

Week 10, 2 Corinthians 9

Hook



Main Point: Believers cheerfully fulfill their pledges to give, trusting God to resource their giving.

Group Activity: Batteries are an essential part of our lives. Below are a few significant dates in the history of the battery:

- 1798 – Invention of the first battery by Count Alessandro Volta
- 1868 – French chemist George Leclanche designs the first “wet” cell battery.
- 1888 – German scientist Dr. Carl Gassner invents the “dry” cell.
- 1896 – The first commercially available battery is sold in the U.S.
- 1898 – The flashlight is invented. It consisted of a dry cell battery, a bulb and brass reflector inside a paper tube.
- 1955 – First miniature batteries created
- 1956 – The 9-volt battery is invented.
- 1959 – First commercially viable cylindrical alkaline battery produced¹

Break your class into small groups. Challenge them to consider all of the devices they use daily that rely on the power of batteries and imagine that the battery was never invented. Ask them to develop a list of the top five items they would miss most of all.

Transition: Today’s lesson will examine what the believer can do through the enablement of God, particularly in the area of giving.

¹ <http://www.energizer.com/about-batteries/battery-history>

Week 10, 2 Corinthians 9

Book

Main Point: Believers cheerfully fulfill their pledges to give, trusting God to resource their giving.

2 Corinthians 9 In this chapter, Paul communicates the next steps for the Corinthian church, which has expressed a readiness to give to the needy believers in Jerusalem. He also gives the Corinthians instructions regarding their attitude toward giving, based on the Old Testament and fully flourishing in New Testament Gospel realities. Paul lastly explores the source behind generous giving, as well as its individual and churchwide effects.

2 Corinthians 9:1–5 [Read]

Sub-Point: Believers should act upon their readiness to give.

Verses 1–2 In this chapter, it is important to remember that when Paul sent the three brothers to collect the Corinthian offering for the needy believers in Jerusalem, his purpose was not *persuasion*, but rather *assistance*. At this point, the Corinthians had already declared that they were ready to give, Paul just wanted to help them get the job done.²

Since the Corinthians were already prepared to give, Paul starts in verse 1 saying that it would be redundant and unnecessary to write to them about reasons to give. In fact, he had already been boasting to the Macedonians that the Corinthians had been ready to give for a year (v. 2, note that Corinth is the capital of Achaia).³

According to verse 2, what was the result did the Corinthian's readiness have on the Macedonians? What believers in your life have spurred you on to good works?

Verses 3–5 But being *ready to give* and actually *giving* are different. When the brothers arrive at Corinth to collect the offering, Paul expects them to *act* on their declared readiness, because if the Corinthians fail to give, two horrible things would happen.

1) Paul's boasting of them would be "empty" (v. 3). Paul ties generosity to authentic faith, and adversely, ties ungenerous behavior to inauthentic faith. He hopes the Corinthians, for all their declared readiness, prove to be the former when the brothers arrive. The authenticity of the Corinthian's salvation is about to be revealed.⁴

² R Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006), 171.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 172.

2) The second horrible outcome would be humiliation (v. 4). The impoverished Macedonians had heard of the great readiness to give in Corinth, which motivated them to give as well, though they had next to nothing. If a ragged group of these generous, yet impoverished Macedonians finally came to collect the wealthy Corinthians' part in the offering, only to find them unprepared and stingy, the Corinthians and Paul would be disgraced.⁵

Paul desires to avoid both of these outcomes for the Corinthians' sake, so he sends ahead the brothers to collect the offering as soon as possible (v. 5).⁶ He ends this section stating that he desires their gift to be given generously, willingly and freely, not one given obligatorily or grudgingly. To approach this gift grudgingly was to communicate a grudging attitude toward the church at Jerusalem.

What spiritual disciplines do you have a desire to engage in? What steps can you take to move from desire to action?

If a believer wants to reflect the Gospel, how should he give?

Section Application There is a difference between good Christian *talk* about giving and *actually* giving. May we be believers who not only talk about relieving needs, but actually do so.

Further, believers must keep their promises. When we keep our word, we rightly reflect the God who keeps His. To do otherwise would tarnish the reputation of our God, of ourselves, and also those who vouch for us.

Have you made any pledges or promises this year that you have yet to fulfill? What plan can you make this week in order to do so?

2 Corinthians 9:6–15 [Read]

Sub-Point: God generously supplies the cheerful giver.

Verses 6–7 Paul continues in verse 6 with an easily understood parable for his hearers who are familiar with agrarian culture. Those who sow only a few seeds will get a pitiful harvest. But those who reach into their abundance and generously swing seeds far and wide in planting season will yield abundant fruit at harvest time.

Farmers always sow generously in anticipation of obtaining a great harvest, and this model has spiritual realities attached to it. When one freely scatters his blessings in this generous manner,

⁵ Hughes, 172.

⁶ Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longeman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 507.

he can anticipate spiritual blessings to sprout in his own life. For Paul, generosity births blessing.⁷

Verse 7 includes Paul's well-known call for givers to be cheerful. This challenge finds its origin in Deuteronomy 15:10–11, which tells those under the Old Covenant to give freely, without a grudging attitude. God's command of a cheerful attitude relates especially to the "sabbatical year of remission" in which Israel was instructed to forgive all debts every seven years.

The New Testament believer should display a cheerful giving mentality every *day*.⁸ Since we see our own sin-debt as graciously and freely paid by Jesus Christ, we can't help but graciously and freely give to others any chance we get.

How would you describe a cheerful giver?

In what ways can you help to lead your family and teach your children to be cheerful in their giving?

What does "under compulsion" mean? Why is giving this way be a false portrayal of the Gospel?

Verses 8–16 In verses 8–11, Instead of feeling the pressure to gather up funds in his own strength, Paul is convinced that God enables the giver to give with both spiritual and material blessings.⁹

Paul repeatedly cites God as the source of our giving within just three verses: "God is able to make all grace abound to you," "He has distributed freely," and "He who supplies seed to the sower ... will supply and multiply." *God* supplies our ability to give. And since giving depends on God, and not the giver's situation, the Corinthians (and we) haven't any excuse not to give.

Why does God do this? So the believer can be "generous in every way" (v. 11). God enriches people so they can enrich others, not so they can merely accumulate wealth or hoard blessings for themselves. As we are depleted by generous giving, we are also replenished to *keep giving* by divine grace.¹⁰ The Macedonians themselves proved this to be true, as they somehow reached into their poverty and ended up giving an unbelievable abundance.¹¹ Paul expects the same thing for the Corinthians, should they likewise choose to trust God to take care of them as they sacrificially give to Jerusalem.

⁷ Hughes 173.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹ Harris, 508.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Kruse, 217.

Yes, giving benefits the believer individually, but the benefits do not stop there. Giving also enriches the Church in three major ways.

- 1) *Thanksgiving to God* (vv. 11–12). Once the collection is finally in the hands of the needy Jewish Christians, all of the invested churches will join together in a unified thankfulness to the Lord for inspiring the collective effort to help His struggling children in Jerusalem.
- 2) *Glory to God* (v. 13). Through this contribution, the Jewish believers would finally see the Corinthian believers as legitimate partners in the Gospel and true brothers and sisters in Christ. The Jewish Christians would give great glory to God for uniting them with their Gentile brethren.
- 3) *A bond of affection for the Corinthian church* (v. 14). This contribution would cause the Jewish believers to long for the Corinthians, pray for them intentionally, to marvel at God’s grace greatly working in these Gentile believers.¹²

As Paul lists these churchwide benefits of the offering, he can’t help but finish this section with a fitting finale: “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”

How many times does Paul use the word “all” or “every” in this section? What point is Paul trying to make?

In what ways has God enriched you to give generously? How have you given? How have you been blessed through the process?

¹² Hughes, 175-177.

Week 10, 2 Corinthians 9

Took



Main Point: Believers cheerfully fulfill their pledges to give, trusting God to resource their giving.

Current Event: Genetics affects many aspects of who you are but what about your habits? A 2005 study from the University of Washington found that 12-year-olds with parents who smoke are more than twice as likely to begin a daily smoking habit by the age of 21 as children with non-smoking parents.¹³ A study of twins found genetics to be responsible for 33 percent of the variation in savings rates.¹⁴ A similar outcome resulted from individuals who volunteered their time; these volunteers are 145 percent more likely to have parents who volunteered.¹⁵

What habits have you inherited from your parents?

Whose habits do you currently reflect in your giving? How might you better resemble the example of Christ in this area?

Lesson conclusion: As the Corinthians ended up fulfilling their pledge to help the needy Jewish Christians, so should we fulfill our promises in giving. We should not be a people who merely speak about giving, but also follow through in our giving. Even if we find ourselves in a strapped situation like the Macedonians, we should trust that God enriches the believer to enrich others, no matter the financial circumstance. Trusting God to graciously supply the seed to the faithful sower is not just a nice thing to do; it authenticates our faith. Christians believe in the One who did not hoard His riches, but gave them away most extravagantly to us, the One who does not break His word to us, but keeps every promise. May we rightly reflect Him by giving extravagantly and keeping our pledges.

Challenge

¹³ <http://health.howstuffworks.com/mental-health/human-nature/behavior/are-habits-inherited.htm>

¹⁴ <http://health.howstuffworks.com/mental-health/human-nature/behavior/are-habits-inherited.htm>

¹⁵ <http://health.howstuffworks.com/mental-health/human-nature/behavior/are-habits-inherited.htm>

Evaluate your readiness to give. While all of us would like to think that we are eagerly ready to give like the Corinthians, when push comes to shove, we are not as prepared to part with our resources as we once thought. Consider your calendar regarding the next month. Are there any commitments you have that you could sacrifice in order to devote to someone who has a need, whether in your church or in your daily life? While we may sometimes assume we don't have much more to give, the truth is that we are much more like the well-off Corinthians than the impoverished Macedonians, and since God provides the resources, we have no excuse to avoid giving sacrificially.

Make good on a promise you have not yet fulfilled. Paul argues in this chapter that there is a difference between giving your word and following through. Have you given your word about something that you have not fulfilled? Whatever you have promised in the past, ask the Lord to bring it to mind and to give you the ability to fulfill that promise *this week*.

List the ways your generosity has churchwide effects. It's easy to dwell in the personal benefits of giving. However, to ensure we get outside of ourselves, it's helpful to think about the ways our giving benefits the Church. In what ways have your monetary contributions helped your church? Local missions? Global missions? List four or five reasons your giving edifies your church, and thank God for His grace to take care of His people through your generosity.