

LESSON 1:
Paul's Lessons in Stewardship

The Giving Journey

FIRST SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

- To show the biblical nature of a special stewardship drive.
- To acquaint the class with the background and methods of St. Paul's stewardship campaign in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.
- To introduce the class to six basic principles of special giving:
 1. Everyone has a part in special stewardship campaigns.
 2. Each should give in direct proportion to his or her income / net worth.
 3. By breaking down a gift and giving it systematically and incrementally over a period of time, each installment becomes an act of worship as we place it in the offering plate week-by-week on the Lord's Day.
 4. By working together in this way, the job gets done.
 5. Giving campaigns should be well-administered and marked by integrity.
 6. We can learn from the example of others.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- Student Guide
- Map of Paul's Third Journey
- Marker Board or Overhead

HOW TO TEACH THIS LESSON:

Read 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8-9, and the passages in Acts and Romans that are referred to in the lesson. Become very familiar with the introduction and background segments of this lesson and share this information during the first third of the class period. Do not read this material or attempt to memorize it, but know it well enough to share it conversationally as if talking to a friend. Use as few notes as possible.

After giving the background, spend the next half of the period discussing the implications and drawing out the six basic principles of special giving. Let the class bring these up in any order, and list them on the marker board or overhead. Devote only a few minutes to each point so that all will be covered. Someone in the class may suggest a principle not given in this lesson plan. If so, acknowledge it and list it with the

LESSON 1:
Paul's Lessons in Stewardship

The Giving Journey

others. If all six points are not covered, draw the class's attention to them and list them as you bring this portion of the lesson to a close.

Point number six is designed to lead into a closing story for you to share with your class. Again, do not read it or attempt to memorize it. Go over this story thoroughly in advance and rehearse telling it so you'll be able to share it freely and naturally as a motivational conclusion.

THE LESSON:

Scripture—1 Corinthians 16:1-4: Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. 3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

INTRODUCTION:

Our church is preparing for one of our greatest opportunities ever! We're getting ready to push forward with a great campaign that will truly advance us both spiritually and in terms of ministry. In preparation, we want to find out just what the Bible says along these lines about financial stewardship. 1 Corinthians 16 provides one of the Bible's clearest examples of a special stewardship endeavor in a local church like ours, and it gives us some valuable principles on how to go about setting aside the resources needed for those special opportunities that a church like ours faces from time to time.

SIDEBAR

The word "stewardship" comes from the word "steward" which, in biblical times, referred to someone who managed the assets of another. A wealthy man, for example, would turn his business affairs over to a steward who would manage them in the owner's name. The Bible says that God owns heaven and earth. He is owner over all. Furthermore, when we make Christ Lord and Savior of our lives, we give Him all we are and have. That means that those things we possess really belong to Him and we are simply stewards or managers of them.

LESSON 1:

Paul's Lessons in Stewardship

The Giving Journey

BACKGROUND:

From the early days of his ministry, the Apostle Paul displayed a concern for taking special offerings for special projects, such as we're getting ready to do as a church (see Acts 11:27- 30).

On his third missions journey (which begins in Acts 18:23), Paul was not only concerned about planting new churches and strengthening the existing ones, but he had an additional concern. He wanted to organize a massive fund-raising effort to generate a collection from the Gentile churches, especially in Macedonia (Northern Greece), and in Achaia (Southern Greece) for the church in Jerusalem which was suffering extreme poverty.

Why were the churches in Judea in dire straits?

- During the enthusiastic days immediately following Pentecost, many of the Christians had liquidated most of their assets and shared all things in common (Acts 4:32-37).
- The extreme persecution faced by the Christians in Judea (Acts 8:1) must have presented a difficult economic situation for the believers.
- The famine referred to in Acts 11:27-28, perhaps extended over several years.

So Paul was concerned about the needs of the Judean Christians and wanted to help them, but he had another motive as well. There was great tension in these days between the Jewish Church in Judea and the Gentile Church that was spreading throughout the world. He must have felt that a gift from the Greek Christians to the Jewish Church would go a long way toward lessening tension and promoting healing and unity. (See Romans 15:23- 29). Bible scholar F. F. Bruce put it this way: The solidarity of Jewish and Gentile Christianity, in particular the strengthening of fellowship between the church of Jerusalem and the Gentile mission, was a major concern of Paul's, and his organization of the relief fund was in large measure designed to promote this end. He knew that many members of the Jerusalem church looked with great suspicion on the independent direction taken by his Gentile mission: indeed, his mission-field was repeatedly invaded by men from Judea who tried in one way or the other to undermine his authority and impose the authority of Jerusalem.

As Paul visited his churches in Asia Minor and Europe, he not only evangelized and taught, he promoted a year-long endeavor to raise these special-project funds.

To quote F. F. Bruce again: One fact emerges clearly from those letters of Paul which can be dated in this period—that he was greatly taken up during these months with the completion of the contributions to the

The Giving Journey

Jerusalem fund made by his churches in Macedonia and Achaia. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance which Paul attached to this work and to the safe conveyance of the money to Jerusalem in the hands of delegates of the contributing churches...

While visiting the Christians in Corinth, Paul shared this burden with them and they agreed to help. Later, in 1 Corinthians 16, he gave them specific instructions about how to face this challenge. Remember that Paul is not talking here about regular tithes and offerings.

He is talking about a special endeavor to raise extra resources for an important cause. Let's read his instruction and see what we can learn for ourselves:

1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. 3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

PRINCIPLES FOR SPECIAL GIVING ENDEAVORS:

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

With all that as background, what lessons can we learn here that may help us in our own capital stewardship endeavor?

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

Everyone should be included. On the first day of the week, each one of you should....

Each person should give in direct proportion to his or her income / net worth. On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.... Compare this with the phrases like "in proportion to..." and "according to his ability..." which we find in other passages:

- Deuteronomy 16:10 - Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you.
- Deuteronomy 16:17 - Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.
- Ezra 2:69 - According to their ability they gave to this treasury for this work.... Acts 11:29 - The disciples,

The Giving Journey

each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea....

- 2 Corinthians 8:3 - For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

When we break down a gift and give it systematically and incrementally over a period of time, each installment becomes an act of worship as we place it in the offering plate week-by-week on the Lord's Day. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money....

When we all work together in this way, the job gets done. On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up so that when I come no collections will have to be made.... In other words, so that the need would be filled and the commitment fulfilled by the time Paul arrived, that he might be free to take the gifts right on to the needy Christians in Judea.

The plan should be well-administered and marked by integrity. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

We can learn from the example of other churches. Verse 1 says: Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do...

CONCLUSION:

(This last point can lead to a concluding illustration)

LESSON 2:
What Giving Represents

The Giving Journey

SECOND SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

- To acquaint the class with the biblical advice Paul gave regarding stewardship in 2 Corinthians 8:1-11.
- To discover the implications of this passage through verse-by-verse explanation and discussion.
- To enable the class to understand that special steward opportunities give us the privilege of (1) expressing our love to the Lord, (2) exemplifying our Savior; and (3) enriching our own lives.
- To motive the class toward generosity with a closing illustration.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- Student Guide
- A map of Northern and Southern Greece in biblical times
- Marker Board or Overhead

HOW TO TEACH THIS LESSON:

This lesson falls into three parts:

- Brief review – This can be done in about five minutes.
- A verse-by-verse overview of the passage - Work your way through this passage with the class, reading each verse or set of verses as described in the lesson plan, then making appropriate explanatory comments or leading in a brief discussion using the suggested discussion questions. In the discussion portions of the lesson, be “clock- smart” and make sure the class doesn’t spend too much time on any one question.
- Conclusion - Set aside about ten minutes at the end of the lesson to pull together the truths uncovered in this passage, focusing especially on verses 8, 9, and 10. We’ve provided three key principles and a closing illustration that you can use. Don’t read or attempt to memorize this concluding material, but go over it well enough to share naturally, using as few notes as possible.

SPECIAL NOTE:

Later in this stewardship campaign, the pastor may be preaching a stewardship sermon from 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. This lesson will not duplicate this sermon but will compliment it and help establish the background for it.

LESSON 2: What Giving Represents

The Giving Journey

THE LESSON:

Review from previous week: Last week we studied the special stewardship campaign promoted by the Apostle Paul during his third missionary journey. He was collecting funds for famine relief efforts in Judea, and the churches in the north of Greece (Macedonia) had given generously. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, he reminded the Corinthian church that they, too, had an obligation to help. The response was not as positive as he had hoped, so, in writing back to them, he devoted two chapters—2 Corinthians 8 and 9—to this subject.

SCRIPTURE - -

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

¹And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵ And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. ⁶ So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. ⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰ And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, ¹⁵ as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

VERSE-BY-VERSE EXPLANATION AND DISCUSSION

Verse 1: And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

The Macedonian churches were in northern Greece and included the churches at Philippi Thessalonica, and

LESSON 2: What Giving Represents

The Giving Journey

Berea (see Acts 16-17, Philippians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians). Paul was writing to the church in the city of Corinth, in southern Greece, seeking to use the example of the Macedonian churches to motivate the Corinthians toward generosity.

Paul used the word “grace” here in an unusual way. He is talking about the gracious generosity God had placed in the hearts of the Macedonian churches. Our giving is a reflection of God’s grace in our lives.

Verse 2: Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

The Macedonian Churches had made a sacrificial gift which, in one sense, they could hardly afford. Paul speaks of their severe trial and their extreme poverty. The Christians in Macedonia had endured a period of persecution, which was undoubtedly affecting them financially. But out of overflowing joy they nevertheless gave generously to Paul’s campaign.

Verses 3-4: For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How can someone give beyond his or her ability?
- In what way is giving a “privilege”?

Verse 5: And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.

When these Christians gave, it wasn’t just an emotional response to an appeal. It was the overflow of a deep inner spiritual commitment to God’s will and to God’s work.

Verse 6: So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring to completion this act of grace on your part.

Paul was letting them know that he was sending Titus, his troubleshooter, to oversee this stewardship campaign and the collection of this gift.

Verse 7: But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

LESSON 2:
What Giving Represents

The Giving Journey

Here Paul may have been speaking with just a trace of sarcasm. The church in Corinth was the most immature and trouble-ridden of any in the New Testament, yet they seemed to boast about their faith, speech, and knowledge. Paul was saying, “Since you think of yourself as excelling in these areas, why not excel where it really counts—in the kind of generosity that proves God’s grace is really working in your hearts.”

Verse 8: I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

While Paul was strongly urging them to give (and using the example of the northern churches to inspire them), he stopped short of issuing a command. For the gift to be pleasing to God, it had to be a voluntary act of love.

Verse 9: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Why would Paul place this verse—one of the greatest and most beautiful verses in the Bible on the love and redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ—in the middle of a passage about stewardship?
- In what ways are we poor?
- In what ways do we become in Him?

Verses 10-11: And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year, you were the first, not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- If the Apostle Paul showed up in our class today to advise us regarding our stewardship campaign, would you jump at the chance to do as he said?
- Notice the phrase: what is best for you.... What is the significance of those words? In what way would it be beneficial for the Corinthians to do as Paul suggested?

LESSON 2:
What Giving Represents

The Giving Journey

CONCLUSION:

Having worked our way through the passage, let's conclude by pulling it all together in three principles we can reflect on this morning:

Giving Expresses Our Love (Verse 8) - Notice again in verse 8 that when we give to the Lord we aren't so much obeying a command as we are expressing our love to Him: I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love... How else can we express our love except through giving? Do you love your wife (husband, friend, parent)? Then you have to express that love by giving this person your time, your attention, your affection, your help. You have to give up your own preferences at certain times to look to the needs of the one you love. Do you love your children?

How else can you express it except by giving them time, attention, affection, and love, and by working to meet the material and physical needs they have? Do you love your Lord? How else can you express it except by giving? We give Him our hearts, our praise, and our obedience. And here in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul is saying that the way we give our money is also a test of our love.

Giving Exemplifies Our Savior (Verse 9) - Psalm 50:10 says that God owns "the cattle on a thousand hills." What an understatement! God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but He also owns the thousand hills. He owns the seven continents in which those thousand hills are located, and the spinning planet on which those seven continents are placed. God owns the solar system. The entire universe is His—all the galaxies from here to infinity. So consider the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor. The Greek word Paul used there for "poor" conveys the idea of crouching and cringing. It was the word used for beggars. He had little money, a sparse wardrobe, no houses or land, not even a pillow on which to lay His head. What little He did have was stripped away, and He was nailed to an upright post and robbed of even the blood that flowed through His veins. Why? That we through His poverty might become rich—that we might inherit eternal life and be heirs to the kingdom. The apostle's point here is that when we give to the Lord our tithes and offerings, we are in a tiny way exemplifying the giving nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. What else needs to be said? If that doesn't move us to be givers, what will?

Giving Enriches Our Lives (Verse 10) - Even so, Paul goes on to make another point in verse 10: "Here is my advice about what is best for you...." Paul is concerned for the Corinthians, and he wanted what was best for them. How is giving best for us? In his book, *None of These Diseases*, Dr. S. I. McMillen discusses the life of the great financier, John D. Rockefeller. As a young man, Rockefeller was strong and husky, and

LESSON 2:
What Giving Represents

The Giving Journey

when he entered business he drove himself harder than a slave. He was a millionaire by age 33. By age 43 he controlled the largest business in the world. When he was 53, he was the world's richest man and the world's only billionaire. But he developed a disease called alopecia in which he lost most of the hair from his head, his eyebrows, and his eyelashes. He looked like a mummy, and his digestion was so bad he could only eat crackers and milk. He lost weight until he looked like a dead man, and the newspapers began compiling his obituary. Rockefeller complained of loneliness and depression. He was unable to sleep. Someone wrote of him: "An awful age was in his face. He was the oldest man I have ever seen." One night, unable to sleep, Rockefeller had a sudden thought. He realized that he would not be able to take even one of his thin dimes into the next world with him. Everything he had built and accumulated was like a boy's sand castles, doomed by the inevitable tide. For the first time he realized that money was not a commodity to be hoarded, but something to be shared for the benefit of others. The next morning, he lost no time in transforming his money into blessings for others. He established the Rockefeller Foundation so that some of his fortune could be channeled to needed areas. He gave hundreds of millions of dollars to universities, hospitals, mission work, and to millions of underprivileged people. He was at the forefront of efforts to rid the south of the hookworm and in the development of penicillin. The focus of his life changed from getting to giving. The result is that he did not die in his fifty-third year, or in his fifty-fourth or fifty-fifth. He lived to be ninety-eight years old. Whether or not Rockefeller was a born-again believer, he did discover one of the moral laws God has placed in the universe: Giving is good for us. It is for our best. It enriches our lives.

LESSON 3:
Three Principles Found in Paul's Stewardship Drive

The Giving Journey

THIRD SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

- To acquaint the class with the biblical advice Paul gave regarding stewardship in 2 Corinthians 8:13 – 9:3.
- To enable the class to understand the principle of equal sacrifice.
- To reassure the class of the integrity with which the stewardship campaign is being conducted.
- To motivate the class to be financially generous in committing to the Lord's work.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- Student Guide

HOW TO TEACH THIS LESSON:

This lesson resumes a four-week study of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. From today's passage (2 Corinthians 8:13 – 9:5), this lesson draws three critical, guiding principles of biblically-based stewardship campaigns—equality, integrity, and generosity. In this passage, the apostle Paul lifts the curtain from the philosophy and machinery of his New Testament stewardship drive and offers three insights into how he is conducting it. This segment of Scripture falls naturally into three divisions. Rather than read the entire passage at once, divide the bulk of class time into three sections that correspond to these three passages.

Read and study them one at a time. The lesson closes with an honest class discussion of giving attitudes: How we can develop into the kind of givers God wants us to be—enthusiastic, eager, generous givers, rather than grudging ones.

STEP BY STEP THROUGH THE LESSON

Briefly review the previous two weeks, then tell the class that today's lesson will take up the passage where last week's left off, at 2 Corinthians 8:13. The passage—2 Corinthians 8:13 – 9:5—falls into three sections, each one giving us a different guiding principle for the way the apostle Paul directed his own stewardship campaign. The first principle has to do with equality.

Section 1—The Principle of Equality

8:13 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be

LESSON 3:

Three Principles Found in Paul's Stewardship Drive

The Giving Journey

equality. 14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, 15 as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

Consider reading this text to the class then asking them to paraphrase it, which is to restate it in simpler words, to reword it as if explaining it to someone else. Some classes may want to take five minutes for each member to work individually with pencil and paper on this project. Others may divide into groups of two, three, or more. In other classes, the entire group can take this paragraph, phrase by phrase, suggesting ways in which it can be reworked. Write the best rendition on the board. Then read to the class these one or more of the following paraphrases:

J. B. Phillips: "Of course, I don't mean that others should be relieved to an extent that leaves you in distress. It is a matter of share and share alike. At present your plenty should supply their need, and then at some future date their plenty may supply your need. In this way we share with each other, as the scripture says: 'He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack.'" (The New Testament in Modern English)

Eugene Peterson: "This isn't so others can take it easy while you sweat it out. No, you're shoulder to shoulder with them all the way, your surplus matching their deficit, their surplus matching your deficit. In the end you come out even. As it is written, 'Nothing left over to the one with the most, nothing lacking to the one with the least.'" (The Message)

Kenneth Taylor: "Of course, I don't mean that those who receive your gifts should have an easy time of it at your expense, but you should divide with them. Right now you have plenty and can help them; then at some other time they can share with you when you need it. In this way, each will have as much as he needs. Do you remember what the Scriptures say about this? 'He that gathered much had nothing left over, and he that gathered little had enough.' So you also should share with those in need." (The Living Bible)

Paul felt there was something wrong among his churches when some Christians were overly wealthy while others were starving. He believed those with greater resources had an obligation to help those suffering from want. In other words, God provides some people with more money that they might be of greater help. There should be equality of sacrifice. Those with more (like the Corinthians) should give more. Those with less (like the Macedonian churches) should give less. Those in dire need (like the churches in Judea) should receive, knowing that in the future they may be called on to give sacrificially even as they had received.

LESSON 3:

Three Principles Found in Paul's Stewardship Drive

The Giving Journey

One application of this principle in our current stewardship campaign is this: Those who have been entrusted with more of this world's goods should give more proportionally than those who have little. Not equal giving, but equal sacrifice is called for.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

In stories of survivors of the Nazi death camps, an attitude of determined giving was one of the things that distinguished the survivors from those who perished. If a prisoner was on the verge of starvation, but he had a crust of bread or a scrap of a potato that he could share with his comrade in suffering, he was psychologically and spiritually capable of surviving. A survivor of Treblinka described it this way: "In our group we shared everything, and the moment one of the group ate something without sharing it, we knew it was the beginning of the end for him."

In the book *Tortured for Christ*, Richard Wurmbrand tells of his many years in and out of miserable Communist prisons because of his faith in Christ. He was often tortured and on some occasions nearly starved to death. But the principle of giving was so internalized in his heart that when he was given one slice of bread a week and dirty soup every day, he faithfully tithed from it. Every tenth day he gave his soup to a weaker brother, and every tenth week he took his slice of bread and gave it to one of his fellow prisoners in Jesus' name.

Section 2—The Principle of Integrity

¹⁶ I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. ¹⁷ For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. ¹⁸ And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. ¹⁹ What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. ²⁰ We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. ²¹ For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.

²² In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. ²⁴ Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

LESSON 3:

Three Principles Found in Paul's Stewardship Drive

The Giving Journey

In 2 Corinthians 8:16-24, Paul reassured the Corinthians about his handling of the monies raised. He told them he was sending trustworthy Titus to oversee the collection, along with a second leader of high reputation who had been entrusted by the churches to transport the offering to Judea (verse 18). In verse 22, yet a third man was appointed. So there are at least four men of integrity overseeing this campaign: (1) Paul, (2) Titus, (3) the “the brother who is praised by the churches,” in verse 18; and (4) “our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous” in verse 22.

Notice these phrases:

- ...which we administer in order to honor the Lord Himself
- We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift
- We are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In other passages elsewhere in his letters, Paul seems unconcerned about his reputation or about what other people think of him. For example, in Galatians 1:20, he said, “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Yet here he seems very concerned, wanting to avoid any criticism. Why is he more sensitive about how others perceive him here than in other places?”
- Why does he assign at least four people to administer and transport this offering?
- In what ways is our church demonstrating similar integrity during our current stewardship effort?

Section 3—The Principle of Generosity

There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. ² For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. ³ But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we— not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

See if the class can isolate six words or phrases that describe the kind of financial gift that God desires from His people. List them on the board or overhead:

LESSON 3:
Three Principles Found in Paul's Stewardship Drive

The Giving Journey

- Service to the saints (to God's people) - verse 1
- Eagerness to help - verse 2
- Ready to give - verse 2
- Enthusiasm - verse 2
- Generous gift - verse 5
- Not grudgingly given - verse 5

CLOSING DISCUSSION:

These words and phrases may not represent our natural reaction toward giving. We're prone to ask ourselves, "How little can I get by with? What is the least amount I can reasonably promise to give?" But the Lord does not want gifts "grudgingly given." He wants eager, enthusiastic, generous gifts. How can we learn to give in this way? How can we work on our own attitudes about giving so that they match these Scriptural standards?

LESSON 4:
What Giving Reveals

The Giving Journey

FOURTH SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON:

- To acquaint the class with the stewardship principles articulated in 2 Corinth 9:6-15. To remind class participants of “the law of sowing and reaping” in verse 6.
- To discuss the multi-faceted directive about giving found in verse 7.
- To realize the great outcomes promised to givers in verses 8 through 14. To praise God for His indescribable gift – verse 15.
- To end this series of lessons on an enthusiastic, upbeat note, preparing the hearts of class members for the concluding phases of the church’s stewardship drive.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- Steward Guide
- Marker board or overhead

HOW TO TEACH THIS LESSON:

Today’s concluding lesson covers a powerful passage about stewardship as Paul wraps up his financial appeal to the Corinthians. These verses are some of the richest in Scripture on the subject of giving. There are five sections. After a brief review of the previous lessons to establish background and context, divide the class time into five roughly-equal segments. Read each section of verses in turn, and devote a few minutes to class discussion of each. Though only a paragraph of Scripture, this is wonderfully rich passage, and you’ll find you could easily devote the entire time to almost any verse. Watch the clock carefully so you’ll be able to cover the entire passage and end the lesson with the climaxing verse 15: Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. You want class participants to leave this extended study feeling enthusiastically toward: (1) Christian giving in general, and (2) the church’s stewardship campaign in particular.

STEP BY STEP THROUGH THE LESSON

Briefly review the previous weeks: On his third missionary journey, Paul was conducting an ambitious

LESSON 4: What Giving Reveals

The Giving Journey

campaign to raise a large number of one-time gifts for a special project— humanitarian aid for the poverty-stricken Judean churches. He initially wrote the Corinthians about this in 1 Corinthians 16. When they proved reluctant to give, he wrote again, giving us two incredible chapters in the Bible on the subject of special offerings and Christian stewardship—2 Corinthians 8 and 9. We've been devoting these weeks to a study of these chapters and today we come to Paul's concluding paragraph—2 Corinthians 9:6-15. Here we encounter:

- A Truth
- A Directive
- A Promise
- A Result
- A Doxology

A Truth

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

The Lord states here a basic truth, a law built into the physical and moral fiber of the universe—the law of the harvest, or the law of sowing or reaping. This principle has ramifications in every area of life. For example:

- In farming and gardening.
- In evangelism. Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth were among the most effective missionaries to China during the late 1800s and early 1900s. But their early ministry showed little promise, and Rosalind nearly gave up. In her book, *Climbing*, she writes: "Those very earliest days and weeks at Changte were indeed times of testing. Often it seemed, at least to me, all useless, hopeless, like casting bread upon the waters. But one little thing helped me more than I could ever tell. I had a Chinese carpenter make a good sized blackboard. It was really intended for the children, for the drawing of letters, pictures, and so on. One day when feeling discouraged and in need of help I opened my Bible and was led (I know) to 2 Corinthians 9:6: "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." So impressed was I with the latter clause that I went to the blackboard and printed in large letters, high up out of the children's reach, the words: HE WHO SOWS BOUNTIFULLY WILL ALSO REAP BOUNTIFULLY. For more than two years, until our new home was built, this promise remained constantly before me, an ever-present incentive to sow bountifully the gospel seed, as I have endeavored to picture it, even though it often seemed the seed was being cast on stony ground. The day came, however, when my husband and I were permitted to see bountiful harvests of souls reaped for our Master in that region.
- In giving. God promises here to reward us (whether financially or otherwise) for our generosity in giving. We cannot out-give God. Paul will have more to say about this a few verses hence.

LESSON 4: What Giving Reveals

The Giving Journey

A Directive

⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Discussion: This verse 7 is one of the Bible's greatest verses on the subject of giving, and it contains multiple implications about Christian stewardship. Let's isolate some of them:

1. We should all give – “Each man (each person) should give...”
2. We should all decide prayerfully and thoughtfully (in our hearts) how much to give. We should follow through, carefully keeping our commitments: “Each should give what he has decided...to give”
3. We should not give reluctantly.
4. We should not give under compulsion. It isn't human pressure, but divine persuasion, that should guide us in determining the amount of our commitment.
5. We should give cheerfully. Our attitude should be joyful as we recognize the honor of giving to God and to the expansion of His Kingdom.

A Promise

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

The powerful words—And God is able—are followed by a series of “alls”

- All grace
- All things
- All times
- All that you need
- All (every) good work

This is essentially a financial promise: God is able to provide us with everything we need so that we'll always have enough to give back to Him.

LESSON 4: What Giving Reveals

The Giving Journey

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What does verse 11 mean when it says we will be made rich in every way?

Why does God want to make us rich in every way?

What will be the final result?

What other promises in the Bible relate to stewardship?

- Proverbs 3:9-10
- Proverbs 11:25
- Malachi 3:10-11
- Luke 6:38

A Result

¹² This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

Our gifts to the Lord not only result in the physical expansion of a worthwhile project. They result in thanksgiving, praise, and prayers from those who will benefit. In this current building program, we mustn't just think of bricks and mortar, but of men and women, boys and girls. Our land and buildings are merely tools for reaching and teaching those who need the Lord. One day a host of people, presently unknown to us, will be praising and thanking God for the way in which we provided the tools God used to reach them.

A Doxology

¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Now only do others thank the Lord for our gifts, but we ourselves experience tremendous feelings of gratitude as we thank God for His indescribable gift. This is the only time the word "indescribable" occurs in the Bible. Every other gift can be described, even as we've talked about generous gifts, cheerful gifts, bountiful gifts, and even grudging gifts this morning. But one gift defies all attempts to describe it:

- For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...--John 3:16
- The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord—Romans 6:23
- For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith... it is the gift of God—Ephes 2:8
- Every good and perfect gift is from above—James 1:17

LESSON 4:
What Giving Reveals

The Giving Journey

Bible teacher A. T. Pierson wrote:

This precious Book tells us of one... exchanged the radiant robe of the universal King for the garment of a servant, descended to death, condescended to human want and woe and wickedness, lay in a lowly cradle in a cattle stall at Bethlehem, and hung upon a cross of shame at Calvary, that even those who crucified Him might be forgiven. Can you span the chasm between the throne of a universe and that cross? A crown of stars and a crown of thorns? The worship of the host of heaven and the mockery of an insulting mob? There is nothing like it in history, not even in fable. How can we understand? A man with human infirmities, without human sin or sinfulness; poor, yet having at His disposal universal riches; weak and weary, yet having the exhaustless energy of God; unable to resist the violence and insults of His foes, yet able to summon legions of angels at a word or wish; suffering, yet incapable of anything but perfect bliss; dying, yet Himself having neither beginning of days or end of years?

This is God's indescribable gift. During this special season in the life of our church, let's think of our giving commitments as a small imitation of God's indescribable gift to us, the gift of His Son who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through His poverty, should become rich. From that perspective, our whole attitude changes, and our whole approach toward stewardship is forever altered.