

# Study 2 Corinthians



Session Four

## Giving: The generosity of grace

2 Corinthians 9: 6-15

### Aims of the study

In this passage Paul uses a farming picture of sowing and reaping to illustrate his final appeal to the Corinthians. This appeal is not just to participate in the collection but also to make a generous contribution. This study aims to look at two elements of this picture:

- The provision of the seed
- The harvest which is reaped

### Leaders preparation

In this final section Paul urges the Corinthians to a generous gift. It is no accident, however, that in this passage he also stresses the abundance of God's provision which makes such generous giving possible. We cannot separate generous giving from generous receiving, gracious giving from grace itself. The farming image Paul uses was well known in his day. The meaning is simple: giving is not about losing something but sowing a seed and reaping a harvest. In short, when we give we get something back! It is all too easy to misunderstand this and think in terms of giving in order to get more money back. But Paul promises that God is able to supply both the financial capacity and the spiritual maturity to give generously and be blessed spiritually.

This final study is a little shorter than the others. It leaves space for the group to consider the Giving in Grace literature- the brochure, the letter and the response forms which will be distributed in the church around this time. There may be some discussion about the literature. Encourage a positive response. In some churches the literature may be distributed through housegroups as well as at church or through the mail. It may even be appropriate for group

members to complete the form at the end of the session after a time of private prayer and reflection

### Opening prayer

### Exercise

The appendix has some humorous stories that can be used to introduce this session which looks in part at the promise of blessing that Paul teaches comes as a result of giving.

### Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Read this passage together and then look at the following elements:

#### The Seed (verse 6)

The seed we need to sow is provided by God himself. If we sow sparsely it is not because of a lack of seed but because of our reluctance to sow. Paul seems to make a bold promise here: that *we will always have enough to live and enough to give*.

- Does that promise ring true in your experience?
- How do we claim this promise? Do we wait until it is obvious we have enough and then make plans to give? Or do we plan to give and trust God that he will keep his promise that we will have enough to live and to give?
- What advice would you give to someone who was in serious debt and was asking what this promise is all about?
- It begs the question: what is enough? Paul uses a Greek word which means “self sufficiency” or contentment. What does contentment mean and how does it help us to understand Paul’s promise about always having enough?
- Could it be true that the decision to give, to invest in God’s harvest is what opens the door for us to discover contentment?
- To take this further read Philippians 4;10-20 where Paul talks about being content whether he has plenty or is in need.

### The Harvest (verse 10)

Paul promises that if we sow we will reap; if we give we will get something back. Perhaps the automatic reaction is that we will get a financial reward?

- How do group members feel about this promise? Is it too self centred?
- What are the benefits we receive from giving? Take suggestions from the group and encourage story sharing to illustrate.
- Read again verses 11-14 and list the various results of this harvest: givers are enriched (v11); thanksgiving to God (v11); supplying the needs of the saints (v12) and more.
- Some will have experience of the so called “prosperity Gospel”, the idea that God financially rewards those who give generously. Can this be true at all? What is so wrong with that kind of teaching?

### Money autobiography

The following are the money autobiography questions for the session:

- Each day in the EU each person contributes \$2 to subsidise a cow. In the world 60million people live on less than \$1 per day. How does that kind of poverty affect your thinking about money?
- Is giving to the church and Christian or other charities a priority for you when you decide on how to spend your money?
- What was your attitude to giving five years ago? What questions did you have then? How have things changed in the last five years
- Do you think that money is spiritual issue and being a good steward of money is becoming a more important part of your Christian life?

### Reflection: Giving – the sowing of grace

Invite the group to reflect upon the story of the sower in Mark 4, reading it slowly and prayerfully. Think about all that we have as seed that we have received from God. We sow it across our church, our home and family, our mission societies, everything that we give to. Think about what of the ground we need to till, the weeds we need to clear in order that the seed may produce better fruit. It may be appropriate to reflect upon the Giving in Grace literature. End by giving thanks to God for all the seed - all that we receive from God.



### The monkey and the jar

*Men are hunting for food in a dry and thirsty country, water is hard to come by. There is a bush that holds water, perhaps a pint, in its roots, deep underground. But it is hard to find - except for the monkey's who live there. To find the water you must first catch a monkey; and to do that you need a tree, some creeper, a jar with a narrow neck and some rock salt.*

*The jar is tied to the tree and rock salt put in and around the jar and then you wait. The monkeys come down because they love salt and grab a handful from the jar. The bushman walks over and catches the monkey, feeds the rock salt and then waits until the monkey leads him to the bush containing the water in its roots.*

*Now you are thinking, "Isn't nature incredible" while some are thinking - "Why doesn't the monkey run away?" The answer is that the monkey can get its paw inside the jar but cannot get it out while holding a fist full of rock salt. It is caught because it will not let go of what it is holding tightly to.*

*Part of the harvest of giving is the freedom and the joy that giving brings. This freedom is a spiritual freedom, the freedom that comes from putting God first in our lives. But don't be embarrassed that it can also be a financial freedom. If we are set free from the need to accumulate, or prove something by our wealth then we will quite literally have more disposable income - and more freedom in how we use it. We will have, as Paul promises, enough to live and enough to give.*

### Do it again!

*A man was giving his testimony to a large Christian convention in the States. He told them, "I had only \$10 dollars in the world and God said to me, 'Give it away'. So I did, and he gave me \$20. God said, 'Give it away' and I did and he gave me \$40. This went on until I became a millionaire." A little old lady sitting in the front row said aloud, "I dare you to do it again!"*

### The Vicar's prayer

*A man visited his vicar for advice. He had given 10% of his income for years but now he was in a really well paid job and a tithe seemed to be an enormous amount of money each month. He wasn't sure that he could afford to keep giving this much. The wise Vicar heard him out, and then suggested they prayed together. The man was staggered to hear the Vicar pray that his salary would be reduced to the level at which he could afford to continue giving his tithe!*