

Study 2 Corinthians



Session Three

Giving: the application of grace

2 Corinthians 9 v1-5

Aims of the study

In this passage for the first time Paul makes it clear that he is going to come to Corinth himself. He does not want to arrive and find the collection unfinished as this would shame the Corinthian church. His solution is to send brothers in advance to assist the church in planning their giving so that it will be ready when Paul arrives and both Paul and the Corinthians will be honoured by a generous collection. The study aims to:

- Explore how planned giving makes generosity possible
- Discuss what honour and shame mean for the modern church
- Be practical about planned giving for today's congregations

Leader's preparation

In verse 5 Paul states that he wants the collection to be a "gift" not something given grudgingly by the Corinthians. We know that generosity comes from a grateful heart; it cannot be compelled or insisted upon. But we can choose to do the things that help us to be generous. For example, we might love a partner but we need to do the things that nurture love – such as remembering birthdays or spending time together. There is much more at stake than a big collection, however. The Corinthians well understood the ideas of honour and shame from their own culture. Paul had brought to them the gift of the Gospel. A willing and generous participation in the collection is a response that brings honour to both Paul and the Corinthian church. However, failure to participate brings shame to both them and Paul. This session is about planned giving because planned giving is the key to becoming a generous giver.



Leaders who would like some more detailed background can look at the [preaching notes](#) on this passage. As always, beware, however, of trying to bring too much detail into the study.

Opening prayer

Exercise

This simple opening exercise gives a chance to briefly review the teaching so far. Ask people to tell the group of one charity that they support, either now or in the past, apart from their giving to the local church. Ask people to talk briefly about:

- What the charity does, the need that this charity meets. (e.g. a cancer charity)
- Why the person started supporting that charity. Almost always there is a personal story to tell but be sensitive to any painful memories.

How they support the charity.

Any giving has two elements: a *need* to be met and the *motivation* of the giver to give. For Paul the need was poverty in Jerusalem, the motivation was the giving of God in Christ. The group so far has looked at the motivation to give and thought a little about the ministry of the church to which we give. It is our actual giving that connects the need and the motivation. So in this session we are going to be looking at planned giving.

Be prepared! (Verse 5)

Read the passage 2 Corinthians 9:1-5 together. Look closely at verse 5. In three different ways Paul underlines the need to plan our giving

*I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to **go on ahead** to you, and arrange **in advance** for this bountiful gift that you have **promised**.*

- Why would sending the brothers in advance help the Corinthians to give gladly and generously? What could they say and do to help generous giving?

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Paul is asking the Corinthians to plan their giving because he knows that last minute collections can be begrudged and cause resentment as well as being less than generous. In fact Paul had already written to the Corinthians about planned giving in his first letter. Ask the group to turn to 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and read the text together. Suggest to the group that they are to look for 5 points all beginning with a P in Paul's teaching. They are listed below to help you, you might think of others! Our giving says Paul should be:

- **Priority** – on the first day of the week. This is the day of resurrection; Paul invites the Corinthians to put aside what they give to God's work on the day we remember what God has done for us.
- **Planned** – It is a decision that is made to put money aside.
- **Personal** – each person should make their own decision; Paul does not say how much we are to give. Nor can we excuse ourselves on the grounds that we do not have enough
- **Proportionate** – Paul asks us to give from what we have. It will be different for each person in accordance with our income. We do not expect the state pensioner to give as much as the couple living on comfortable company pensions, nor that couple the same as a couple both paying higher rate income tax.
- **Practical** – Paul knew that last minute collections are not only less generous but also can breed resentment

Money autobiography

The following questions are the money autobiography questions for this session. Make sure that the discussion is about how people plan their giving NOT about how much they actually give.

- When do you get your financial gift ready for church? Is this a helpful time? (You might like to read the Adrian Plass poem *The Real Problem*, a humorous look at family chaos before church. It is in *Clearing Away the Rubbish* p142)
- How does the way you plan your giving compare with Paul's advice?
- What practical steps could you take get closer to Paul's advice?

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- How do you decide what to give to God's work through your local church? Is it based on an amount of money or a percentage of your income?
- What about our children's gift? Does what we do (or do not do) here help them to see money as God's gift and Christian giving as a priority?

Practical matters

Ask the group members to list as many different ways in which people can financially give to their church or charity. The list can include:

- loose cash collections
- planned giving envelopes
- Gift Aid giving
- legacy gifts
- gifts of shares
- one off donations
- standing orders
- interest free loan
- Payroll giving
- Charity Bank

(Charity Bank enables people to earn a lower rate of interest on savings so that their money can be loaned out to other charitable community projects at lower rates of interest. But they get tax relief on the savings so that in practice the interest rate is as high as an ISA. And they can allocate the interest they earn to their church or any other charity while still receiving tax relief. Payroll giving is a government scheme to encourage more people to give to charity. Contact Resources at Church House [0151 705 2180] for more information)

Invite the group to comment on these ways of giving:

- Which have they simply never thought about before?
- Which do group members like the sound of or could be helpful to them?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these ways of giving?

Honour and shame

In verses 1-4 Paul talks about boasting which sounds strange to us. In those times the giving of a generous gift bestowed honour on both the giver and the one who received the gift. The correct response was to express gratitude and so honour the giver. Failure to do this meant shame to both the giver and the recipient. For Paul the gift was the Gospel he brought to Corinth. If they joined in the collection for Jerusalem they honoured the Gospel, Paul and themselves. However, failure to share by not participating brought shame upon them because they had not responded worthily to the gift of the Gospel.

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Ask the following questions:

- What do you think Paul means by “boasting” about the Corinthians?
- Honour and shame are tough concepts for modern day church. What things would be honourable for a church today in money terms? (e.g. committed mission giving, strong leadership in financial matters; careful budgeting)
- What things would shame a church financially? (E.g. wealthy congregations giving less than poorer ones; constant appeals for money from the pulpit; a lack of openness in parish accounts; a refusal to pay the parish share.¹)

Reflection: giving – the application of grace

Allow a time for silence and prayer. Invite the group to reflect on the theme of honour and shame. Does our actual giving, the way in which we plan that giving and the heart with which we give bring us honour or shame? You might like to play a hymn such as *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* or *Take my Life*.

¹ The parish share is an amount asked of each parish by the diocese as the contribution to the cost of ministry across the diocese. Parish share is assessed on the basis of the size of congregation and the social and economic wealth of the parish. Some parishes pay more than the cost of their own clergy and so support ministry in parishes less wealthy than their own. Most parishes in the Liverpool diocese pay less than the cost of their own clergy.