

Study 2 Corinthians



Session Two

Giving: the action of grace

2 Corinthians 8:8-24

Aims of the study

Last week we saw how Paul tried to motivate the Corinthian church to get involved again in the collection for the church in Jerusalem. In this next section of his letter Paul is much more practical. He knows there is always a gap between our best intentions and doing what we say we will do. Things get in the way and this study aims to:

- Explore the things that make giving difficult
- Discuss the relationship between giving and lifestyle
- Discover the high standards Paul expects in handling financial matters

Leaders preparation

Paul was rarely afraid of saying what he thought but in this passage he treads very carefully. Money can be a sensitive subject and relationships between him and the Corinthian church were still very tender. Still Paul does not avoid the issue because giving is too important to our spiritual growth. For us today it is often the demands of the world around us in the west that make it hard for us to hear what the Bible says and to put it into practice. In verse 12 Paul says we are to give from “what we have” but this is about giving from what we have **received** not what we have **left over** when we have satisfied all our other wants and needs. In short Christian giving is related to the lifestyle we choose. Our Bible study will explore this.

Leaders who would like some more detailed background can look at the preaching notes on [2 Cor 8:10-15](#) and [2 Cor 8:16-24](#). this passage. As always, beware, however, of trying to bring too much detail into the study.



Opening prayer

Introduction

Distribute amongst group members a collection of glossy, lifestyle magazines. Ask members to flick through them and tear out one or two adverts that illustrate:

- an advert for something that I would really like to have - perhaps a car, perfume etc.
- an advert for something that makes me angry or I do not like
- An advert that has a strong message - such as “*women should be thin*” or “*this product will make you happy*”

Invite group members to share their adverts and say why they have chosen that particular advert. Keep the discussion relaxed; it is intended to help people get to know each other better and unearth some money messages not start an argument about moral standards in magazines! Ask people to share the key messages from the adverts about money and lifestyle. Summarise the activity along these lines:

These money messages surround us every day. They shout loudly making it difficult to hear the still, small voice of discipleship in this area of money. They make it difficult for us to think clearly about giving and make it hard for us to put giving into practice. In this passage we look at three things: Paul’s sensitivity in addressing the issue; the importance of a willingness to give and the importance of actually putting the desire to give into practice.

Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 8:10-15

Read the whole passage through together then explore the following questions:

1. **Advice**

Paul is aware of the tender relationship with the Corinthian church; he also knows that generosity can only be encouraged, not commanded.

- Why does Paul insist he is only giving advice in verse 10?
- Why is money such a sensitive subject? What is your reaction when the church needs to talk about money? What do you hear from other people?



2. **Willingness and completion**

Look at verse 12. For Paul willingness to give is important. Only a freely given gift is acceptable to God. He does not want to drag a gift out of them.

- Why does Paul say no one is having an easy time at Corinth's expense? (v13)
- You are in a pub; a man comes round with a collection tin for orphans; another with raffle tickets for the kids football team; then the Salvation Army with the War Cry. How does the discussion on charity giving go? What reasons (or excuses?) are given for not giving money to charity or church?
- Where are we weakest? In our *willingness* to give or in *carrying it out*?

3. **Giving what you have**

Paul says that the Corinthians must give what they have, not what they do not have. But this is not an excuse for poor giving! He means we should give from what we have received from God, not what is leftover after all our desires have been met.

- What does Paul mean by "*giving from what you have*"? Is it about giving from what is left over when everything else is paid or from our income?
- How do lifestyle pressures affect our giving?

A simple illustration could be used here. Many group members will remember how they or their parents managed their money with jam jars on the mantelpiece. There was a jar for the rent, gas, food, tontine, the Provi man etc. Collect a handful of jam jars and invite people to identify major categories (not actual costs) of expenditure. Label each jar and put it on the mantelpiece. Is there a jam jar for what we give to God? Is it a priority along with other expenditure priorities? Or do we not plan our giving so that the church gets our giving from what is left over when everything else is taken care of?

Setting high standards

Now read through the rest of the passage 2 Cor 8:16-24. Paul chooses three men to visit the Corinthians. They are there to ensure the money is handled properly to avoid criticism. But the qualities of the men suggest something else as well. The money is God's money; the people are handing the things of God and so it is vital that they have the highest integrity.

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- What does Paul want the three men in these verses to do?
- What personal qualities do the three men have?
- Why is it so important that money is carefully handled?
- Is it just about money or is more than just money Paul is concerned about?

Money autobiography

- When it comes to money: in what ways are you a spender? In what ways a saver?
- What do you like best about money at this stage in your life? What do you like least?
- In what ways are you a good manager of money - and in what ways are you a poor manager of money? For example, do you have a personal budget or pay off credit cards in full each month?
- Are we careful to fill our church envelope as a priority? Do we exercise the same care with our giving as we do with other aspects of our finances?
- When we give is the local church central to our planning? If not and our major giving goes somewhere else- why is this?

Closing reflection and prayer

Close the session by looking at 8:14-15. Here Paul uses the example of the gift of manna from Exodus 16. Briefly tell the story; the manna was freely given to all; the greedy could not collect too much and the sick or aged did not go short. That is the nature of God's grace; fair shares for all. In making the collection the Corinthians who had enough to give shared it with those who needed it. They shared in the economy of God, the economy of grace.

Read the story from Exodus 16 prayerfully in the group and leave a time of silent reflection on these questions

- Does my use of money reflect the truth that it is a gift from God, freely given?
- Are there times when I try to take more than I need?
- What is enough for me, and how do I decide that?
- Is money for me at the moment a blessing or a problem?

The leader might wish to close with the General Prayer of Thanksgiving.