

The Book of 2 Corinthians

Lesson 9: Cheerful, Generous Giving -- 2 Corinthians 9:1–15

There is a way of giving that drains the giver and a way of giving that delights the giver, and God cares very much which one we practice. Paul has been encouraging the Corinthians to complete their collection for the poor in Jerusalem, and now he turns from the question of whether to give to the question of how. He does not want their gift to be squeezed out of them at the last minute under embarrassment or pressure, “as an exaction.” He wants it ready as “a willing gift.” And then he gives one of the most quoted and most freeing sentences in all of Scripture: “God loves a cheerful giver.” Not a grudging giver. Not a pressured giver. A cheerful one, a hilarious one, the word almost says, someone who gives with a glad heart.

To get there, Paul reaches for a farmer’s image. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” Every farmer knows you cannot hoard your seed and expect a harvest. The seed clutched tightly in the barn produces nothing; only the seed scattered freely into the ground multiplies. Paul is teaching us that generosity is not loss but planting, and that God is no man’s debtor. But we must be careful here, because this is exactly the verse that some have twisted into a get-rich scheme. Paul’s point is not that we give money to God as a down payment on a bigger paycheck. His point is far better than that.

What Paul actually promises is this: “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.” Notice the purpose. God supplies us, not so that we may pile up wealth for ourselves, but so that we may overflow in good works. He gives us enough, and then more, precisely so that we can keep giving. As Paul puts it, we are “enriched in every way to be generous in every way.” The harvest God promises the cheerful giver is not a swollen bank account but a multiplied capacity to do good, a growing righteousness, and a flood of thanksgiving rising to God from those we have helped.

And that is where the chapter lands, not on what we get, but on the glory God receives. The gift to Jerusalem will meet real needs, but it will do something greater: it will overflow “in many thanksgivings to God.” The poor saints, helped by the Corinthians, will praise God and pray for them. The whole circle of generosity ends in worship. And Paul caps it with a doxology that puts every gift we could ever give in its proper place: “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” Before we give anything, we have already received everything in Christ. Read this chapter and learn the secret of the cheerful giver, who gives freely because he has been given to beyond all telling.

Group Discussion: 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). Why does God care so much about the spirit in which we give, and not merely the amount? What tends to rob our giving of

cheerfulness, and how might a person move from reluctant or pressured giving toward genuine gladness?

Personal Reflection: 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). Do you tend to give from a settled trust that God will supply what you need, or from a fearful, sparing posture that holds tightly out of worry? Where is fear, rather than faith, shaping the way you handle what God has given you?

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1–15

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Proverbs 11:24–25, the one who gives freely and grows richer, while the one who withholds comes to want; Luke 6:38, give, and it will be given to you, pressed down and overflowing; Acts 20:35, it is more blessed to give than to receive; Philippians 4:17–19, the fruit that increases to your credit, and God supplying every need; Matthew 6:19–21, laying up treasure in heaven rather than on earth