

Charity Begins in the Heart

Topic

Giving

Theme

Christ and our fellow Christians challenge us to give.

Desired Learner Response

The learners will gratefully give of themselves to others.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 11

Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 8:1–15

Summary

By citing four examples of giving, this lesson focuses on how Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give to the relief fund for the Jerusalem believers.

Outline

- I. The Example of the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1–8)
- II. The Example of Christ (2 Cor. 8:9)
- III. The Corinthians' Previous Generosity (2 Cor. 8:10–12)
- IV. The Example in the Old Testament (2 Cor. 8:13–15)

Memory Verse

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich"
(2 Corinthians 8:9).

GETTING STARTED

Use the following activities to prepare the learners to think about giving.

Dollars and Sense

Instruct your learners to volunteer the first word that comes to mind as you say each of the following words: money, offering, fundraising, paycheck, poverty, welfare, and budget.

Paul wrote the Corinthians about the sensitive issue of giving. He challenged them to consider what they might lose if they refused to give as God directed them to give.

Sudden Millionaire

ASK: If you suddenly inherited a million dollars, what plans for the money would initially come to your mind? (Q1)

ASK: How much of the million dollars would you expect to give away? To whom would you give it? (Q2)

Today's lesson presents how Paul motivated the Corinthians to give generously. Though he used the impoverished, rather than the rich, as his shining example of giving.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The believers in Jerusalem had a problem. They were poor and in dire straits. Paul wrote to motivate the Corinthian believers to give to a relief fund designated for the believers in Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 8 we see at least four motives for giving, all of which involve examples of giving.

I. The Example of the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1–8)

Talking about a good deed someone else did can highly motivate others to do a good deed. Being aware of this motive, Paul shared with the Corinthians the testimony of what was happening in Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1).

Paul attributed the actions of the Macedonians to *the grace of God*. It was only by God's grace that they were able to give as they did.

READ: 2 Corinthians 8:2. **ASK:** What two paradoxes do you see in this verse? (Q3) *One, they were in great affliction but possessed abundant joy. Two, they lived in deep poverty but their generosity was extremely rich.*

The Macedonian Christians were poor because the Romans had conquered their land and claimed its wealth for Rome. The invaders had taken the Macedonians' gold and other valuables to Rome and had seized Macedonia's gold mines and timber and shipbuilding industries. Thus, they took not only the wealth of the land but also its wealth-producing ability. This left the Macedonians in deep poverty and in great affliction. Yet they had an abundant joy in the Lord and were content with what they had.

The Macedonians gave liberally despite deep poverty. One commentator calls this rock-bottom poverty.

READ: 2 Corinthians 8:2. **ASK:** What did the Macedonians demonstrate about their spiritual state by giving out of their financial poverty? (Q4) *Their spiritual richness.*

The Macedonians were poor in ownership but rich in generosity. They gave what they had, and more. Paul said they gave *to their power* and *beyond their power* (8:3). They gave more than they could afford to give. Perhaps they would best empathize with the Jerusalem saints, since they were so poor themselves.

The Macedonians not only gave but also begged Paul to receive their gifts. Possibly because they were so poor, Paul had not asked them to give as he had asked those in Corinth and Galatia to do (1 Cor. 16:1–4).

READ: 2 Corinthians 8:4. **ASK:** What did the Macedonians call their giving? (Q5) *A gift; a fellowship.*

ASK: How can giving to the Lord's work be a partnership? (Q6) *The believers who give are joined in the same cause as the believers to whom they give.*

The Macedonians were serving the same God as the believers in Jerusalem. They were brothers in Christ. They were partners in the work of the Lord. Helping the believers in Jerusalem would mean helping part of God's team. The Macedonians wanted to see the gospel prosper in their backyard as well as in distant lands.

ASK: How does the Macedonians' attitude toward other churches differ from the attitude between many of today's fellowshipping churches of like faith? *Often fellowshipping churches of like faith in neighboring towns have a competitive rather than a cooperative attitude.*

READ: 2 Corinthians 8:5. **ASK:** What decision did the Macedonians make before they gave their financial gift? (Q7) *To give themselves to the Lord and to His missionaries.*

True consecration to God supersedes all other loyalties. The Macedonians gave money they could not afford to give because they were loyal to God, not to material possessions.

ASK: What does stingy giving say about a person's love for the Lord? (Q8) *It is limited; it is not primary.*

The Corinthians had started to collect an offering at some point in the past. Titus had helped them start the collection process (8:6). Paul challenged them to become active again in the grace of giving. They had many other graces, and Paul wanted them to abound in giving too (8:7).

READ: 2 Corinthians 8:8. **ASK:** What would the Corinthians' generous giving prove? (Q9) *The sincerity of their love.*

ASK: Why is giving one's money to the Lord a good barometer of the sincerity of one's love? (Q10) *Giving money is difficult to do for most people. Our selfish desires call for us to love ourselves by spending all our money on ourselves.*

Giving is a Spirit-enabled gift. Romans 12:8 includes giving in a list of spiritual gifts.

ASK: What happens when someone gives to the Lord's work out of his or her own strength instead of the Spirit's power and leading? (Q11) *Motives for giving are wrong. The amount given is limited.*

ASK: What would you say to those who believe that they do not have the spiritual gift of giving and therefore do not need to be concerned about giving? (Q12) *God expects everyone to give regardless of giftedness.*

Regardless of whether a believer has the spiritual gift of giving, all believers are called to give as the Lord prospers them (1 Cor. 16:2).

RESOURCE: Display resource 11. **ASK:** How might the gift of giving manifest itself in the life of a believer? (Q13) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) *Regular giving to the Lord's work; anonymous gifts to those in need; sensitivity to needs; giving of time and energy to meet needs.*

ASK: How might our church more effectively minister to needy believers? (Q14)

ASK: What obligation, if any, does our church have to help needy strangers who knock on our church's door and ask for donations? (Q15) *The obligation is twofold: to share the gospel with them and to love them, which may or may not mean the church helps them financially.*

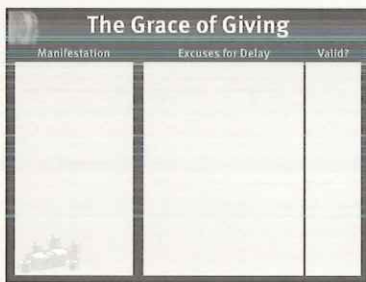
II. The Example of Christ (2 Cor. 8:9)

The Macedonians' example of giving was a strong motivator to encourage the Corinthians to give, but in verse 9 Paul added a much more powerful motivator—the example of Christ.

Christ graciously condescended to become a man. He Who owns the universe became a man of poverty. He left Heaven to be born in a cattle shed. He never owned a house of His own. When He rode into Jerusalem at His triumphal entry, it was on a borrowed donkey. The only clothes He owned were the clothes on His back, and those were taken from Him in His last hours before death. When He was buried, it was in another's tomb.

Why did He come to earth in poverty and die? *For your sakes he became poor*, Paul informed the Corinthians (8:9). He did it for our sakes too. Because He loved us and was committed to glorifying the Father, He was willing to die for our sins. By His death we become rich. We have spiritual riches in abundance in Christ.

ASK: What do you think is an appropriate response to Jesus' sacrificial love and grace? (Q16)



III. The Corinthians’ Previous Generosity (2 Cor. 8:10–12)

To motivate the Corinthians to give, Paul first gave the example of the Macedonians, then of Christ. Next Paul gave the example of the previous generosity of the Corinthians themselves. Paul introduced this motivator by insisting that he was not giving a direct command of God but rather his *advice*. However, since he was an apostle, his advice was to be taken seriously, and it was, after all, inspired *advice*. He told his readers the best thing for them to do was to complete the collection they had begun a year earlier. He was drawing on their earlier liberality to encourage them to finish the collection. It is good for us to stop sometimes and think about our Christian life and ask ourselves, Am I as close to the Lord as I once was? The examples of other Christians may challenge us. But if we have been Christians for some time and have become complacent, perhaps the best challenge, next to the example of Christ, is to look back at our Christian experience at the time right after we became saved.

The Corinthians had begun to take up an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem a year earlier. *A year ago* (8:10) may be used in the sense of *last year*, and it could refer to anytime within the previous year. *To do, but also to be forward* (8:10) means *to do and to be willing to do*. They had begun to give because they were willing to give. The giving was voluntary. If there is a will to do so, the action will most likely follow. The previous year they had been willing. Accordingly, the collection had begun. They had made a good start.

But starting is not enough. A good finish is more important. So in verse 11 Paul encouraged the Corinthians to finish what they had begun. He instructed, *Now therefore perform the doing of it*.

RESOURCE: Display resource 11. **ASK:** What are common excuses for delaying one’s giving to the Lord’s work? (Q17) (Record the learners’ answers on the resource.) *I don’t make enough money. I want to get out of debt first. I send money to charities. I am behind in saving for retirement.*

ASK: Are any of the excuses valid? (Q18) (Indicate the validity of each excuse by writing *yes* or *no* in the far-right column on the transparency.)

The Grace of Giving		
Manifestation	Excuses for Delay	Valid?

IV. The Example in the Old Testament (2 Cor. 8:13–15)

At the end of verse 12 Paul stated another principle of Christian giving: *according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not*. The principle is called proportionate giving. He continued this thought in verse 13. Perhaps some of his attackers in Corinth accused Paul of asking too much of the church, saying that he was draining it to help other churches. To meet this accusation head-on he wrote, *I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: but by an equality* (8:13, 14).

There is no advantage in making the rich give to the point where they become poor. Then no one would have anything to give. Paul said he did not want the Corinthians to be burdened. Rather he was encouraging them to give proportionately. Since they had much, they could give more than some of the other churches. Since they had much to begin with, they would still have enough for their own needs, yet they could help supply the needs of the poor believers in Jerusalem.

However, lest they become complacent in their wealth and ease, Paul remind-

ed them that circumstances could quickly change. The day could come when they might fall on hard times. One day the Jerusalem believers might be wealthy, and then they would be giving and the Corinthians would be receiving (8:14). Then the same principle of proportionate giving would hold true.

ASK: What do you think it would take to persuade materialistic Christians to put spiritual values ahead of materialistic interests? (Q19)

The account of the gathering of manna teaches the principle of equality (2 Cor. 8:15; Exod. 16:14–18). Although God sent enough manna for everyone, some gathered more than they could use in a day. Those who gathered more than they could use shared with those who could not gather enough manna. If those with extra manna were greedy and did not share their excess manna, it spoiled and was no good. In the end all had enough.

ASK: What appropriate action might be taken in each of the following situations:

- A church with a big surplus bank account refuses to adopt any support of qualified missionary candidates.
- A church with a lean, dwindling bank account has a surplus of members with large bank accounts, but the church isn't meeting its budget.
- A civic group has asked a church with an excellent record of giving to contribute to needs of homeless and poor families in the community.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Use the following activities to help each learner decide to give faithfully to the Lord and to help meet the needs of believers in need.

Charity Begins with You

ASK: What needy person or group of people could use your help this week? (Q20)

ASK: How will you help? (Q21)

Giving Back

ASK: Knowing that the Lord has given so much to you, including the sacrifice He made at Calvary, what will you offer Him today? (Q22)

Summary and Memory Verses

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: By God's grace I can give of myself gratefully.

Encourage your learners to memorize 2 Corinthians 8:9. Give them an opportunity to quote the verses in class next week.

Waves of Grace	
By God's grace I can . . .	7.
1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.