

Stewardship *and* Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Corinthians 8–9; John 3:16; John 17:5; Luke 9:58; Rev. 13:8; Rom. 12:8; Rom. 15:26, 27.

Memory Text: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9, NKJV).

Second Corinthians 8 and 9 show that Paul gave the Corinthians the opportunity to serve their brothers and sisters in Judea. This passage shows that giving is a privilege that God grants us, so that we can emulate the self-giving character of Christ. The language of heaven is one of giving. Notice these remarkable words: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16, NKJV; *emphasis supplied*).

Furthermore, John 3:16 clearly expresses God's purpose in giving Jesus, so that “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (NKJV). Stewardship and mission go together in this passage. They are as inseparable as the two sides of a coin. It is no wonder that Paul identifies himself and his fellow workers as “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1, NKJV). We, too, are stewards in the same sense.

This week we will see that the concepts of stewardship and mission are deeply rooted in the example of Jesus. Indeed, stewardship and mission are inseparable. Stewardship provides the church with financial and human resources to fulfill God's mission.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 12.

The Example of Jesus

The context of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 has to do with Paul's encouraging members in Corinth to complete a fundraiser for the impoverished churches in Judea. Apparently, they had already committed to doing that (2 Cor. 8:10, 11; 2 Cor. 9:5; see also 1 Cor. 16:1–4), but relationship issues between them and Paul had complicated things. After dealing with these issues (2 Corinthians 1–7), Paul now turns to the conclusion of that task (2 Corinthians 8–9).

Initially, Paul appeals to the example of the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1–7), whose extreme poverty did not prevent them from overflowing “in a wealth of generosity” (2 Cor. 8:2, *ESV*). Yes, poverty and generosity can walk together. However, this admirable generosity of the Macedonians is but a replication of Jesus' generosity in giving Himself for us (2 Cor. 8:8–15).

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. What does this passage tell us about the example of Jesus?

Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 8:9 is one of the most astonishing, powerful, and profound passages in the whole Bible. Paul tells the story of Jesus' mission but with an incredible economy of words. There is so much theology here. This is the story of redemption but in only one verse.

Even more impressive is that this story is told through financial language. Yes, Jesus was rich. His richness refers to His pre-existence in heaven (*John 17:5*). He decided to become poor by giving up the heavenly glory and coming to this world of sorrows. He became literally poor (*Luke 9:58*). Although He was equal with God, He “emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men” (*Phil. 2:7, NASB*). “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (*Phil. 2:8, ESV*).

Jesus gave His own life so that we might live forever with Him. His offering had a purpose: our salvation. Stewardship and mission go together. Second Corinthians 8–9 tells the story of a particular money offering, but this story is based upon Jesus. During this week, we will see theological principles related to the practice of offering gifts that are based on Christ's offering of Himself.

Dwell on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. When you realize that all this was done for you so that you can have hope of something beyond this miserable existence here, what should your reaction be?

Motivation

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1, 5 and 2 Corinthians 9:7, 9, 13, 15. What is the central message of these passages?

The language of giving pervades 2 Corinthians 8 and 9: “The grace of God . . . has been given” (2 Cor: 8:1, *ESV*); “They gave themselves” (2 Cor: 8:5, *ESV*); “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart . . . , for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor: 9:7, *NIV*); “He has given to the poor” (2 Cor: 9:9, *ESV*); “They will glorify God because of . . . the generosity of your contribution” (2 Cor: 9:13, *ESV*); “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (2 Cor: 9:15, *ESV*). Second Corinthians 8 and 9 begin and end with the language of giving (2 Cor: 8:1 and 2 Cor: 9:15). We must read these two chapters with the idea of giving in mind. They present at least four major reasons for giving our offerings.

Gratitude for God’s grace (2 Cor: 8:1; 2 Cor: 9:14, 15). Second Corinthians 8–9 begins with a reference to “the grace of God” (2 Cor: 8:1). A little further, Paul says, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor: 8:9, *ESV*). The grace of God and Christ is presented here as one’s primary reason for the practice of offering. God did so much for us by giving us Christ. By offering our gifts in return, we recognize the grace of God in our lives.

As with the concept of giving, the term “grace” (in Greek, *charis*) also occurs repeatedly in 2 Corinthians 8–9. Likewise, the word *charis* occurs at the beginning and the end of this passage (2 Cor: 8:1; 2 Cor: 9:14, 15). Paul applies this term with different meanings in the passage to emphasize that the grace of Christ in our lives results in grace for others and for thanksgiving.

Desire to follow the example of Jesus (2 Cor: 8:9). Jesus was rich and became poor (remember that these are symbols for His eternal pre-existence and then coming into humanity, respectively). There is only one way for that to have happened: He gave all. As for us, by sharing our offerings, we provide means for others to know Christ.

Desire to share God’s blessings (2 Cor: 9:10, 11). We give to others only because we first received from God. He enriches us so that we can be generous.

Sincere love (2 Cor: 8:8, 24). Giving is the test of sincere and genuine love. It is the most substantial evidence that love dwells in one’s heart. To use an English expression, it is to “put your money where your mouth is.”

How generous are you? In light of the Cross, how much do you give in contrast to what you could give?

Planning

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7. What does this passage say about the act of offering?

God's decision to save the world took place even before the world fell into sin. Christ's coming to die for us was part of an ancient plan (*Rev. 13:8*). God was not caught by surprise. He had made plans to give Himself through Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, planning is an essential theological principle that concerns the act of giving. This can be seen in at least two ways:

First, **planning involves previous decision**. Paul says that "each of you should give what you have decided in your heart" (*2 Cor. 9:7, NIV*). The Greek word translated as "decided" is the verb *proaireō*. This verb is a compound form. The particle *pro* means "beforehand" or "in advance," and *aireō* means in this context "to decide." Thus, *proaireō* points to a decision made beforehand. Also, by starting his statement with "each of you," Paul indicates that the given amount will not be the same for everyone. His point was simply that whatever people decide to give, they should do it with careful reflection. They should give what they believe is the right amount for them to give.

Second, **planning involves the principle of proportionality**. Paul reports that the Macedonians "gave according to their means" (*2 Cor. 8:3, ESV*). Next, he applies this principle of proportionality to the Corinthians, as well. Encouraging them to finish the task that they had already committed to, he urges them to complete that project by using the resources that they possess (*2 Cor. 8:11*). He concludes this thought by saying that the offering is given "according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have" (*2 Cor. 8:12, ESV*). Whereas the Bible defines the proportionality of the tithes, namely, 10 percent, the same does not apply to the offerings. "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart" (*2 Cor. 9:7, NIV*) by applying the principle of proportionality. In other words, each one decides which proportion of earnings that he or she will give as an offering. Each one is supposed to give in proportion to what one has. This cannot be done without planning.

How faithful are you with tithes and offerings, no matter how rich or poor you are? What excuses do you use to hold back from giving when you know that you can do more?

Attitude

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–5. What possible reason could have been behind the Macedonians’ willingness to give their offerings with such generosity?

The positive attitude of the Macedonians can be seen in several ways.

First, **they gave with abundant joy (2 Cor. 8:2)**. Paul says that the Macedonians’ “abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity” (2 Cor. 8:2, *ESV*). He later mentions that “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7, *NKJV*). The Greek word rendered as “cheerful” occurs only here in the New Testament. A term from the same family occurs elsewhere: “The one who does acts of mercy [must do it] with cheerfulness” (Rom. 12:8, *ESV*). Terms from this word family sometimes appear in extra-biblical literature, with a sense of gladness and happiness. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, being a cheerful giver means giving without reluctance.

Second, **they gave with generosity (2 Cor. 8:2)**. Before Paul mentioned the Macedonians’ generosity, he first referred to their “extreme poverty” (*ESV*). The word “generosity” (in Greek, *haplotētos*) appears twice more in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Paul says, “You will be enriched in every way so that you can be *generous* on every occasion” (2 Cor. 9:11, *NIV*; *emphasis supplied*), meaning that we are given so that we can then give. A little further, he mentions “the *generosity* of your contribution” (2 Cor. 9:13, *ESV*; *emphasis supplied*). In this passage, being generous in contributing is a way of confessing Christ’s gospel.

Third, **they gave “of their own free will” (2 Cor. 8:3, *NLT*)**. This means that they gave voluntarily. This becomes even more admirable when one sees they did not give out of their surplus, for their resources were extremely limited. Paul uses the same idea to characterize Titus’s willingness to visit the Corinthians. He went to Corinth voluntarily (2 Cor. 8:17).

Fourth, **they gave with a sense that giving is a privilege (2 Cor. 8:4)**. This attitude is perceptible in the Macedonians’ request to participate in the collection. “They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service” (2 Cor. 8:4, *NIV*).

Finally, **they participated in the collection as an act of total consecration (2 Cor. 8:5)**. Paul says, “They gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us” (2 Cor. 8:5, *ESV*). Giving oneself to the Lord results in giving oneself to others. The Macedonians expanded their mission involvement beyond financial assistance. That is, giving and being generous is not limited to money alone.

Unity

We have seen that Paul encourages the members in Corinth to get involved in a collection for the impoverished churches in Judea. One of his purposes is to kindle a sense of unity. He wants them to participate, to be part of the mission. He wants to show that the Gentile churches are part of the same family of God as are the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. That is, these people, who were once their opponents, are now, indeed, fellow members with them in God's new covenant remnant. Paul wants to see the whole Christian family, Jew and Gentile, united in a powerful way that can bear a witness to the church in generations to come.

Titus and two other acclaimed brothers were in charge of the funds. God put this care for the church into the heart of Titus (*2 Cor. 8:16*). Through the churches, God also chose the two other brothers (*2 Cor. 8:18–23*). They are called “messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ” (*2 Cor. 8:23, NKJV*). Whether “the glory of Christ” describes these two faithful brothers or the churches themselves does not matter. Giving offerings is ultimately a signal of loyalty to Christ, the Head of the church (*Eph. 4:15*).

Second Corinthians 8–9 indicates that the offerings should be given to people appointed by God through the church. The phrases “all the churches” (*2 Cor. 8:18, NKJV*), “chosen by the churches” (*2 Cor. 8:19, NKJV*), and “messengers of the churches” (*2 Cor. 8:23, NKJV*) suggest precisely that. Thus, the following exhortation is not surprising, “Give proof before the churches of your love” (*2 Cor. 8:24, ESV*).

Bringing offerings to the church—God's appointed instrument on earth—promotes unity and, at the same time, is the result of a sense of unity (*2 Cor. 8:13, 14*). Money can be a great unifier. On the other hand, if people's eyes are not single to the glory of God, money can create division, as well.

How does Romans 15:26, 27 reveal Paul's desire for unity here?

Finally, Paul depicts the collection as service or ministry, as an act of grace, as a blessing, as an act of worship, and also as fellowship. All that from an offering? Think about it.

How does our giving to fellow churches and missions overseas, often in faraway places, help bring unity to our world church?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “A Liberal Church,” pp. 335–345, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Those whose hearts are filled with the love of Christ, will follow the example of Him who for our sake became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich. Money, time, influence—all the gifts they have received from God’s hand, they will value only as a means of advancing the work of the gospel. Thus it was in the early church; and when in the church of today it is seen that by the power of the Spirit the members have taken their affections from the things of the world, and that they are willing to make sacrifices in order that their fellow men may hear the gospel, the truths proclaimed will have a powerful influence upon the hearers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 71.

“The Lord does not need our offerings. We cannot enrich Him by our gifts. Says the psalmist: ‘All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.’ Yet God permits us to show our appreciation of His mercies by self-sacrificing efforts to extend the same to others. This is the only way in which it is possible for us to manifest our gratitude and love to God. He has provided no other.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 18, 19.

“How great was the gift of God to man, and how like our God to make it! With a liberality that can never be exceeded he gave, that he might save the rebellious sons of men and bring them to see his purpose and discern his love. Will you, by your gifts and offerings, show that you think nothing too good for Him who ‘gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life?’”—Ellen G. White, in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 15, 1900.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on 2 Corinthians 8:9. Why is the example of Jesus so crucial as far as stewardship is concerned?
- 2 John 3:16 hints that the language of heaven is one of giving. Read John 15:13; Ephesians 5:2, 25; Galatians 2:19, 20; and 1 John 3:16. What do these passages and John 3:16 have in common, and what message can we take from them?
- 3 Based on your reading of 2 Corinthians 8–9, what are the personal benefits of giving?
- 4 In addition to giving systematic offerings, what other things can you do to imitate Jesus’ self-giving example?

BLESS You! Part 1

By OFFICE OF ADVENTIST MISSION

Copenhagen wasn't the kind of place where people went looking for faith. In fact, Rob and Bethany knew that moving to one of the most secular cities in Europe meant facing a different kind of mission field—one where success would be measured by relationships, not numbers.

They arrived in 2024, stepping into a city where polished systems and comfortable lifestyles seemed to leave little room—or need—for God. But Rob and Bethany hadn't come to preach sermons on street corners. They came to build friendships.

Years earlier, the couple had served in a traditional church before going to seminary. There, God began to stir something new in their hearts.

“We realized we wanted to rub shoulders with people outside our Adventist bubble,” Rob recalled. “We wanted friends we could introduce to Jesus.”

Their first foray into church planting was in Squamish, British Columbia.

It was unfamiliar and stretching—unlike anything they'd done before. But through this experience they learned to befriend people of very different beliefs and worldviews. They discovered they could be confident in representing their faith while connecting with others in meaningful ways.

Four years later, when the opportunity came to plant a church in a cross-cultural setting, they felt ready. Now in Copenhagen, they approach ministry through a relational framework. Rob adapted a simple acronym—**BLESS**—that encompasses their friendship-focused approach.

B stands for *Begin with Prayer*. “You start by pursuing a friendship with Jesus,” Rob explained, “and asking Him to guide you toward others.”

L means *Listen*. “You don't talk first. You learn. You listen to their lives, their needs, and where God is already working.”

E is for *Eat*. “There's no better way to connect than to share a meal. It builds trust.”

S stands for *Serve*. “Serving people in small ways opens doors.”

And the final **S**—*Share*—comes last for a reason. “When someone is ready and God opens doors, share what Jesus has done in our lives.”

Rob and Bethany weren't starting with a building or a program.

They were starting with prayer—and a table big enough for neighbors.

Reaching hearts for Jesus in the Post-Christian Window is one of our church's greatest mission challenges. To learn more, visit GMSda.org/refocus. Read the rest of this mission story next week.