

# Session 4

## STEWARDSHIP OF RESOURCES

*2 Corinthians 9:6-14*

### Memory Verse

<sup>6</sup> *The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously.* <sup>7</sup> *Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver.*

– 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7, CSB

## Stewardship of Resources

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** God is sovereign over His creation. This means that everything His people have in their possession is not ultimately theirs to do with whatever they like. God owns all things and people are merely given stewardship over them.

In a study conducted in Zurich, researchers found that being generous tends to make the giver happier. In this study, two groups of people were given \$100 each. The first group was instructed to spend the money on someone else while the second group was instructed to spend it on themselves. It turned out that those who used the money to help others were happier after the money was spent than the group that used the money on themselves.<sup>1</sup>

❓ When have you experienced happiness over spending money on someone else rather than yourself? What benefit is there from spending on someone else that we don't get from spending on ourselves?

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❓ Why is it easier to be selfish than to be generous? When is it the hardest to be generous? When does it come easily?

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Can you think of any examples or teachings in the Bible concerning generosity? How would you sum up the Bible's overall teaching about generosity?

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Almost everyone would agree that being generous is a virtue and a characteristic to be cultivated and encouraged. However, it is much easier to assent to the theory than to practice the principle in everyday life. Our reluctance to put others first is due, at least in part, to sin. The reality of human nature is that people are primarily concerned about self-preservation. That is their nature. In general, we are concerned first and foremost about our own preferences, desires, and happiness. Generosity is oftentimes painful because it goes against what the natural self desires and values. To be generous, a person has to look beyond themselves and be motivated by something deeper than self-preservation.

It seems counter-intuitive, but in the Christian life, generosity actually does enrich believers. It's true that there are emotional and psychological benefits associated with giving that social scientists have actually quantified. But there are spiritual benefits as well. It is helpful to understand the biblical principles of generosity and also the promised rewards. These truths are found in 2 Corinthians 9:6-14. But first let's look closely at a verse found in Philippians 4 to help us frame our understanding of generosity.

## Session Summary

Just as God's love for the world resulted in His giving Christ unto the world, so does the Christian's love for God result in their giving of their resources unto Him. Of course, God needs nothing, but He calls on Christians to be generous in their living. Because sacrificial giving is an act of obedience, it is also an act of worship. Christians who give in faith and obedience worship God. Furthermore, in God's Word Christians find helpful principles about giving and insight about the results of giving.

### 1. Giving is Worship (Phil. 4:15-20)

Our primary text for today is 2 Corinthians 9, in which Paul gave instruction concerning giving to the Corinthian church. But first, we will lay a foundation for giving from Paul's teaching to the Philippian church. In Philippians 4:15-20, Paul described the gifts that the

church of Philippi sent to him via Epaphroditus. We can't know with confidence the exact nature of the gift, but it is a safe assumption that at least a part, and maybe all, of the gift was money to assist him in his ministry. Through their sacrificial gifts, Paul's needs were met, and he was able to continue on in the work that the Lord called him to pursue.

**?** What did Paul mean by “the profit that is increasing to your account” in verse 17? How does this apply to us today?

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Paul stated clearly that the service the Philippians rendered to him—the kindness they showed him—was ultimately for their benefit. While what they had done was certainly a sacrifice, Paul assured them that it was not a sacrifice without reward.

The implication is that they should be grateful for the opportunity to serve because it resulted in profit being accrued to their accounts. In other words, God saw their sacrifice, and He would reward them for it. This principle is expressed time and again in the Bible (see also 2 Cor. 9:6; Deut. 15:10; Ps. 37:25; Prov. 11:25; Prov. 19:17; Mal. 3:10).

**?** In verse 18, Paul tried to help them see that though he received the gift, it was actually an act of worship to God. Why would that be so?

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Paul used the language of Old Testament worship to explain the nature of the Philippians' gift. He said it was a “fragrant offering.” This phrase is common in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) and is parallel with the “pleasing aroma” of sacrifices to God that we see in Genesis 8:21, Exodus 29:18, and Leviticus 4:31. The literal offerings of the Old Testament system were no longer in effect because of Christ's work on the cross, but the principle behind this sort of sacrificial worship to God carried over. The Philippians' gift was an act of worship because it was given in faith and obedience for the purposes of the kingdom. Paul was the steward who would be managing it, but the gift was safeguarded in the coffers of the King.

**?** Application: According to this passage, what is the benefit of regular generosity? Why should we view our generosity as an act of worship to God?

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## 2. Principles of Generous Living (2 Cor. 9:6-9)

In this passage, Paul taught how Christian giving is to be done. Believers are to give generously and cheerfully. Giving will be neither generous nor cheerful if givers are anxious about meeting their own needs. Christians may have reasoned that the more they gave, the less they would have, and the more likely they would become dependent on the giving of others.

We should remember that there is always a return on investment when we give. There is a spiritual return on the investments you make in the kingdom of God. The first principle that we should consider has to do with timing on the returns.

There may be times when Christians invest and don't see a return for months or years. There may be times when they give and never really see a direct return. Should Christians grow frustrated or weary when this happens? No, because their giving isn't motivated by return. They give because they have received. They give because they are commanded to give. They give because they love Jesus and desire to walk in His ways.

**?** When we talk about a return on investment in Kingdom giving, do we mean dollars and cents? What is dangerous about making the basis of our investment returned money?

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In verse 8, Paul wrote "always having everything you need." Paul didn't preach a prosperity gospel. He wasn't promoting a "get rich" strategy. Paul expressed to the Corinthians that God would take care of them by providing for their needs. He did not mean God would make them financially rich people. The return on investment would come in many forms, some tangible and some intangible.

When one's giving is an expression of God's grace, God will provide more to the giver, who then will be able to give even more. God sees far more clearly than we do that all worldly wealth is temporary. God has given us excess so that we will live generously and take care of others. He expects His people to invest their financial resources in ways that will endure for eternity. Generous giving is not to be done haphazardly, but purposefully.

**?** Do you think a Christian's attitude and posture matter when they give sacrificially and invest in Kingdom work?

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Paul said that those who give should do so cheerfully. The fact of the matter is that what Christians do with their hands is inextricably related to what is going on in their hearts. If they are sinning in their hearts, then the fruit of their hands gets spoiled. Similarly, if a Christian has good intentions but doesn't follow through, then they are in opposition to their heavenly Father.

God has been generous with Christians giving them both an example and a motivation to do likewise. Christians are commanded to be generous, and when they are generous, they also receive a return on the investment. But it doesn't stop there. God blesses them so that they can be generous again. It's a cycle of generosity.

**?** Application: Do those close to you consider you to be a generous person? Is generosity reflected in both your heart and your hands? What needs to change?

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### 3. Rewards of Generous Living (2 Cor. 9:10-14)

We've seen several principles of generosity found in the New Testament. Now, let's think about spiritual rewards for generous living. The first benefit of being generous is spiritual growth.

**?** What is the connection between generosity and spiritual growth? How have you experienced this?

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Giving sacrificially to others and to kingdom work is a safeguard for those who are in Christ. Paul said that giving would increase the harvest of the believers' righteousness. In other words, living generous was going to help the Corinthians be more like Jesus. Giving away material resources forces Christians to remember that their true treasure isn't found here on earth. It forces them to rely more upon God and to recognize idols in their lives. All of this contributes to their sanctification.

**?** According to verse 12, how else does generosity result in spiritual growth? How did Paul describe their expression of gratitude? What characterized their thanksgiving?

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Paul said that as others witnessed and experienced the generosity of the Corinthians it would lead them to give thanks to God. Think about it: When a person experiences the work of God's grace in daily life through someone else, the response is not to set up shrines and altars to worship that person. The response is to worship, love, enjoy, and trust God even more because of His provision through another person. So, generosity causes spiritual growth in the giver, the receiver, and those Christians who are witnesses of what the giver does.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that God was capable of meeting their needs as they followed His leadership in meeting the needs of others. One obvious way the Lord provides for His people is through one another. When God's people happily render the service of meeting one another's needs, the result is thanksgiving to God. Those receiving gifts from other believers recognize His hand at work and thank Him.

When followers of Jesus live generously, joy can't be squashed. You might as well try to keep the tide from coming in as you try to hold back the joy that is produced by generous living. This joy is produced in the giver, receiver, and witness alike. Why?

Because everything about biblical generosity places Christians squarely in the middle of God's will. Plus, generosity is a direct parallel of the grace of God that Christians see at the cross, as well as the innumerable daily blessings from Him that they experience. Generosity is grace. And grace is the currency of the Kingdom.

We certainly don't give in order to make people like us. If that's our goal, then we've short-circuited generosity. That is not true generosity but manipulation. However, when we give to others out of faith and obedience to our heavenly Father, then the bonds we have with the receiver will be deepened and strengthened. Generosity results in a greater sense of community, interdependence, and family.

**?** Application: What motivates you to generosity? How is generosity connected to the gospel?

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## Conclusion

Christians are a generous people because they worship and follow a generous God. John 3:16 says, "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." The ultimate act of generosity was God the Father giving the Son to suffer and die for the rescue of many sinners.

Those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb live according to a new law and from a new posture. Christians aren't concerned with self-preservation, but self-sacrifice in service and worship of their King. This means that they are a generous people. They are willing to give of what they have for the good of those around them.

**?** Are you a generous person? What are some specific ways you have been generous this past week? What were some missed opportunities of generosity?

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**?** Who do you find yourself being more generous toward? Why? Is there anyone to whom it is hard to be generous? How might you seek to grow in this area?

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**?** What does generosity have to do with seeking to have gospel conversations? Should you be generous also toward non-believers? Why or why not?

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**CHRIST CONNECTION:** Christians steward their possessions with grace-inspired generosity because they have been the recipients of a great and glorious generosity in the coming of Christ, His death, and their redemption.

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** The Christian's grace-inspired generosity is directed toward not only their brothers and sisters in Christ, but to the unbelieving world. This kind of generosity quiets those who revile the Christian faith and beautifully adorns the gospel of Jesus Christ.



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## The Gospel and Politics

### Main Passages

- 1 Timothy 2:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14,17

### Session Outline

1. Oriented Toward the Kingdom (1 Tim. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:13-17)
2. The King of the Kingdom (1 Tim. 2:3-4)
3. The Key to the Kingdom (1 Tim. 2:5-7)

### Memorize

*<sup>6</sup> The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. <sup>7</sup> Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver.*

- 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, CSB

### Daily Readings

- Monday - 2 Corinthians 8:1-9
- Tuesday - 2 Corinthians 9:6-8
- Wednesday - 2 Corinthians 9:10-15
- Thursday - 1 Timothy 6:17-19
- Friday - Acts 20:32-35
- Saturday - 1 Chronicles 29:1-19

### References

<sup>1</sup>MacMillan, Amanda. “Happiness: Being Generous Makes You Feel Better.” Time. July 14, 2017. Accessed July 30, 2020. <https://time.com/4857777/generosity-happiness-brain/>.