

# BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

## 8

### THE BLESSINGS OF GIVING

#### 2 Corinthians 9:6—15

By Elizabeth B. Crawford

*“Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can.”*

John Wesley

*“We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give.”*

Winston Churchill

*“Share everything with your brother. Do not say, ‘It is private property.’ If you share what is everlasting, you should be that much more willing to share things which do not last.”*

*The Didache*

*“Possessions are not given that we may rely on them and glory in them...but that we may use and enjoy them and share them with others.... Our possessions should be in our hands, not in our hearts.”*

Martin Luther

## AIM OF STUDY

- To recognize that when we give generously to our needy Christian brothers and sisters, God is honored and we deepen the fellowship and love in the Body of Christ.

## KEY VERSES

“ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”

2 Corinthians 9:13–14

## PREPARATION

The authors suggest you read over the notes on “How to Teach the Bible in Small Group” and “Some Practical Suggestions for Leading a Small Group Discussion” in Vineyard Church of Columbus’ *Small Group Leadership Training Manual* if you feel your inductive study skills are rusty. Then, before you read over the Scripture text, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then read through the passage keeping an open heart and ear to the Lord. Finally, read through the Bible study below.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. **Therefore, use this Bible study as a framework for the discussion you lead in your small group meeting. This means, you will need to**

- Go over the questions and **choose** which ones you want to emphasize and which you will eliminate since your time is limited.
- Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (\*). Rather than leaving all of these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture’s truths and applying them to their own lives.
- Pace yourself. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could **summarize** some of the passage and then go to the final questions.
- Select **one application question** you will use with your group at the end. The question may have more than one part, but the vital Biblical truth you want to encourage your group to put into practice should be the focus of your final question.
- Feel free to suggest that your group **continue** a discussion at the next meeting or at another informal get together. You want to leave time for worship, listening to God, and prayer ministry, so don’t feel you must cover every nugget of truth in a passage or allow each group member to share a mini-sermon on every question!
- Also, you may want to create your own introduction by using a personal example or current event that illustrates the point of the study. Your introduction and any background material shared should help lead the group members’ thoughts from the present moment into the text.

The authors are providing these questions and accompanying material for the leaders' benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to supply resources for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously, we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* or *The New Bible Commentary* as excellent resources for further study.

## PREPARATION RECOMMENDATION

All leaders need to bring to their small group meeting resources listing opportunities to **participate** in or partner with the **urban ministries** of our church. If you already support or engage in ministry with them on a regular basis, several days before this meeting, ask someone in the group to share a highlight from being involved in that work. If you do not have a regular place to serve, come with a few ideas for the group to decide on. You may find this information on a printed sheet in the church lobby, which has suggestions for both groups and individuals. Some of these are usually listed in a current issue of *The Mix*, our monthly magazine, or on our website. For more specific details, contact the Administrative Assistant of the Fruit of the Vine (Urban) Ministries.

## OPENERS

Vineyard Church of Columbus has a partnership with the Vineyard Community Church in N'Dola, Zambia. For two and a half years, we have sent funds to help feed the poor. Each week, members of the N'Dola Vineyard travel to Twapia, a poor village nearby for an outreach to fifty children, many who are orphans due to the AIDS epidemic. In February 2003, the children's ministry at Vineyard Columbus focused on this sister congregation and their outreach in Twapia. Each week our children in the preschool classes read a special picture book prepared by a Columbus staff member depicting the Zambian kids and adults. They learned some of the similarities and differences between our congregations. They heard about the shortage of food in Zambia and the relief work the Vineyard there was doing. Our children were encouraged to "save our pennies and send them to Zambia" (Campbell). Their classrooms had specially decorated collection jars to remind them of their African brothers and sisters. In the grade school services, the children also learned about the N'Dola Vineyard and the kids in need. Each grade-schooler was asked to take a treasure chest home and put his/her donations in them. Our Children's Ministry staff set an initial goal of \$1200.00, which would help support the outreach to the fifty kids in Twapia (White).

But an amazing thing happened. The children gave much more than the adults expected. The kids gave generously from their lunch money, allowances, and savings. One little girl gave the \$16.00 she had been saving to buy a special baby doll since she felt the boys and girls in N'Dola needed her money much more than she needed another doll (Nathan). A nine-year-old boy gave his entire \$20.00 received as a birthday gift instead of the \$2.00 tithe his dad expected. Later, the boy was sent another \$20.00 from an unexpected source (Tate, Szlapak). Altogether, the Columbus children raised **\$2800.00**.

In May of 2003, Pastors Dan Franz of our Mercy Ministries and Mike Szlapak of our Children's Ministry went with a short-term missions team to Africa. They visited the N'Dola Vineyard and met the children ministered to through the outreach. Pastor Franz made arrangements so that almost fifty of the orphaned or poor children could go to school. Although school in Zambia is free up to age thirteen, many poor children cannot afford the required shoes, uniforms, and textbooks. So the Pennies for N'Dola project provided money to buy shoes, uniforms, backpacks, and the necessary textbooks for nearly fifty children enabling them to attend school for the past two years. Because of the generosity of the Columbus area kids, there were additional funds that are used to bus all fifty kids to the Twapia Vineyard each Sunday (Franz, "Fruit of the Vine").

What caused children in one community to sacrifice for kids they didn't know living on another continent? What excited the Columbus children more than getting new toys, buying another soda or eating a candy bar? God moved on their hearts and gave them compassion for kids who couldn't go to school, who suffered from illness, and who needed someone to hold and comfort them. They realized that Jesus loved both groups of children, that they were all in God's family, and that Jesus wanted all His kids to have enough. So Jesus' kids in Columbus became partners in providing for Jesus' kids in Zambia. Perhaps this project will be multiplied one hundred times over between churches with resources and other Vineyard churches across Africa (Franz). And, as the storybook states, "This will make God smile" (Campbell).

This is not an isolated experience in the history of God's people. The Bible is full of references about God's concern for the poor and His commands that we care for the poor and orphaned. The passage we'll study today deals with taking up a collection for a congregation that was impoverished, and the blessings that can come from it.

***Pray and invite the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to the benefits of generous giving.***

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

***This is background information for the leaders. You may decide how much to share with your small group.***

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians before visiting the church in Corinth for the third time. He spent most of the letter defending himself and his ministry since false teachers had insinuated that he was an illegitimate apostle. In chapters eight and nine, he specifically dealt with collecting money for the impoverished mother church in Jerusalem. The Corinthians had begun to make donations prior to this letter, but had stopped possibly because the false teachers had sowed mistrust of Paul's integrity. Paul urged them kindly to complete the work of collecting the money before he would arrive so that he and other trustworthy men could take it to Jerusalem (Hughes, *Second Letter*, pp. xvi–xvii, 283–286). In fact, he sent the 2 Corinthians letter with Titus who had begun collecting the money a year before so that the giving would be finished when Paul arrived (Hughes, "2 Corinthians," *NIV*, p. 1771). In chapter nine, Paul emphasized the blessings that the Corinthians would experience as they continued to give generously and gladly (Hughes, *Second Letter*, p. 322).

## STUDY THE PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 9:6–15

1. Let's read verses 6–11 and 12–15 aloud.  
What's the point of the old saying that Paul uses in verse 6?

Paul is using a proverb familiar in the ancient world (Keener, p.507). The analogy uses “sowing” for “giving.” The point is when we give away your wealth or resources we aren't really losing. Instead, like seed scattered in the ground that sprouts and produces a crop, our giving will result in an increase of several intangibles, especially a bigger heart (Hughes, *Second Letter*, pp.329–330). Paul may not be linking greater financial riches to one's giving, but he will mention that those who give will increase generosity in their own hearts, equality in the Body of Christ, thanks and praise to God, and fellowship between believers.

2. How should each person decide what to give (v. 7)?

Each person should give freely and whatever amount he or she decides privately. Paul doesn't advocate a certain percentage, like a tithe (10%), because we are no longer under the legal requirements of keeping God's law in order to be in right relationship with Him. Instead, like everything in the Christian's life, we should make a faith decision based on what we believe God wants us to give. Both Paul and the author of Hebrews tell us how important faith is to all we do (Romans 14:22–23; Hebrews 11:6).

3. What attitudes does Paul want us to avoid (vv. 6–7)?

Paul mentions three qualities we want to avoid in our giving: sowing sparsely, giving reluctantly, and contributing under compulsion. Hughes notes that all three attitudes stem from our hearts, which God is far more interested in than any material contribution (*Second Letter*, pp. 329–334). Because God has been amazingly generous with us—both materially and spiritually—we should imitate His extravagance rather than give in a miserly fashion. Just as we doubt the sincerity or love a person who delivers an apology with clinched teeth and rude looks, God does not cherish our giving when we give only to fulfill our duty or to conform to another's expectations. Likewise, God doesn't want our giving to be self-serving—to gain attention, to give the appearance of generosity and compassion, or to earn a reward. The Old Testament prophets condemned hypocritical giving (Isaiah 1:10–17; Malachi 1:6–14) and Jesus criticized the Pharisees for similar motives (Matthew 6:1–4). A couple in the New Testament who withheld part of their profits but pretended to give it all met with sudden death since they had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1–11).

**\*How do you usually feel when someone asks you to contribute to other Christians in need?**

**4. Whose resources make it possible for us to participate in “good works” (vv. 8–9)?**

Note that Paul repeats the word *all* four times in verse 8 implying that God will supply us with everything we need so we can give when asked. This may raise the obvious question about how can there be poor people in the church if God is so generous. That should be answered in the next few verses. But keep in mind that Paul has not said the gift each person should give has to be large. It should be generous according to what each person actually has; so one person’s gift may seem small compared to another’s. Again, the amount is not so important as the heartfelt willingness to let go of the possessions God has entrusted to us.

**5. Why does Paul use the quote from Psalm 112:9 (v. 9)?**

Psalm 112 praised the godly man who revered God and imitated God’s good works. He is described as experiencing blessing on his life and family. Hughes thinks Paul referred to Psalms 112:9 since it also used the image of sowing seed that began in verse 6 (*Second Letter*, p.332). Paul might have been showing the Corinthians that there was pattern of generous giving among God’s people beginning with the open-handedness commanded in the Old Testament law (Deuteronomy 15:7–11) to the good works expected from those whom had received the gift of salvation (James 2:14–17; 1 John 3:16–17). In sending out His disciples, Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8) about the way they should minister the message and the gifts of God (Hughes, *Second Letter*, p. 333).

**6. What will actually increase when we give (vv. 10–11)?**

Paul again reminded them that God supplied the farmer with seed, which grew into the grain, which was harvested and ground for flour, which was baked to make bread. In the same way, God can take our small gift and increase our willingness to give as well as the results of our giving. The “enlarge the harvest of your righteousness” refers to Hosea 10:12. There, the prophet explains that if God’s people repent and seek Him, they would experience God’s righteous blessings, not further punishment (Martin, p. 292). So our acts of doing what is right in God’s eyes are seen as the seed that God will use to produce greater good—more maturity and blessing in our lives and in others. Of course, we have to see this in the context of our obedience being possible only by faith in Christ. He alone is in a right relationship with God and any act of righteousness or obedience is because of the right relationship/obedience Jesus has shown, not because of anything we have done.

**7. What response does Paul anticipate when the Jerusalem church receives the monetary gifts (vv. 11–14)?**

Paul mentions thankfulness twice in verses 11 and 12. He expects that the Jerusalem church will not only be grateful to the believers in the Greek churches but also will express thanks to God for their needs being met. He also believes the Jerusalem church members will praise God for this evidence of the Gentile’s true

conversion as they choose to give generously to other Christians in need. Finally, Paul mentions that the Jerusalem believers will pray for their Greek brothers and sisters.

**8. What connection is there between our giving and confessing the gospel (v. 13)?**

The person who has received the gift of eternal life by faith in Jesus and now has Christ living out His life in him or her should evidence the life change that has taken place by good works. Giving sacrificially, especially to strangers or people one has never met, is not a natural human instinct. By caring for the impoverished believers in another part of the world, the Corinthians were demonstrating the reality of the gospel they now confessed or professed. James clearly taught that faith without good works was not living, vital faith at all. And he used the situation of our response to a Christian brother or sister who needs clothing and food as the example of whether we have saving faith or not (James 2:14–17) (Hughes, *Second Letter*, p. 338). And, Jesus said that when we give without thinking of reward, we are serving Him with our acts of generosity, not just the needy individuals (Matthew 25:40).

**9. How will the Corinthians contributions impact their relationship with the believers in Jerusalem (v. 14)? Why would this matter to Paul or the Corinthians?**

Paul was certain that the Jerusalem believers would pray for the churches in Greece even more than they might have before since this sizable gift would draw the churches together more closely. Because the membership of the Corinthian and other Greek churches were largely Gentile, this charitable act would help convince the primarily Jewish believers in Jerusalem that they were one Body in Christ. It also would help validate the ministry that Paul has had among the Gentiles since the generous giving would be evidence of how thoroughly the Greek believers had yielded their lives to Jesus Christ (Hughes, *Second Letter*, pp. 338–339). And finally, the love expressed tangibly between these churches would advance the witness Jesus expected of His disciples:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:34–35

**10. What gift is uppermost in Paul’s mind (v. 15)?**

Paul briefly breaks into praise for the gift of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who died in our place so we might receive the gift of eternal life and relationship with the Father. This extravagant gift, which assures us of the Father giving us anything else we need (Romans 8:32), has been the backdrop for all Paul has written about giving. Paul mentions the grace that God has already given the Corinthians and Macedonians, which enabled them to demonstrate the reality of Christ in their lives. Perhaps he paused and pondered the gift that surpassed all giving. Paul’s praise and gratitude must have simply flowed over at this point since he has been thinking on God’s sacrificial gift all along.

## **APPLYING THE TEXT**

**\*When is it difficult for you to give away something in your possession?**

**\*How does the concept of being God's steward free us to give to other believers?**

**\*What are some local opportunities for our small group to serve the needs of other Christians?**

**\*What are some concrete ways our group could give to Christian brothers and sisters in a distant location who experience poverty on a regular basis?**

## **WRAPPING IT UP**

God doesn't want us to be mere hearers of His Word; He wants us to be doers. God doesn't want us to be rich in knowledge but never put it into action. Throughout this stewardship series, we have been reminded of how much we have received through God's lavish gift of His Son. It's only fitting that we find concrete expressions of gratitude for the grace we've received. Let's pray and select some group and individual goals to increase our willingness to let go of what God has entrusted to us; to increase the regularity or actual amount we give; and to increase praise to God and fellowship with other believers whom God wants to touch through us.

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