

Study 2 Corinthians



Session One

Giving: the overflow of grace

2 Corinthians 8 v 1-9

Aims of the study

“We don’t like talking money in church, and we really don’t like it when the vicar does!”

In fact we do not like talking about money very much at all. This first session aims to:

- get people talking easily to each other about money
- to realise that the Bible has a lot to say on the subject of money
- to think about the motivation for giving Paul shares with the Corinthians
- to introduce the idea of a money autobiography to the group.

Leaders preparation

Giving in Grace is not a fundraising effort, a one off appeal for money to help the church. Although there was a real and important need in Jerusalem for which Paul has great concern he does not dwell on this. He does not write to the Corinthians about giving to a need but about their need to give. It is important for their spiritual life that they get involved again in this act of giving. He talks in this passage about the motivation to give.

For preparation group leaders should make sure that they have read through the [Corinthians Introduction](#) which gives some helpful background to understand better Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church. Leaders who would like some more detailed background can look at the [preaching notes](#) on this passage. Always beware, however, of trying to bring too much detail into the study. Finally the end of the study introduces the idea of a money autobiography. Leaders should read the web page [A Money Autobiography](#) as background and be familiar with the [money autobiography questions](#). Print out these questions for each group member to hand out at the end of this first session.



Opening Prayer

Introduction

As this is the first session for the group take few minutes at the start to welcome people, to introduce people to each other and put people at their ease. They are here to talk about an issue that runs deep in each of us so it is worth getting people to feel comfortable with each other. It is worth serving refreshments at the beginning at least for this first session. Once everyone is settled make introductions during the refreshments and then ask people to answer one or both of these questions:

- *The most exciting, challenging or interesting thing I have ever done is*
- *If I had £1 million I would like to.....*

This second is not a big moral question! It is simply to get people talking easily about money. Ask them to share something that they would love to do or visit etc.

My money memories

Invite group members to share their earliest memories of money. What are those memories? Are they good or bad, happy or sad? Explore how this has shaped their thinking and feelings about money. Allow sufficient time to develop this because it is an important exercise in itself and is a good way of helping the group to grow together. (Though simple, this is an incredibly powerful exercise and is the money autobiography question for this session. Don't refer to the money autobiography at this point; it will be covered at the end of the session.

As the conversation develops make a list on a flipchart or some wallpaper of some of the important words that describe our early memories about giving under the heading "*Childhood Memories*". Make a list also under the heading "*Adult Feelings*" of our adult words around money: anxious, grateful, fearful, short! etc.

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Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Make photocopies of the text of 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 found at the end of this study. Read it through together in the group and then ask members to use highlighter pens to mark the important words Paul uses about money. Then share the words together and write the key ones up on the flip chart under the heading “*Paul’s words about money*”. Take some time to discuss similarities and differences between Paul’s words and our own words about money.

Paul believed that participating fully in the collection was vital for the spiritual health of the church in Corinth. An illustration at this point might help. Show the group the geographical picture of Israel from the end of these notes. Galilee in the north is teeming with life; it is fed from the Jordan River which rises in the north and flows through the lake and then south. By contrast the Dead Sea is just that. Because it is below sea level it has no outlet; the water stagnates and evaporates leaving a high salt content. When we give we share in the flow of God’s grace. We need to be able to receive gladly and also to give graciously. If we do not give out what we have received then we risk losing the life that God has given to us. This is true about our financial giving just as it is about many other areas of our lives. Alternatively leave this illustration to the end of the session as a lead in to prayer and reflection.

A little background

At the end of the exercise take a few minutes to very briefly explain the background to 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Paul wanted to take a financial gift to the poor church in Jerusalem as a sign of the unity of the Jewish and gentile sections of the Church. Initially the church in Corinth was enthusiastic but their enthusiasm waned. One of the reasons for this was because their relationship with Paul had deteriorated. Some doubted his credentials as an apostle and there seems to have been some suggestion that Paul was personally gaining from the collection. The Corinthians Introduction gives more detail but again beware of putting across too much detail.

Looking more closely

Paul seems to identify three key motivations to encourage the Corinthians to give.

1. ***The church in Macedonia (verses 1-4)***

Paul points to the generosity of the poor church in Macedonia. The Macedonians are still with us; in the Diocese of Liverpool the most generous giving is from the poorest areas.

- Have group members ever heard a story in church that has motivated them to give either to the church or a Christian charity? E.g. a visit from third world Christians?
- Has anyone visited another church and thought “If they can do this, so can we”?
- Why is this kind of experience so powerful? Does it open up new possibilities for us?
- Could some people be put off by such comparisons? Discuss why this might be. Often it is a reluctance to give rather than a problem with the story telling?

2. ***Sharing in the ministry (verse 5)***

The Macedonian church pleaded for the privilege of *sharing in ministry*. That is how they saw the collection. But is that how we see giving to our local church? Too often people simply do not know what the ministry of the church really is.

- Ask people to list what the ministry of their church actually involves.
- What is it that they appreciate most in this ministry?
- When we give are we aware that we are making this ministry possible? Do we normally think of our giving as sharing in the work of God - as the Macedonians clearly understood it? Would that change the way we thought about giving?

3. ***The example of Jesus (verse 9)***

Paul says our most important motivation to give is the life of Jesus himself.

- Is this idea of giving because of what Jesus has given to us a new idea for anyone in the group? If so how does it feel thinking about it - exciting, scary, challenging?
- We often talk about giving as “giving back to God”. Is this the best way of putting or are we asked here to be caught up in the overflow of God’s giving to us in Jesus? An illustration may help. In white water rafting the pleasure and challenge is when the raft is caught up in the flow of the river. When we give we don’t just give back but are caught up in the total giving of God: creation, prayer, spiritual gifts, and sacraments.



Closing reflection and prayer

In verse 8 Paul knows that he cannot *command* the Corinthians to give their money because grace and generosity cannot be compelled. But Paul does say that giving tests the genuineness of the Corinthians love for God and for the Christians in Jerusalem. Discuss with the group how they feel about this statement of St Paul.

You may find it helpful at this point to use the illustration of the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea mentioned earlier in the study.

After any discussion spend some time for quiet reflection and prayer. Perhaps use a chorus such as “*You laid aside your majesty*” while the group reflects on the question:

■ Does what I give reflect what I have received from God?

Conclude the evening with a prayer of thanksgiving

After the session

Briefly introduce the idea of a money autobiography, referring back to the question about early memories of money as an example. You might like to suggest to the group that they begin to keep a journal, a simple diary in which they record their own money autobiography. Invite folk to write up the early money memories they have, some of which they might have shared in the group during the evening. If group members are enthusiastic hand out a copy of the [money autobiography questions](#).



2 Corinthians 8:1-9

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.