



# Preach 2 Corinthians notes

## 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (NIV)

### Suggested Lectionary Readings

1 Kings 17:8-16  
2 Corinthians 9 :6-15  
Mark 4 v1-20

## Sowing and Reaping

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

As it is written:

“He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;  
His righteousness endures forever.”

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 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.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul is establishing that the basic principles of giving are rooted in God’s grace while being aware of the sensitive interplay of money and personal relationships. The fair shares (*isotēs*) of 8:13 are the minimal response to God’s grace, the recognition of mutuality and the obligation to extend grace. In this final section Paul now consciously urges generosity on part of the Corinthians, a generosity that will match the gracious giving of the Macedonian church, though actual comparison is no longer the issue. There is no limiting of the gift to “what you have” (8:12) or assurance that no one is having an easy time at their expense (8:13). Instead there is an appeal to generosity founded on a promise that God will abundantly supply their

needs and so provide the ability to be generous. He has already hinted at this in 9:5 describing their gift as “a generous gift” and he now explores it further. There are three essential points he makes: the sower, the seed and the harvest.

### The Sower

In verse 6 Paul may be alluding to Proverbs 22:8 and 11:25 or may be simply quoting a contemporary and lost proverb. Certainly the imagery of sowing is used in various classical writers and would be familiar and obvious enough in its application to the Corinthians. One who sows sparingly will of necessity reap a sparse harvest. By contrast, sowing bountifully will



produce a rich harvest. The Greek word here is *eulogeias* meaning literally “with blessings” and the use of the plural is intended to denote abundance. This is the same word Paul uses in verse 5 for the gift the Corinthians should send to Jerusalem. The decision to give and to give freely and gladly to the collection is akin to sowing a seed which will produce an abundant crop at harvest time. In this way Paul introduces a new theme, that of the reward that follows upon giving.

The conclusion Paul draws is straightforward – we need to decide how much we shall give. The English translation “decide” reflects firstly Paul’s use of “heart” (*kardia*), which in ancient thought is the seat of decision making not of emotion. In addition Paul uses the verb *proērētai*, (another *-pro* suffix verb; see the notes in week 4) to denote the pre-planned nature of this giving. Paul then asserts that this giving should neither be sorrowful or born of necessity but the actions of a cheerful giver. The Greek word for cheerful is *hilaron* from which we get our word “hilarious”. Now anyone who counts the collection at the average parish church will know that some people’s giving is hilarious – but that is not quite what Paul had in mind!

At first sight this command to cheerful giving can sound like the familiar parental instructions to a child “...and do it with a smile on your face!” Two things need to be considered. The first is that the decision to give lies with the individual. Paul has consistently underlined that there is no compulsion beyond the obligation of grace itself. Secondly, as we explored in 9:1-5 it is in the nature of planned giving

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**The emphasis is upon the heart of the sower not the promise of the harvest that is reaped.**

that it makes possible a sustained and joyful response. It is last minute scrabbling for funds that breeds resentment and joyless giving

The way Paul uses this farming imagery is crucial. The emphasis is upon the heart of the sower, not the need to be met nor the promise of the harvest that is reaped. We need to distinguish between the gift and the giver. Pressing financial need puts the gift itself at centre stage. But mature fundraising and biblical stewardship is always about nurturing the giver and this is Paul’s focus here.

Now sowing is always in some field and the ministry of the church is one of the fields in which we are to sow. There are fully legitimate financial needs within our churches that need to be clearly articulated but we must become more skilled in presenting that need in terms of ministry and lives changed. All too often there is too much focus on the needs of the church as an institution, the need to pay the bills, to meet parish share. It is precisely at this point that unhealthy comparisons are made with parish next door paying less share, or alleged failures of pastoral care or wrong decisions by PCC.

### Seed

Verse 8 develops the farming imagery further. It is God the abundant provider who provides the seed we scatter. Paul’s language trips over itself trying to express this abundance of God using the verb “abound” (*perissuein*) used earlier in chapter 8 and the pregnant phrase “in all things, always, everywhere”. This is even more powerful in the alliterative Greek phrase- *panti pantote pasan*. Any sparse sowing is not for want of seed, but for want of trust in the heart of the sower or the desire to hold on





to what has been given. But in the economics of grace to hold on to what we have is to receive little blessing in return. God's provision means we will have enough to live and enough to give and share in every good work. To change the analogy the image of a dam might be helpful here, a picture of abundance stored up while there is a need for water in the valley below. The abundance is held up, fearful of being lost

All of which begs the question - how much seed do we need? The clue may lie in Paul's use of *autarkeia* in verse 8.

This carefully chosen word was used by the ancient philosophers called the Stoics to describe their quest for "self-sufficiency". They wished to progressively reduce their need to depend on externals, upon other people. In mainstream Greek thought the word came to be used of having enough to live on and this sufficiency was a pre condition of human freedom. The abundance of God is not given simply that we might have enough to live on but that we should be generous in every good work. To have sufficiency is to have the freedom to give not the freedom to hoard, to retain and to possess. Paul uses the same word, *autarkeia*, to mean contentment in Phil 4:11.

Knowing how to be content with what we have gives us the freedom to be able to give and not to keep what has been given to ourselves. Before we can decide how much to give we have to know how much we need to live. This is not just a matter for careful budgeting (though that is important) it is also about an inner contentment.

Mature stewardship is an enormously liberating

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**sowing is not for want of seed, but for want of trust in the heart of the sower**

experience, the recognition of receiving gladly and sharing gladly, finding a contentment whether in surplus or short supply. To literally not have enough whether in the absolute terms of third world poverty or the relative poverty in this country is an offence to grace and should be challenged with all means at our disposal. It is precisely this that Paul is addressing through the collection, lest we lose sight of its purpose. The abundance of God's giving is not a green light to the accumulation of riches but an invitation into the economy of receiving and giving, which is at the heart of the Kingdom of God. Stewardship is inextricably linked with spirituality and is never reducible to how much I can get away with giving.

We should also note that the obligation to extend and share grace through our giving rests upon all Christian people, whatever their personal circumstances. They must make an appropriate response for themselves. It is erroneous to assume on behalf of others in our churches that they cannot afford to give. It is spiritually damaging to deny access to the economy of grace by failing to nurture generous givers.

### Harvest

What is the harvest that giving reaps. Clearly we cannot exclude financial blessing because this is

precisely what the Jerusalem Christians would receive. But to find in these verses a crude promise of financial reward for speculative giving is to miss the entire point of Paul's teaching.

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**Stewardship is inextricably linked with spirituality**

Giving is a response to grace received; it is God centred stewardship not an extension of the consumer culture. It was Copernicus who first taught the medieval world that the sun is at the centre of our





galaxy and not our world. In like manner we need a Copernican revolution in our understanding of giving. That which is truly life giving, the glory and grace of God must be at the centre of our lives and we must find our proper orbit around that life giving grace.

Paul is clear that the two results of faithful obedient giving are firstly the expression of praise and thanksgiving to God in verse 13 and secondly the prayers and longing for the Corinthians from the Jerusalem church. (Note that the “they” of verse 13 is the Jerusalem church not the Corinthians as suggested in some English translations.) In Romans 15: 27 Paul is quite specific that as the gentiles share in the spiritual blessings of the Jerusalem church so Jerusalem should share their material blessings. In brief there is an economy of grace. God is the giver of all that is needed not only for living but for generous living. As we give so we reap spiritual blessings in which words like joy, freedom, contentment and obedience are all central.

The collection to which Paul devoted so much of his apostolic energy and longed for the Corinthians to share was a material sign of some healing of the split with Paul, of their identification with other churches and recognition of the unique place of the Jerusalem church within the history of salvation. Paul ends with a heartfelt ascription of praise and glory to God who is both the source and the goal of life giving grace.

### Core

The tough question is: how are you sowing – richly or

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reluctantly? The promise in this passage is that God will multiply what you sow back to you in everything – not just in money, or even spiritual blessing but also in the gift of contentment, of peace of heart and mind. The challenge is that we need to sow before we can reap. There is a domino effect in giving; when we learn to give, precisely because money is so close and important to us that it releases lots of other areas of our lives. Are we ready to put God to the test, to trust his promises?

### Congregation

A second tough question might be: Which field are you sowing in: your field or God’s? We cannot separate money from lifestyle. If all that we have is sown in the field of our own personal choices and satisfaction then we miss out on the blessing twice. Once because no matter how much we sow in our own field it will never be enough. Secondly because there will be so little left to be sown in God’s field and therefore so little spiritual harvest to be enjoyed.

### Fringe

Michael Green tells story of mercenary soldiers fighting in the crusade and needing to be baptised but keeping their sword arms out of the water! It conjures a mental image of us being baptised, holding our wallets and purses out of the water: “*Lord, please not this as well!*” Paul said that deciding to give, to be involved in the collection was a test of the faith of the Corinthians. I can give my time and my talents to the ministry of the church but the acid test is whether I will give my money as well. In truth, those who give most generously will give of all three together, in proportion to what God has given to them. ■

