

The Bountiful Giver **A Lesson on Stewardship and Giving**

Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 9:6-9

Key Verse

“Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

Overview

Much of Scripture’s clear teaching regarding a Christian’s habit of giving can be summed up in one word: bountiful. Christians have a responsibility to examine themselves as a central component to their practice of stewardship.

Theme

Bountiful giving results from a commitment to examine oneself, investigate the gospel, and give from a heart that is grateful for the grace of God.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will grow in his understanding of the Bible’s teaching on stewardship by considering the heart from which faithful stewardship springs.

Outline

- I. Christians give out of the bountiful gospel (9:6).**
 - A. Man’s Way is to sow sparingly.
 - B. God’s Way is to sow bountifully.
 - C. The gospel makes men bountiful givers.
- II. Christians give out of a cheerful heart (9:7-8).**
 - A. Man’s Way is to give grudgingly and under compulsion.
 - B. God’s Way is to give cheerfully.
 - C. Christians give out of the bounty of God’s abundant grace.

Getting Started



At the front of the room present three or four “smiley faces” which display different emotions. Explain to the class that these faces picture emotions that are commonly associated with stewardship. Some people respond with surprise at the thought of Christian giving, while others respond with confusion, sadness, anger, or joy. Then ask each person in your class to draw on a piece of paper a face that best represents his typical disposition toward stewardship and giving. Clarify that by “giving” you mean the stewardship of time, energy, concern, *as well as* financial giving. Encourage honesty, even if the truth is difficult to embrace. After a few

minutes, offer for any of your students to share with the class the faces they have drawn. Do not force anyone to share his drawings. If no one is interested, swiftly move on with your lesson by explaining that these simple drawings are intended to help us begin examining our heart's disposition toward sacrificial giving.

Searching the Scriptures

Throughout the Scriptures, we find a consistent plea to give with godliness. For many decades, the Church has made much of tithing and rightly so. The Scriptures say much about a man's willingness to tithe. In the Old Testament, tithing was a requirement of the Law. All Israelites were commanded to bring to the Temple 10% of all they earned or won through war (Genesis 28:22; Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21-32; Deuteronomy 12:5-6, 11, 18; 14:24; 2 Chronicles 31:5-6; Jeremiah 33:13; Ezekiel 20:37; Hebrews 7:5; Nehemiah 10:39). However, we find in the New Testament no explicit command to tithe. Instead, we find a new and richer way to give. Through the realization of God's wonderful grace through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, we are freed from the rigid keeping of the Law to live life under the grace of God. In addition, it is the clear testimony of Scripture that Christians are capable and willing to give more under grace than they would under law. Grace brings about freedom and power to give with supernatural zeal. This is exactly what the gospel does to every aspect of life. The gospel changes the hearts of men and opens them to worship in a way they did not while held custody by the law. This is precisely what Jesus described five times in Matthew 5. His teaching on murder¹, adultery², vows³, dealing with evil⁴, and love for neighbor⁵. In each case Jesus says, "You have heard it said...but I tell you." In a similar way, the change wrought by grace is reflected in the New Testament's teaching on giving. The gospel exhorts believers, *you have heard it said: tithe, but I tell you: Give bountifully!*

This is only possible through the regenerating and sustaining work of God's Spirit. Just as the grace of God transforms our hearts, His grace also transforms our outlook on stewardship. The man who has been transformed by the gospel no longer dreads the giving of His resources. Instead, he longs to give more and more. Neither is he under compulsion by the Law to give a tithe. Instead, the man who has been transformed by grace carefully, willingly, and cheerfully gives an abundance out of the bounty God has given him. Indeed the clear New Testament teaching is sacrificial giving which extends beyond the tithe. In this lesson, we will seek to drill down into the Scriptures' teaching of New Testament giving.

¹ Matthew 5:21

² Matthew 5:27

³ Matthew 5:33

⁴ Matthew 5:38

⁵ Matthew 5:43

I. Christians give out of the bountiful gospel (9:6).

From the beginning of *Genesis* through the end of *Revelation*, God's Spirit has made a clear distinction between *Man's Way* and *God's Way*. While *Man's Way* is one of sin, selfishness, rebellion, error, and overall independence, *God's Way* is one of righteousness, selflessness, loyalty, truth, and overall dependence upon God as King. Often, even as Christians, we stray from *God's Way* and return to living life according to *Man's Way* by failing to "lay aside the old self with its evil practices and to put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (Colossians 1:10). This conflict between *God's Way* and *Man's Way* extends even so far as to affect a Christian's practice of stewardship and giving.

A. Man's Way is to sow sparingly (9:6a).

In his second epistle to the Christians at Corinth, Paul addresses the doctrine of stewardship. In chapter 9, verses 1 through 5, Paul commends the Corinthians for their readiness to give bountifully. Yet, in spite of their readiness, he encourages them to follow through with practically putting their ready hearts to action. In fact, Paul was so concerned that these Christians act out in bountiful giving that he sent some brethren to them to ensure that the offering was well prepared, organized, and actually given. Paul did not want his boastful confidence in these giving Christians to be made shameful and empty by their potential failure to follow through in their desire to give. Certainly, Paul knew of the many temptations to revert back to *Man's Way* rather than pressing on to live out *God's Way* in reality.

ASK AND DISCUSS: Ask your class to help you list some things that often tempt them not to give as God would like. It has been said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Discuss with your students how *good intentions* are only as good as the outlet they find in real-life practice. Ask students to discuss with you some ways in which their *good intentions* are defeated before they are acted upon.

As Paul continued his message to the Corinthians, he employed clear agricultural terminology to illustrate *Man's Way* of giving. He wrote, "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. . ." His readers, who were well acquainted with agrarian life, would have benefited from a keen awareness of what he was teaching. For they all knew how sowing seeds sparsely would result in a sparse harvest. Paul used the word *φειδομένως* (*fidemoneoce*), which means to be stingy, greedy, or mildly. In the context of giving, this was a most wise and illustrative term to use by which to make his point. It clearly presented to his readers more than a rhetorical value, but actually painted a striking portrait of *Man's Way* of giving. Certainly, his readers could easily imagine this imagery and agree to the futility and foolishness of *sowing sparingly*. For to plant a field with such unconcern and carelessness would be an unthinkable waste of time. It was through this illustration that Paul helped his readers recognize the

futility and foolishness of sowing their lives sparingly amid the work of the gospel. For to sow one's life (time, energy, money, etc.) with such unconcern and carelessness would be an equally unthinkable waste of time. But as always, Paul was faithful not only to address the error of *Man's Way*, but to also apply the truth of *God's Way*.

B. *God's Way* is to sow bountifully (9:6b).

In part b of verse 6, Paul provides the antithesis to part a. He wrote, "and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." This is *God's Way* of giving. Unlike a man who sows (gives) sparingly, God sows (gives) with abundance. The word Paul used which is translated *bountifully* is an interesting combination of two Greek parts. The first part is *ep*, which means on or above. The second part is *eulogia*, which is often translated *blessing*. The term *eulogia* carries with it the idea of something spoken with an elegance of language. Therefore, to put these two parts together we get the sense that Paul is describing an abundant and elegant type of giving. As such, the steward does not give carelessly, as an afterthought or in the equivalent of everyday language. Instead, he gives with the intention of bestowing upon the recipient a fine, fair, and abundant blessing. Again, this is *God's Way* of giving.

CONSIDER and DISCUSS: Consider with your students a few of the following examples of *God's Way* of giving as recorded in the Scriptures. Ask them to discuss with you how understanding the way God gives can help a believer give with godliness.

God Gives

Exodus 13:11 – land
Exodus 16:8 – meat and bread for food
Deuteronomy 12:10 – rest
Job 5:10 – rain
Job 32:8 – understanding
Job 33:4 – life
Job 35:10 – songs in the night
Job 36:6 – justice to the afflicted
Psalm 18:50 – deliverance
Psalm 68:35 – strength and power
Psalm 119:130 – light (understanding)
Psalm 144:10 – salvation

Psalm 146:7 – justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry
Psalm 147:4 – names to the stars
Proverbs 2:6 – wisdom
Jeremiah 31:35 – light by the sun and moon
John 1:12 – the right to become children of God
John 5:21, Romans 4:17 – life to the dead
John 5:32 – testimony about Jesus, the Messiah
John 10:10 – abundant life
Acts 17:25 – life and breath and all things

1 Corinthians 15:57 –
victory through our Lord
Jesus Christ

1 Thessalonians 4:8 – the
Holy Spirit
James 1:5 – wisdom
James 4:6 – grace

God is our example of how to give with godliness. Certainly God is a bountiful Giver! As such, we must follow in the area of stewardship the Bible's consistent plea to imitate God. In Ephesians 5:1 Paul exhorted his readers to be imitators of God. In Thessalonians 1:6, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy commended the Thessalonian believers for having actually become imitators the Lord. Likewise, John also wrote in his third epistle that the beloved followers of God ought to imitate what is good (*God's Way*), not what is evil (*Man's Way*). Since *God's Way* is to be a bountiful steward, then Christians ought to be the most abundant givers on earth.

C. The gospel makes men bountiful givers.

So what exactly is it that makes men bountiful givers? We have considered that *Man's Way*, his natural and sinful inclination, is to give sparingly from a heart of greed. So the logical question is, "How, then, can a man, whose natural heart is greedy, become a bountiful giver?" Of course, the answer is simple—only through the gospel. It is the resounding testimony of Scripture that only God can perform the necessary change of heart that every man needs. Therefore, it is impossible for those outside of Christ to give according to *God's Way*. In addition, the Scriptures are clear that God's chosen method of heart change is through contact with the gospel. Therefore, it is essential for all men to hear the gospel and believe before God will make them bountiful givers like Himself. Likewise, it is essential that Christians are ever mindful of the sanctifying work of God through the gospel. God's work by His Spirit, through His Word, and according to the gospel does not end at the moment of belief and justification. The process of sanctification—growing to maturity—continues on into the new life of the believer. As such, no Christian can sustain a giving heart unless he perseveres in maturity by submission to God's Spirit, obedience to God's Word, and a deepening appreciation of God's gospel.

II. Christians give out of a cheerful heart (9:7-8).

Paul explains at the beginning of verse 7 that every Christian must first "purpose in his heart" what he will give. Paul's overarching concern through his writings is never merely outward change or behavioral adjustment. Instead, Paul is preoccupied with the heart and rightly so. God's primary concern regarding man, in both the Old and New Testaments, is the heart.⁶ As a result, the Scriptures direct

⁶ HEART: The inner self that thinks, feels, and decides. In the Bible the word heart has a much broader meaning than it does to the modern mind. The heart is that which is central to man. Nearly all the references to the heart in the Bible refer to some aspect of human personality. In the Bible all emotions are experienced by the heart: love and hate (Ps 105:25; 1 Peter 1:22); joy and sorrow (Eccl 2:10; John 16:6); peace and bitterness (Ezek 27:31; Col 3:15); courage and fear (Gen 42:28; Amos 2:16). The thinking processes of man are said to be carried out by the heart. This intellectual activity

Christians to actively examine their hearts as they follow Jesus Christ. Without examination of the heart, a Christian is left only to behave *this way* or *that*. Of course, a Christian could be outwardly giving, but inwardly greedy. Since God looks at the heart, outward behavior must be a secondary concern. One's primary concern must be his heart because the motive of the heart always determines whether the outward behavior is a reflection of inward worship.

A. Man's Way is to give grudgingly and under compulsion.

In verse 6, Paul identified the quantity of giving according to *Man's Way* as "sparingly." Now, in verse 7, he identifies the quality of giving according to *Man's Way* as "grudgingly." Similar to Paul's word rendered *bountifully*, the word translated here *grudgingly* is also composed of two parts in Greek. The first part is *ek* which means "out of" and the second part is *lupe* (loopy), meaning "sadness." Literally, Paul warns against having a heart that gives "out of sadness." Interestingly, this is the same word Paul used in 2 Corinthians 7:10, "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death." In this verse, Paul shows that there is a godly sorrow which leads to repentance and life. There is also a human sorrow which leads to rebellion and death. When it comes to stewardship, it is rebellious and dead sorrow which Paul teaches belongs to the man who gives grudgingly.

ASK and DISCUSS: Ask your students to share some reasons why a person would be saddened by stewardship? Discuss with them the fact that there are no biblical reasons to be saddened by sacrificial giving to God; and, therefore, we must conclude that all grudging stewardship is something of which God wants us to repent.

In verse 7, Paul also warned the Corinthian Christians against the natural inclination to give under a sense of compulsion. Paul used the word *anagkh* (*anagke*) to communicate this idea of giving out of compulsion. *Anagke* is synonymous with restraint and distress. In the context of the passage, this word paints the picture of someone who gives not from a genuinely willing heart, but as a result of outward force. Perhaps a likely scenario would be

corresponds to what would be called mind in English. Thus, the heart may think (Est 6:6), understand (Job 38:36), imagine (Jer 9:14), remember (Deut 4:9), be wise (Prov 2:10), and speak to itself (Deut 7:17). Decision-making is also carried out by the heart. Purpose (Acts 11:23), intention (Heb 4:12), and will (Eph 6:6) are all activities of the heart. Finally, heart often means someone's true character or personality. Purity or evil (Jer 3:17; Matt 5:8), sincerity or hardness (Ex 4:21; Col 3:22); and maturity or rebelliousness (Ps 101:2; Jer 5:23) - all these describe the heart or true character of individuals. God knows the heart of each person (1 Sam 16:7). Since a person speaks and acts from his heart, he is to guard it well (Prov 4:23; Matt 15:18-19). The most important duty of man is to love God with the whole heart (Matt 22:37). With the heart man believes in Christ and so experiences both love from God and the presence of Christ in his heart (Rom 5:5; 10:9-10; Eph 3:17). Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 1986.

that of two men walking through a poor downtown area. Coming upon a desperately poor and homeless person, one man compassionately and willingly gives the homeless person a dollar. The second man feels pressure to give, not out of compassion for the needy, but out of a compulsion to follow the first man's outward behavior. As a result, the second man's gift is motivated by a legalistic, external pressure rather than a loving heart-desire to meet the poor man's need. This is exactly the way Paul says Christians are not to give.

LIST and DISCUSS: With the help of your students, make a list of pressures which commonly lead Christians to give out of compulsion rather than true love. Ask students to share any specific times when they personally faced such pressures.

B. God's Way is to give cheerfully.

If *Man's Way* is to give grudgingly and out of compulsion, then *God's Way* must clearly be to give cheerfully. Here Paul explains that the type of giving God approves is giving that springs from a cheerful heart. *Cheerful* is translated from the Greek word ἡλαρός (hilaros) meaning prompt, willing, or merry. It is from this Greek word that we derive our English word *hilarious*. In fact, this word for *cheerful* is found nowhere else in the New Testament. It is unique to this passage of 2 Corinthians. The point of this verse is that those who follow *God's Way* of giving are those who are happy, joyful, and willing stewards. Such people view giving not as grudging compulsion (as a hassle, pain, or cold duty), but as a happy privilege (as a joy, honor, or warm sacrifice of worship). Consider the words of Jonathan Edwards, "It is a requisite [giving] that we do it *cheerfully* or *heartily*, and with real good-will to the one we would benefit. What is done heartily is done from love; and what is done from love is done with delight and not grudgingly or with backwardness and reluctance of spirit."⁷

One caution at this point is to note that in no way does Paul's teaching on "hilarious giving" mean that Christians are to give in a carelessly exuberant manner. Today, the word "hilarious" typically carries the image of someone laughing out of control, almost to the point of insanity. We must be careful not to lose Paul's clear concern for Christians to "purpose in their heart" what they will give. The style of giving that is in accord with *God's Way* is careful and calculated. The gift of this kind of giver comes from a heart that has diligently considered the opportunity to give and, as a result, gives with confidence and joy. Let us not forget that Nadab and Abihu faced serious consequences for carelessly bringing "strange fire" before the Lord.

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Christian Love as Manifested in the Heart and Life*.

⁸Likewise, Christians are to guard against doing the same in the name of “hilarious giving.” Instead, may we as Christians consider carefully and prayerfully what we purpose in our heart to give that we might follow *God’s Way* and not *Man’s Way*.

READ and DISCUSS: Read Ecclesiastes 5:4-5. On the grounds of this passage, discuss with your class the importance of giving what you have “purposed in your heart.” For added insight into this, see footnote.⁹

⁸ Leviticus 10:1-3 -On the first official day that the Israelite system was to be employed, Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron (Ex 6:23; 24:1-2; 28:1; Num 3:2-4; 26:60; 1 Chron 6:3), failed to obey the proper practice God had commanded. The offense is specifically described as the offering of “strange fire” (ִשְׂרָאָה) on the altar (10:1).³³⁶ The nature of this “strange fire” has been widely debated throughout the ages by both Jewish and Christian commentators. The Jewish rabbis, for example, proposed twelve theories to explain Nadab’s and Abihu’s death.³³⁷ The most commonly offered suggestions on the nature of the offense of Nadab and Abihu include: (1) penetrating too far into the sanctuary, (2) offering unauthorized coals from outside the temple area,³³⁸ (3) offering incense that did not contain the proper ingredients,³³⁹ and (4) offering incense at the wrong time of the day.³⁴⁰ Positions one, two, and three appear to have contextual support. Position one is supported from the text of Lev 16:1-2, where the sin of Nadab and Abihu is discussed in the context of Aaron entering into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Aaron is warned that he is not to enter behind the curtain anytime he wants but only on the Day of Atonement. This admonition might indicate that the nature of Nadab and Abihu’s offense was precisely that they had entered into the Holy of Holies, and thus God took their lives.³⁴¹ The immediate context of Lev 10, however, focuses on the nature of the fire itself that led to the violation. This is seen particularly by the relative pronoun ִשְׂרָאָה, which immediately follows the expression “strange fire” (NIV, “unauthorized fire”), indicating that it is the nature of the fire that is at issue. Thus positions two or three appear to be the best options for the explanations of Nadab and Abihu’s death. Preference is given to position two because fire rather than incense seems to be the main concern of the violation in the context.³⁴² Further precision on the nature of the offense is not possible based on the evidence from the text. If the exact nature of the “strange fire” is somewhat obscure, the fire of God’s judgment is not. Lev 10:2 states that in response to this violation by Aaron’s sons fire burst forth from the presence of the Lord and consumed the bodies of Nadab and Abihu. “They died before the LORD.”³⁴³ The fire mentioned in 10:2 is the same fire that came from the presence of God in 9:24 in celebration of the obedient priestly response to God’s instructions for the inauguration of the priesthood. Here it is meted out in judgment as a response to disobedience. The Lord appears as a devouring fire as he does in Ex 24:17; Deut 5:22; Num 11:1; 16:35; 2 Kings 1:10,12. Fire from heaven occurs twelve times in the Old Testament, six times in a beneficial way and six times in judgment.³⁴⁴ The latter is certainly the contextual background for the statement in Heb 12:29: “God is a devouring fire.” The serious consequence of Nadab and Abihu’s disobedience is a reminder of how resolutely important the worship of God is to be for a believer’s life. Calvin commented on this heinous act of disobedience and the necessity of God’s strict judgment on this occasion: If we reflect how holy a thing God’s worship is, the enormity of the punishment will by no means offend us. Besides, it was necessary that their religion should be sanctified at its very commencement; for if God had suffered the sons of Aaron to transgress with impunity, they would have afterwards carelessly neglected the whole Law. This, therefore, was the reason of such great severity, that the priests should anxiously watch against all profanation. Moreover, the priests had been warned that judgment would be the inevitable result if they were disobedient in their presentation of offerings to him (Ex 19:22). The worship of God should never be characterized by carelessness, especially by those who have a spiritual leadership role. (New American Commentary)

⁹ Ecclesiastes 5:4-7

Solomon’s third admonition had to do with *making vows to the Lord (vv. 4-7)*. God did not require His people to make vows in order to be accepted by Him, but the opportunity was there for them to express their devotion if they felt led to do so (see Num 30; Deut 23:21-23; Acts 18:18). The Preacher warned about two sins. The first was that of making the vow with no intention of keeping it, in other words, lying to God. The second sin was making the vow but delaying to keep it, hoping you could get out of it. When the priest [“angel” = messenger] came to collect the promised sacrifice or gift, the person would say, “Please forget about my vow! It was a

C. Christians give out of the bounty of God's abundant grace.

All of this discussion of *God's Way* and *Man's Way* of stewardship begs a very important question. "How can a finite and sinful human being actually follow *God's Way* of giving?" It is only through the abundance of God's grace. First and foremost, we must remember that it is impossible for any person to follow *God's Way* of giving unless he is first redeemed and transformed by God's grace through belief of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible clearly teaches that unbelieving men are spiritually dead and incapable of doing anything good (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:10).

Yet, to the praise of God's love, mercy, and power, when an unbeliever comes to faith in Christ he becomes a new creation in Christ. Through the life and wisdom which comes from God on the basis of the gospel, he is made capable of following *God's Way* through necessary and continual self-examination, repentance, and obedience. Even still though, the Christian's ability to give according to *God's Way* is dependent upon his commitment to finding his sufficiency in God's abundant resources. For it is "God who is able to make all grace abound to you."¹⁰ In this passage, Paul clearly teaches that the sufficiency of God's grace affords the Christian steward with "an abundance for every good deed."

Throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul exhorted his readers to understand that their ability to comfort and help others was only possible as a result of God's comfort and help toward them. Consider the words of 2 Cor. 1:3-5, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Indeed, to give according to *God's Way* is to reflect the way God has given to us. For God has

mistake!" God hears what we say and holds us to our promises, unless they were so foolish that He could only dismiss them. If providence prevents us from fulfilling what we promised, God understands and will release us. If we made our vows only to impress others, or perhaps to "bribe" the Lord ("If God answers my prayer, I will give 500 to missions!"), then we will pay for our careless words. Many times in my pastoral ministry I have heard sick people make promises to God as they asked for healing, only to see those promises forgotten when they recovered. People make empty vows because they live in a religious "dream world"; they think that *words* are the same as *deeds* (v. 7). Their worship is not serious, so their words are not dependable. They enjoy the "good feelings" that come when they make their promises to God, but they do themselves more harm than good. They like to "dream" about fulfilling their vows, but they never get around to doing it. They practice a make-believe religion that neither glorifies God nor builds Christian character. "I will go into thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble" (Ps 66:13-14). When we rob the Lord of the worship and honor due to Him, we are also robbing ourselves of the spiritual blessings He bestows on those who "worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). (The Bible Exposition Commentary, Warren W. Wiersbe)

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 9:8

bestowed upon us grace upon grace - willingly, cheerfully, and bountifully.¹¹

Making It Personal

To become a Christian who gives *God's Way*, one must be ever mindful of the many blessings God has graciously bestowed. Paul encouraged his Corinthian readers by reminding them of Psalm 112:9, "He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever."¹² Instruct your class to break into discussion groups of 8-10 people. Ask them to make a list of 10 ways God is gracious to people in His giving. Once their list is complete, ask them to consider together how they might each imitate God by following His example of cheerful, bountiful, and sacrificial stewardship.

Review

Remind your class of the importance of pleasing God through cheerful, bountiful, and sacrificial giving. Challenge them to live "under grace" by abundantly giving of their time, money, and energy to the pleasure of God.

Memory Verse

Encourage your class to memorize 2 Corinthians 9:7.

¹¹ John 1:16

¹² 2 Corinthians 9:9