts

- Does your giving overflow from joy or feel like a squeezed-out duty?
- What does your giving reveal about your heart toward God right now?
- Why does the spirit of giving matter even more than the amount?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul urges the Corinthians, who excel in faith, speech, knowledge, and love, to "excel in this act of grace also" (v. 7). What does it mean that generosity is a grace to be grown and excelled in, like faith or love, rather than a fixed obligation to be merely satisfied?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul tells the Corinthians to "excel in this act of grace also." They prided themselves on excelling in faith, speech, knowledge, and love. Paul adds generosity to that list and calls them to grow in it as they have grown in the others. Giving is a grace to be developed, not a fixed bill to be paid.

Help students grasp the implication. We readily think of growing in faith, knowledge, or love, but we rarely think of growing in generosity. Yet Paul puts it in the same category, a Christian virtue to be cultivated, deepened, and excelled in over a lifetime.

This reframes giving from a static obligation to a dynamic grace. The question is not merely whether we give, but whether we are growing in giving, becoming more generous, freer with our resources, more like our open-handed God as the years pass.

Note the encouragement here. Paul assumes growth is possible. None of us has arrived; all of us can grow. A believer who feels their generosity is stunted can take heart: this is a grace God delights to grow in those who ask Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Generosity as a Christian grace to be cultivated and excelled in
- Giving placed alongside faith, knowledge, and love as a virtue to grow in
- The dynamic of growth rather than a static minimum obligation
- God's delight to grow generosity in those who seek it

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to "excel" in generosity rather than merely satisfy an obligation?
- Why do we rarely think of growing in giving as we do in faith or love?
- What would deliberately growing in generosity look like for you this year?

Question 4

Student Question:

In what areas of the Christian life do you see yourself growing, and is generosity one of them? What would it look like to deliberately "excel" in giving this year, to grow in it on purpose rather than leaving it static?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question invites students to assess their own growth. We can usually point to areas where God is maturing us, in patience, in knowledge, in prayer. The question gently asks whether generosity is among them.

Help students consider whether their giving has remained static for years, the same amount, the same habits, the same reluctance, while other graces have grown. If so, this is an invitation, not a condemnation, to let God grow them here too.

Encourage them to think concretely about what growth would look like. Perhaps a planned increase, a new area of generosity with time or hospitality, a fresh openness to give as needs arise. Growth is usually intentional, not accidental.

The aim is to move generosity from autopilot to deliberate cultivation, treating it as a grace God wants to expand in them. Encourage one concrete step toward growth this year.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Intentional cultivation of generosity rather than static giving
- Growth in generosity as part of overall spiritual maturity
- Generosity expressed in time and hospitality, not only money
- Deliberate steps toward growth in this grace

Discussion Prompts

- In what areas of the Christian life do you see yourself growing?
- Is generosity one of them, or has it remained static?
- What is one deliberate step toward growing in giving this year?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says he gives this counsel “not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine” (v. 8). What does this teach about the connection between generosity and genuine love, and why does Paul refuse to simply command their giving?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes a striking choice: he refuses to command their giving. “I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.” He could have ordered them; instead he appeals to them, because the kind of giving he wants cannot be commanded into existence.

Help students see why. Commanded giving is mere compliance; it proves nothing about the heart. Freely chosen giving, on the other hand, reveals genuine love. Paul wants the Corinthians’ generosity to be the authentic fruit of love, not the forced product of pressure.

Draw out the connection between generosity and love. Love naturally gives; it is the nature of love to pour itself out for the beloved. So the presence or absence of generosity is a window into the genuineness of our love, for God and for others. Stingy love is suspect love.

This also models a healthy approach to giving in the church. Leaders are to appeal, teach, and inspire, but not to manipulate or coerce. The goal is hearts so gripped by grace that generosity flows freely, proving love genuine.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Genuine generosity as freely chosen, not commanded or coerced
- Giving as a window into the genuineness of love
- The nature of love to pour itself out for others
- Appeal and inspiration rather than manipulation in leading the church to give

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul refuse to simply command their giving?
- How does generosity reveal whether our love is genuine?
- What is the difference between inspiring giving and coercing it?

Question 6

Student Question:

If someone examined how you actually spend your money and time, what would they conclude about what you love most? Where is there a gap between what you say you value and what your giving reveals you value?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses Jesus' principle that our treasure reveals our heart. It asks students to imagine an honest audit of their spending and time, and what it would say about their true loves.

Help students do this without flinching. Our calendars and bank statements are surprisingly honest theologians; they record what we actually value, not merely what we claim to value. A gap between professed and revealed values is worth facing.

Be pastoral. The goal is not shame but alignment. Most of us discover some gap between what we say matters and what our resources show matters. Naming it is the first step toward closing it.

Encourage students to identify one specific area where their giving does not match their stated values, and to consider how to bring the two into alignment. The aim is integrity, a life in which what we treasure and what we say we treasure are the same.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spending and time as honest revealers of true values (Matthew 6:21)
- The gap between professed and revealed values
- Integrity as alignment of stated and actual priorities
- Generosity as a reflection of rightly ordered loves

Discussion Prompts

- What would an honest audit of your spending and time reveal about your loves?
- Where is there a gap between what you say you value and what you actually fund?
- What would it take to bring the two into alignment?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul urges the Corinthians to “finish doing it,” matching their earlier readiness with completion, “according to what a person has” (vv. 10–12). What does this teach about following through on good intentions and about giving in proportion to what we actually have, rather than what we do not?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul urges the Corinthians to “finish doing it.” They had begun the collection a year earlier with enthusiasm, but enthusiasm had not yet become completion. Paul gently calls them to match their initial readiness with follow-through. Good intentions are not enough; the gift must actually be given.

Help students see how common this pattern is. We are often moved to give or serve, we resolve to do it, and then the resolve fades before the act is done. Paul’s counsel is to close the gap between intention and completion.

Note Paul’s principle of proportion: giving “according to what a person has,” for a gift is acceptable “according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” God does not measure the gift by its size but by its proportion to our means and the willingness of our hearts. This frees the poor from shame and calls the rich to honesty.

This proportional principle is important and liberating. We are not asked to give what we do not have, nor to ruin ourselves, but to give willingly from what we do have. The widow’s small coins and the wealthy person’s larger gift are both measured by the same standard: a willing heart giving in proportion to its means.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to complete good intentions, not merely begin them
- Proportional giving, according to what one has (v. 12)
- God measuring the gift by willingness and proportion, not size
- Freedom from giving what one does not have, and honesty about what one does

Discussion Prompts

- Why is following through on a good intention so important?
- What does it mean to give in proportion to what we have?
- How does this principle free the poor and challenge the wealthy?

Question 8**Student Question:**

Is there a good intention to give or to serve that you began with enthusiasm but never completed? What has kept you from finishing, and what would it take to follow through?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question turns the matter of follow-through toward the student's own unfinished intentions. Most of us carry a small graveyard of good resolves that never reached completion, a gift we meant to give, a service we meant to render, a need we meant to meet.

Help students name one specific intention they began but never finished. The point is not guilt but reactivation. Often the intention was good and the only thing lacking was completion.

Explore gently what stalled it. Sometimes it was busyness, sometimes forgetfulness, sometimes a cooling of the heart, sometimes the discovery that following through would cost more than expected. Naming the obstacle helps overcome it.

Encourage one concrete act of completion this week. The aim is to become people who finish what love begins, closing the gap between the generous impulse and the generous act.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between generous intention and generous action
- Completing what love begins as a mark of maturity
- Identifying and overcoming what stalls our follow-through
- Faithfulness in finishing, not only in beginning

Discussion Prompts

- What good intention to give or serve have you never completed?
- What has kept you from finishing it?
- What concrete step would bring it to completion this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul anchors the whole appeal in the gospel: "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (v. 9). How does the self-giving of Christ serve as both the motive and the model for Christian generosity, and how does New Testament giving, as a free-will, purposed, cheerful grace, differ both from Old Testament tithing imposed as binding law and from the prosperity teaching that treats giving as a way to get rich?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, and it should be taught with both gospel warmth and doctrinal precision. Paul grounds the whole appeal to give in the gospel itself: "you know the

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” Here is the supreme model and motive of Christian generosity.

Dwell on the self-impoverishing of Christ. The eternal Son possessed all the riches of heaven, yet for our sake He emptied Himself, taking the poverty of human flesh, a borrowed manger, a homeless ministry, a criminal’s cross. He became poor that we might become rich, not in money, but in the unsearchable riches of forgiveness, sonship, and eternal life. This is the pattern Christians follow: self-giving for the good of others, even at real cost to ourselves.

Now teach clearly what New Testament giving is and is not. It is free-will, purposed, proportional, and joyful, flowing from a surrendered heart in imitation of Christ. Notice that Paul never grounds the appeal in the Old Testament tithe. Under the new covenant, Christians are not bound to a fixed ceremonial tithe as a law to be discharged. That does not lower the standard; in a sense it raises it, because now everything we have belongs to the Lord, and we give as grace has gripped us, often well beyond a tenth. Tithing as a binding law belongs to the old covenant; grace-giving from the heart belongs to the new.

Equally important, this passage stands against the prosperity teaching that treats giving as an investment scheme, a way to get rich by giving to get. Paul’s logic runs the opposite direction. Christ did not become poor so that we could become materially wealthy; He became poor so that we could become rich in Him, and He calls us to imitate His self-giving, not to use giving as a technique for personal gain. The prosperity gospel turns the cross-shaped generosity of Christ into a self-interested transaction, and it must be rejected as a distortion of this very passage.

End by holding the two together: free, glad, sacrificial giving, modeled on Christ, neither bound by the old covenant tithe as mere law nor corrupted into a scheme for getting rich. The Christian gives because he has been given to, lavishly and eternally, by a Lord who made Himself poor to make us rich. Let students feel the wonder of that grace, for it is the only thing that produces true generosity.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ’s self-impoverishment as the model and motive of Christian giving (v. 9)
- New covenant giving as free-will, purposed, proportional, and joyful
- Christians not bound to the Old Testament tithe as a binding law
- Grace-giving from the heart that often exceeds a tithe, since all we have is the Lord’s
- Rejection of prosperity teaching that gives in order to get rich
- Generosity as cross-shaped self-giving, not self-interested speculation

Discussion Prompts

- How does the self-giving of Christ serve as both the motive and the model for our generosity?

- How does New Testament grace-giving differ from Old Testament tithing imposed as law?
- Why is the prosperity idea of giving to get rich a distortion of this passage?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, the generous poor, the grace to be grown, the test of genuine love, the completed intention, the self-impoverishing Christ. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this passage, and what is your first step toward that change this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the chapter and asks for one specific change. Help students avoid generalities; the chapter has pressed on the source of generosity, growing in the grace of giving, the test of genuine love, follow-through, and the self-giving of Christ.

Invite each student to discern the Spirit's particular pressure. For one it may be surrendering themselves more fully to God so generosity can flow. For another it may be growing deliberately in giving. For another it may be completing a stalled intention or letting the grace of Christ reshape how they hold money.

Ask for both the change and the first step. The change is the inward reorientation; the step is concrete, a planned increase in giving, a completed gift, a new area of generosity, a fresh surrender of self.

Close with the gospel that drives it all: the Lord who was rich became poor to make us rich. Generosity is not a burden but the joyful overflow of having been given everything in Christ. That is the disciple this lesson is meant to form, one whose open hands reflect the open hands of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual formation, not mere information, as the goal of study
- Generosity as the overflow of grace received
- Obedience expressed in concrete, completed giving
- The believer's growing likeness to the self-giving Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this chapter is the Spirit pressing on you most directly?
- What single change is Jesus inviting you to make?
- What is your first concrete step toward it this week?