

The Book of 2 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Cheerful, Generous Giving

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Second Corinthians 9 completes Paul's teaching on giving and centers it on the spirit of the giver: God loves a cheerful giver. Doctrinally, the chapter teaches that Christian giving is to be willing, deliberate, heartfelt, and joyful, and it sets out a genuine principle that God blesses generosity. The teacher should present this principle honestly. Paul really does promise a harvest to the generous, and we must not flatten his words out of fear of abuse. God is no man's debtor, and He delights to provide abundantly for those who give freely.

But this chapter is also one of the most abused in the Bible, and the teacher must handle it with care. The prosperity gospel seizes on the language of sowing and reaping and of being enriched, and twists it into a transaction: give money to God or to a ministry, and God will make you materially rich in return. Paul's actual teaching dismantles this. The harvest he promises is a harvest of righteousness, an increased capacity to do good, and an overflow of thanksgiving to God. God enriches the giver, Paul says explicitly, in order that he may be generous in every way, not so that he may accumulate wealth for himself. The increase is more seed to sow, not a bigger barn to hoard. The teacher should present this clearly, affirming that God blesses generosity while rejecting the self-interested distortion that makes giving a technique for getting rich.

At the same time, this chapter is meant to set the heart free. It calls us out of grudging, fearful, pressured giving into the gladness of the cheerful giver. It invites us to trust God's abundant provision rather than to clutch our resources in anxiety. And it lifts our eyes from what we give to the inexpressible gift we have received in Christ, so that all our giving becomes a small echo of His. So aim at both targets. Help students understand clearly how God blesses generosity without falling into prosperity teaching, and lead them into the freedom and joy of cheerful, trusting, generous giving.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul wants the Corinthians' gift to be ready "as a willing gift, not as an exaction" (vv. 1-5). What does this teach about the importance of willingness in Christian giving, and why is a gift given freely from the heart so different in God's eyes from one extracted under pressure?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with Paul's pastoral concern. He is sending brothers ahead so that the Corinthians' gift will be ready "as a willing gift, not as an exaction." He does not want a last-minute, embarrassed, pressured offering. He wants a gift that flows from glad willingness.

Help students see that willingness is not incidental to giving; it is essential. A gift extracted under pressure may meet a need, but it does not reflect the heart God is after. God is not merely collecting funds; He is forming generous, willing people.

This challenges manipulative approaches to giving that rely on guilt, pressure, or emotional arm-twisting. Such tactics may raise money, but they undermine the very thing God values. True Christian giving is freely chosen, decided in the heart before it is ever placed in the offering.

Note the dignity this gives to the giver. God invites us to give as willing partners, not as taxed subjects. He honors our freedom, desiring a generosity that is genuinely ours, not coerced. That freedom is part of what makes giving an act of worship rather than a payment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Willingness as essential to acceptable Christian giving (v. 5)
- God forming generous people, not merely collecting funds
- The rejection of manipulative, guilt-driven approaches to giving
- The dignity of giving freely as a partner rather than under compulsion

Discussion Prompts

- Why is a willing gift so different in God's eyes from a pressured one?
- How do guilt and pressure undermine the very thing God values in giving?
- What does it mean that God honors our freedom in giving?

Question 2

Student Question:

Think about a time you gave or served mainly because you felt cornered or obligated. How did that differ from a time you gave freely and gladly? What does the difference reveal about your heart, and where do you need God to free your giving from compulsion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to compare pressured giving with free giving in their own experience. Most can recall both: the offering given because everyone was watching, and the gift given quietly and gladly from the heart.

Help them feel the difference in their own spirit. Pressured giving leaves a residue of resentment or relief; free giving leaves a residue of joy. The contrast itself is instructive about where the heart is.

Explore what produces compulsion in giving, fear of judgment, the desire to look good, guilt, social pressure, and what produces gladness, love, gratitude, and trust in God. Moving from one to the other is a matter of the heart, not merely technique.

Encourage students to identify where their giving is still driven by compulsion and to ask God to free it. The aim is not less giving but freer giving, the kind that flows from a glad and willing heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The contrast between pressured and free giving in the heart
- Resentment versus joy as the residue of different kinds of giving
- The roots of compulsion, fear, guilt, and image, versus the roots of gladness
- Asking God to free our giving rather than merely increasing it

Discussion Prompts

- How did giving under pressure differ from a time you gave freely and gladly?
- What tends to produce compulsion in your giving, and what produces gladness?
- Where do you need God to free your giving from a sense of obligation?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul writes, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (v. 6). What does this farming image teach about the nature of generosity, and how does it expose the false economy of hoarding, which clutches the seed and so forfeits the harvest?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul reaches for a farmer’s wisdom: “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” Every farmer knows seed hoarded in the barn yields nothing; only seed scattered into the ground produces a harvest.

Help students grasp the reframing this offers. Generosity is not loss but planting. The world sees giving as subtraction, less for me. Paul sees it as sowing, an act that, in God’s economy, leads to a harvest. The sparing person, clutching the seed, actually forfeits what he is trying to protect.

Be careful, even here, to set up the later correction. The harvest Paul has in view is not primarily a bigger personal fortune, as the chapter will make clear. But the principle stands: God honors generosity and is no man’s debtor. A tight, fearful, hoarding posture cuts us off from blessings God longs to give.

Apply it broadly. The sowing-and-reaping principle touches more than money. The person who sows kindness, hospitality, encouragement, and love generously will reap a harvest the hoarder never sees. Withholding may feel safe, but it is a false economy that starves the very harvest we crave.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Generosity as sowing rather than loss
- The false economy of hoarding, which forfeits the harvest
- God as no man's debtor, honoring generosity
- The sowing-and-reaping principle applied beyond money to all of life

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing giving as sowing change the way we think about it?
- Why is hoarding a false economy?
- Where, beyond money, are you tempted to clutch the seed rather than sow it?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where in your life do you find yourself clutching tightly out of fear, with money, time, hospitality, or love, in a way that actually keeps you from a harvest God wants to give? What would it look like to scatter that seed more freely?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to locate where fear makes them clutch. The hoarding impulse is rarely limited to money; we can be stingy with our time, our hospitality, our affection, our forgiveness, all out of a fear that there will not be enough.

Help students name the specific area where they hold tightly. Often the clutching is driven by an underlying anxiety, a fear of scarcity, of being taken advantage of, of running out. Naming the fear loosens its grip.

Point to the remedy: trust in the God who supplies. We can open our hands only when we believe Someone is filling them. The cheerful giver is, at bottom, a person who trusts that God will provide, and so is free to scatter seed without fear.

Encourage one concrete area to scatter more freely this week, with money, time, hospitality, or love. The aim is to break the fearful clutch and to experience the freedom and harvest of open-handed living.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fear of scarcity as the root of hoarding
- Stinginess extending to time, hospitality, and affection, not only money
- Trust in God's provision as the basis for open-handed living
- Freedom from anxiety as the path to generosity

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you clutch tightly out of fear rather than scatter freely?
- What underlying anxiety drives that clutching?
- What would it look like to scatter that seed more freely this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (v. 7). What does this teach about the deliberate, heartfelt, and joyful nature of Christian giving, and why does God delight specifically in the cheerful giver?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here Paul states the principle directly: "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Three things stand out: giving is deliberate ("as he has decided"), free ("not under compulsion"), and joyful ("cheerful").

Dwell on "as he has decided in his heart." Christian giving is thoughtful and intentional, not impulsive or accidental. It involves prayerful decision, a settled purpose of the heart, rather than merely reacting to the offering plate.

Then dwell on "cheerful." The word carries the sense of gladness, even hilarity. God is not after grim, dutiful giving but delighted giving. He loves the giver whose face lights up at the chance to give, because such giving reflects His own glad, open-handed nature.

Help students see that this is good news, not a new burden. God is not demanding that we manufacture a smile; He is inviting us into the joy that giving was always meant to carry. The cheerful giver has discovered that it really is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Giving as deliberate and decided in the heart, not impulsive
- Freedom from compulsion as essential to acceptable giving
- God's delight in the cheerful, glad giver
- The joy of giving as a reflection of God's own open-handed nature (Acts 20:35)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God love specifically a cheerful giver?
- What does it mean to give “as you have decided in your heart”?
- How is the call to cheerful giving good news rather than a new burden?

Question 6

Student Question:

How cheerful is your giving, honestly? If God loves a cheerful giver, what would it take for you to grow in the gladness of your generosity rather than giving out of duty, guilt, or reluctance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to assess the cheerfulness of their own giving. Many give faithfully but not gladly, out of duty, guilt, or habit rather than joy. The question gently exposes the gap between giving and cheerful giving.

Help students see that the goal is not to feel guilty about a lack of cheer but to grow toward joy. Cheerfulness in giving is cultivated, largely by remembering how much we have received and by giving freely enough, and often enough, to taste the gladness it brings.

Explore what steals the cheer: comparison, fear, a sense of obligation, giving so little that it never becomes joyful, or so grudgingly that it never feels like love. Naming the thief helps us reclaim the joy.

Encourage one step toward gladder giving this week, perhaps giving to a specific need that moves the heart, or giving in a way that reconnects the gift to the love behind it. The aim is to grow into the cheerful giver God loves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between faithful giving and cheerful giving
- Cheerfulness as a cultivated grace, rooted in remembering what we have received
- Common thieves of joyful giving
- Growth toward gladness rather than guilt over its absence

Discussion Prompts

- How cheerful is your giving, honestly?
- What tends to steal the joy from your generosity?
- What would help you grow in the gladness of your giving?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul promises that “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (v. 8). What does this teach about God’s provision for His people, and about the purpose for which He supplies us, namely that we may overflow in good works rather than merely accumulate for ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes a sweeping promise: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” This is the foundation of the cheerful giver’s confidence. We can give freely because God is able to supply abundantly.

Help students notice the careful balance. God promises “all sufficiency,” enough, in all things at all times. This is a promise of provision, not a promise of luxury. The God who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies will not fail to supply His generous children what they need.

But notice the stated purpose, which is crucial and easily missed: God supplies us “so that... you may abound in every good work.” The provision is given with a goal, that we may overflow in good works. God fills our hands so that we can keep giving, not so that we can simply consume.

This is the antidote to anxious hoarding. If God truly stands behind our generosity, supplying what we need so that we can keep giving, then we are free to give without fear. Our security rests not in our reserves but in our God, who is able to make all grace abound.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s promise of sufficiency for His people (v. 8)
- Provision aimed at overflowing in good works, not accumulation
- Security grounded in God’s provision rather than personal reserves
- Freedom from anxious hoarding through trust in God

Discussion Prompts

- What does God promise to supply, and for what stated purpose?
- How is a promise of sufficiency different from a promise of luxury?
- How does trusting God’s provision free us from anxious hoarding?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where does fear of not having enough cause you to hoard rather than to trust and give? What would change if you truly believed God is able to supply all you need so that you can be generous?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the issue of trust. The deepest obstacle to generosity is usually not stinginess but fear, the gnawing worry that if we give, we will not have enough. Hoarding is anxiety made visible.

Help students examine where this fear operates. It may show up as an inability to give to a clear need, a reluctance to be hospitable, a tight grip on savings far beyond reasonable prudence, or a constant low-grade worry about money that crowds out generosity.

Point again to the promise of verse 8. God is able to make all grace abound. The cheerful giver is not reckless but trusting; he gives freely because he believes God stands behind him. Generosity is, in this sense, an act of faith, a wager that God's promise is true.

Encourage students to identify one fear-driven pattern and to challenge it with a concrete act of trusting generosity this week. The aim is to let faith in God's provision, rather than fear of scarcity, govern the way they hold what He has given.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fear of scarcity as the deepest obstacle to generosity
- Hoarding as anxiety made visible
- Generosity as an act of faith in God's provision
- Challenging fear-driven patterns with concrete acts of trust

Discussion Prompts

- Where does fear of not having enough cause you to hoard rather than give?
- How is generosity an act of faith?
- What concrete act of trusting generosity could you take this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul promises that God "will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness," so that "you will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way," producing "thanksgiving to God" (vv. 10–11). How does this passage teach that God genuinely blesses generosity, while at the same time ruling out the prosperity teaching that treats giving as a way to get rich, given that the promised increase is a harvest of righteousness and a greater capacity to give, all overflowing in thanksgiving to God rather than personal wealth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, and it must be handled with both honesty and care, because it is among the most abused passages in Scripture. Paul promises that God "will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness," so that the

giver is “enriched in every way to be generous in every way.” The teacher must affirm what Paul affirms and deny what Paul denies.

Affirm first that God genuinely blesses generosity. Paul does not speak in vague spiritual terms only; he promises that God will supply and multiply the giver’s seed and increase his harvest. We should not be so afraid of the prosperity gospel that we deny the plain biblical truth that God honors and provides for generous people. He is no man’s debtor, and He delights to enable His children to give.

But now define the harvest exactly as Paul does, because this is where the prosperity teaching collapses. The harvest is, first, “the harvest of your righteousness,” our growth in Christlikeness and good works. Second, it is an increased capacity to give: God enriches us “to be generous in every way.” The multiplied seed is more seed to sow, not a bigger barn to hoard. And third, the whole process overflows “in thanksgiving to God,” as those who are helped praise Him. Nowhere does Paul promise that giving will make the giver personally wealthy. The increase flows outward to others and upward to God, not inward to our own accumulation.

State plainly, then, why the prosperity gospel is a distortion. It takes Paul’s promise that God supplies the giver so the giver can give more, and twists it into a promise that God will make the giver rich for his own enjoyment. It turns sacrificial generosity into a self-interested investment, give a hundred dollars to get a thousand back. This reverses Paul’s entire logic. In the previous chapter, the model was Christ, who became poor for our sake (8:9). Genuine Christian giving follows that cross-shaped pattern; it does not use God as a means to wealth. The prosperity gospel preys on greed and on the desperate, and it must be rejected as contrary to this very text.

End on the true and better promise. God will see to it that the generous giver always has enough seed to keep sowing, that his righteousness grows, and that his giving produces a harvest of thanksgiving to God. That is a far greater reward than money. The cheerful giver is caught up in something glorious: a circle of grace that begins with God’s supply, flows out through our generosity to meet others’ needs, and returns to God as worship. Help students want that harvest, and beware the counterfeit that promises gold.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God genuinely blessing and providing for generous givers (vv. 10–11)
- The promised harvest as righteousness and increased capacity to give, not personal wealth
- Provision given so we can be generous, the multiplied seed being more to sow
- Generosity overflowing in thanksgiving to God rather than self-enrichment
- The rejection of the prosperity gospel that gives in order to get rich
- Cross-shaped giving modeled on Christ (8:9), not giving as a wealth technique

Discussion Prompts

- How does this passage show that God blesses generosity?
- How does Paul define the “harvest,” and why does that rule out the prosperity gospel?
- What is the difference between trusting God to provide and giving in order to get rich?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, the willing gift, the law of sowing and reaping, the cheerful giver, God’s abounding provision, the harvest of righteousness, the inexpressible gift of 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 willing giving, sowing and reaping, cheerfulness, trusting God’s provision, and the inexpressible gift of Christ.

Invite each student to discern the Spirit’s particular pressure. For one it may be moving from pressured to willing giving. For another it may be releasing a fearful clutch. For another it may be growing in cheerfulness or trusting God’s provision more deeply.

Ask for both the change and the first step. The change is the inward reorientation; the step is concrete, a glad gift to a specific need, a fearful pattern challenged, a fresh decision of the heart about generosity.

Close with the chapter’s climax: “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” Before we give anything, we have already received everything in Christ. The cheerful giver gives freely because he has been given to beyond all telling. That gratitude is what this lesson is meant to form, and from it true generosity flows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual formation, not mere information, as the goal of study
- Gratitude for the inexpressible gift of Christ as the spring of generosity (v. 15)
- Cheerful, trusting giving as the fruit of a transformed heart
- Obedience expressed in concrete, joyful generosity

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?