



UNFILTERED

REAL FAITH IN A FAKE WORLD

The Heart Behind the Hand

Have you ever had a moment where you suddenly felt like you'd been in the exact same situation before? You were doing something, talking to someone, or sitting somewhere, and this strange feeling hit you like, "Wait... I've been in this exact moment before." Even though you know you really hadn't. That feeling actually has a name. It's called déjà vu.

I mention that because, as we start 2 Corinthians chapter 9 today, you might feel a little bit of that. You might think, "Wait... didn't we just talk about this last week?"

And in some ways, you'd be right. Paul is still encouraging the church in Corinth to give generously. But there are also some new things he wants them to understand.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to follow through on their commitment to give. He pointed to the example of the Macedonian churches, who were very poor but still gave generously. Paul also reminded them that true generosity flows from the gospel itself. Jesus was rich in heaven, but He became poor for our sake so that we could become rich in Him. Because of that, Paul called the Corinthians to finish what they had started and give with sincere hearts.

Last week we saw Christ's example, and that example is our motivation to give back to God. Today we are going to look more at our attitude when we give and how God can use our generosity to bless others, bless us, and help His work move forward.

Paul is reminding us that just because our hand is doing something doesn't mean our heart is really in it. True generosity comes when your hand and heart work together, when what you do lines up with what you genuinely want to do for God.

Icebreaker

Can you think of a time when you went through the motions, where you were doing something with your hands, but your heart just wasn't in it?

Daily Devotions

Day 1: Explore It

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1–15.

- 1. According to verse 2, what does Paul say he knows about them, and to whom has he boasted about it?**
- 2. What does Paul say would happen if the Macedonians came and found them unprepared?**
- 3. According to verse 7, how is each person to give?**
- 4. As the Corinthians gave, what would they be enriched in, and for what purpose?**
- 5. In verse 12, what two results does Paul say come from this “ministry of this service”?**

Day 2 — Today's Theme: A Gameplan

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-5.

Every winter we try to take a trip to Chicago with our young adult group here at VBC (The Grove). Whenever we make this trip, someone will inevitably say, "Let's just walk around the city and figure it out." We go in the winter. It's freezing and people still want to just wander around and see what happens?!? Yeah... no. That sounds awful to me. At the very least, let's have a couple of things on the agenda so we know where we're going and what we're doing.

I've realized that one of my least favorite phrases with people is, "I don't know, we'll figure it out." I really don't like meandering without even a loose plan. I like structure. I like to know what's coming so I can anticipate what I should be ready for. It doesn't have to be overly scheduled, but if we're going to do something, let's at least have some direction.

Paul highlights a similar idea here when he talks about generosity. He encourages believers to be prepared to give, not expecting something in return, but giving with intentionality. In these verses, Paul sends people ahead to make sure the Corinthians' gift is ready before he arrives, so they won't feel rushed or pressured (or cause shame to the Macedonians). Instead, their generosity should be planned and willing, not forced. He's saying they should have a game plan for generosity.

When we don't have a plan to give, it's easy to forget about it altogether. We can become comfortable with what we have, neglect generosity, and even drift toward selfishness, never actually getting around to giving at all. But when we prepare our hearts and make a plan, we position ourselves to give freely and joyfully.

It's also important to remember that giving isn't just about money. (I'm well aware that some middle schoolers have about \$1.85 in their bank account. I have the photo to prove it.) So don't put yourself in a box and say, "Well, I don't have money, so this isn't for me." No, think bigger and ask, "What do I have that I can offer back to the Lord?"

At Village, we like to say it this way: How can we give our time, talents, and treasure back to the Lord? God can use all three of those things to bless other people and bring glory to Himself.

6. Paul wrote to the Corinthians as a reminder so they would be prepared. Where in your life right now do you need a "gracious reminder" to follow through in your relationship with Christ or His church?

7. If someone could see how you spend your time, treasure (money), or talents (energy/gifts), what would it tell them about what you care most about?

8. How could having a plan help you give your time, talents, or treasure more freely and joyfully?

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Sowing and Reaping

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6.

This past February, I had the great opportunity to do street evangelism during Mardi Gras in New Orleans. It was an incredible experience and a time when God grew and strengthened me to lean on Him in new ways. I bring this up because our time there was busy. (Our days started early and went late.) We occasionally had moments to rest, but a lot of it was go, go, go. On the first day, the trip director said, "If you have a chance, take a nap, because every ounce of energy you can get, you'll need it." When we hit the streets to share the gospel, we wanted to be at our best for God. We had to spend our energy for when it mattered most.

I don't expect many of us to be deeply into gardening or farming, but it helps to have a surface-level understanding of what Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 9:6. In verse 6, Paul uses an example most of the Corinthians would have understood, sowing and reaping, but it's also an example that can easily fly over our heads if we're not careful.

Sowing is the act of planting a seed in the ground, and reaping is gathering the harvest after that seed grows into something much bigger. For example, if I planted an apple seed (that's sowing), and it grows into a huge apple tree, the apples it bears are the harvest, the reaping.

No farmer considers sowing as a loss of seed because the harvest will provide the seed for the next season. Consequently, no sower begrudges the seed he casts upon the ground or tries to scrimp by with sowing as little as possible. He willingly sows all he can and trusts that God will bless the sowing with a bountiful harvest. If the farmer, for some reason, stints on the sowing, he will cheat himself of that harvest. The more he sows, the greater the harvest he will reap and the more he will have for sowing for the next harvest.¹

That's exactly Paul's point in verse 6. The one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and the one who sows generously will reap generously. In other words, the way we give (whether it's our time, our talents, or our treasure) is like planting seeds. When we are generous and willing to give, God uses those "seeds" to grow something much bigger than we could have imagined.

9. In verse 6, Paul teaches that "whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly." What does it look like in our lives today to sow sparingly (with our treasure, time, or talents)?

10. How could being generous with your time, talents, or treasure lead to a bigger "harvest" in your life or in the lives of others?

11. Can you think of a time when you gave or helped without expecting anything back? What happened as a result?

¹Garland, David E. Christian Standard Commentary: 2 Corinthians. Nashville: TN: Holman 2021.

Day 4 — Today's Theme: Out of Pressure or Out of Joy?

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7–11.

We've all had moments when we have zero interest in doing something, and then a friend says, "Let's do this!" and you really don't want to.

In high school, my sister was always really good at this. She always wanted to get together with people and do random fun activities. I tended to be the boring one. But she would get enough people excited and invested in the plan that if I decided not to participate, I'd be the one who looked lame.

So out of pressure, compulsion, or just not wanting to be the odd one out, I would jump into it.

Sometimes giving can feel the same way. We might give money, time, or help just because everyone else is, or because we feel we have to, not because we actually want to. That's exactly what Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 9:7. He says each person should give what they decide in their heart, not reluctantly or because they're forced. God loves a cheerful giver!

Giving should be happy and willing, done freely, with a thankful heart. If giving feels stressful, painful, or like "just a chore," don't do it. Paul isn't saying "give until it hurts"; he's saying give in a way that's joyful and fun, because you love God and want to bless others.

The word picture of this verse is not a person putting money into the collection doubled over in joyous laughter but rather a Christian giving prompted by joy in the Lord. This is the way we are to sow our money: with joy in Jesus and with joy for the cause of Jesus. So, give with a sense of "hallelujah" rather than as sorrowing over a hardship. Give gladly, not with grief.²

12. Have you ever helped or given just because everyone else was, or because you didn't want to feel left out? How is that different from giving because you want to?

13. What fears or reasons might make it hard to give your time, talents, or money freely? How does knowing that God takes care of us change the way we can give?

14. How does remembering God's gift in Jesus make giving feel like something fun and joyful instead of something you have to do?

² Grateful Giving (2 Corinthians 9:1–15) by Doug Van Meter

