

Lesson 4

God gives generously through us

Good Questions Have Small Groups Talking
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Here is a great idea. Set up a debate. Ask some of your articulate people to do some research and be prepared to debate. You might set it up in true debate style so that the participants must prepare for the debate in such a way that they are capable of taking either side of the argument. Here are the two sides:

1. We give to get. We reap to sow. We invest in giving to get a return.
2. The above position is just selfish. We should give with no expectation of return.

Here is a fun video you could use: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yItcoY_FdzY

2 Corinthians 9

DIG

1. 2 Corinthians 9.1 – 5. Summarize this section. What is Paul saying?

It might seem he is over-concerned about this, and yet we can see it is one of his ways of stimulating the Corinthians to generous giving and to get their gifts together soon. He is saying in effect, 'If you love me, you won't let me down.' This may not be the highest motive for giving, but is surely legitimate. — Grogan, G. (2007). 2 Corinthians: The Glories and Responsibilities of Christian Service. Focus on the Bible Commentary (211). Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications.

2. Verse 6ff. Some preachers have taken this to mean, "give to our ministry and God will bless you financially." How would you respond to this teaching?

The most outrageous example of materialism in the name of Christianity is, unquestionably, the heretical Word Faith movement, or Health and Wealth Gospel. Its proponents unabashedly proclaim that God's will is for all believers to be rich. If they claim riches by faith and speak positively of them, that verbal confession itself creates the wealth. Word Faith teachers insist that God is obligated to deliver the goods believers request. They are so bold as to replace the sovereign God of Scripture (cf. Ps. 103:19; 1 Tim. 6:15) with the sovereignty of the believer who wields creative power to make himself healthy and wealthy by his own faith. God becomes a utilitarian genie who grants believers' every desire. — MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2003). 2 Corinthians. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (312). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

3. What is the motive of someone who gives to a ministry in order to get? Is it a good one?

But believers cannot, in spite of what Word Faith deceivers shamelessly proclaim, create their own reality for their own indulgence. Such a self-centered, prideful desire does not ever characterize genuine believers. It is true that some godly men, such as Job and Abraham, were very wealthy. Yet Paul described himself as “both hungry and thirsty, ... poorly clothed, ... roughly treated, and ... homeless” (1 Cor. 4:11), while Jesus said of Himself, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Luke 9:58). The church has always consisted of both rich (cf. Matt. 27:57; Acts 4:36–37; 8:27; 10:1–2; 16:14–15; 17:4; 1 Tim. 6:17) and poor (cf. Acts 6:1; 1 Cor. 1:26; 2 Cor. 8:2) people, because according to His own sovereign purposes “the Lord makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts” (1 Sam. 2:7). — MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2003). 2 Corinthians. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (312). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

4. Should we sow into God’s work so that we will reap a financial reward?

There is a tricky balance in this. This text and others clearly say that God will reward the generous.

- Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine. (Prov. 3:9–10)
- There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered. (Prov. 11:24–25)
- One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed. (Prov. 19:17)
- He who gives to the poor will never want. (Prov. 28:27)
- “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.” (Mal. 3:10)
- “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (Luke 6:38)

However, it just seems to be there is more to it than “God is a better investment than your mutual fund.” If we really believed that, why not just give to God instead of our retirement plan?

5. What does the Bible say about the desire to be wealthy? Is it wrong to want to be wealthy?

Rich or poor, however, the Bible warns against “the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19), and exhorts, “Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens” (Prov. 23:4–5). In Matthew 6:24 Jesus declared, “You cannot serve God and wealth,” while

in Luke 12:15 He warned, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed." Greed characterizes unbelievers (Ps. 10:3; Rom. 1:29; 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:3), especially false teachers (1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11; 2 Peter 2:1–3, 14–15; Jude 11), and is a form of idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). In sharp contrast to the materialism promoted by prosperity teachers, Jesus commanded, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal" (Matt. 6:19–20). — MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2003). 2 Corinthians. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (312–313). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

6. What bad things happen to those who want wealth too much?

7. How do we know if we want wealth too much?

8. Should we give to get wealthy?

After Paul's introductory comments, he then reminds them that there is a spiritual law at work in giving, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (v. 6). That familiar farm illustration states both the positive and the negative of the same idea. The negative point emphasizes the truth that when a person makes it a habit to give only a little, he or she can expect very little in the way of blessings. On the other hand, though, the personal rewards are great for those who habitually give generously. Paul is applying the "law of the harvest" to the sharing and giving of our material resources.

It is a mistake, I believe, for us to feel that it is unworthy of the Christian to be interested in rewards. While the anticipation of a reward or the fear of loss may not be the highest motivation for doing or not doing something, it is a part of life. It is a fact that those who develop the habit of generosity are blessed of God. But it is a mistake to think of these rewards or blessings as always being material.

In my ministry as a pastor I have known many generous givers and many who were nongivers, and I can bear witness to the truth of Paul's statement. A person who continues to be preoccupied with accumulating material things and does not develop a spirit of generosity always falls short of achieving his or her full potential. In contrast, equally successful people who are generous seem to enjoy a higher quality of life. — Chafin, K. L., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1985). Vol. 30: 1, 2 Corinthians. The Preacher's Commentary Series (261). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.

9. Verse 7. Should we give if we are not cheerful about it?

I take this to mean that God is not pleased when people act benevolently but don't do it gladly. When people don't find pleasure (Paul's word is cheer) in their acts of service, God doesn't find pleasure in them. He loves cheerful givers, cheerful servants. What sort of cheer? Surely the safest way to answer that question is to remember what sort of cheer moved the Macedonians to be generous. It was the overflow of joy in the grace of God. Therefore, the giver God loves is the one whose joy in Him overflows "cheerfully" in generosity to others.

Perhaps it is becoming clear why part of the thesis of this chapter is that if you try to abandon the pursuit of your full and lasting joy, you cannot love people or please God. If love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others, then to abandon the pursuit of this joy is to abandon the pursuit of love. And if God is pleased by cheerful givers, then to abandon the pursuit of this cheerfulness sets you on a course in which God takes no delight. If we are indifferent to whether we do a good deed cheerfully, we are indifferent to what pleases God. For God loves a cheerful giver.

Therefore, it is essential that we be Christian Hedonists on the horizontal level in our relationships with other people, and not just on the vertical axis in our relationship with God. If love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of other people, and if God loves such joyful givers, then this joy in giving is a Christian duty, and the effort not to pursue it is sin. — *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. John Piper.

10. Suppose a friend said, “I am not a cheerful giver, so I am not going to give at all. It makes me happy to spend on myself.” How would you respond to them?

This too is a tricky balance. I am not sure that we are excused from giving because we are grumpy. The right answer is to give and get happy about it.

11. Here is one to think about: do you enjoy giving? Why or why not?

People who enjoy God enjoy giving. They are happy givers. They love to give. They are somewhat selfish about their giving—that is, they are protective of the joy that their giving brings them. They know the truth of the verse that says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 9:35)

Only children enjoy getting Christmas presents more than giving them.

This is not just some sort of investment strategy. This verse is not a left-brained, analytical, chess game where we are trying to get by giving. It is not a pro forma-type strategy to get some future blessing from God. For the person who enjoys God, this is not a futures market. It is overflow. It is now. The person who enjoys God gives for the thrill of giving. He loves it. It really does bring more pleasure than receiving. Only children enjoy getting Christmas presents more than giving them. He dreams of the day when he can give more. He plans for it, and he is making progress.

The person who enjoys God does not need a Greek lexicon to understand that blessed means happy. He is not surprised to learn the background of 2 Corinthians 9:7, “God loves a cheerful giver.” The Greek word translated cheerful is the word from which we get our word hilarious. That sounds right to the person who enjoys God. It feels right to him. It is a happy, hilariously happy thing to give. — Josh Hunt. *Enjoying God Makes All The Difference*.

12. Some say, “give till it hurts.” Is this a Christian notion?

This is not to say that people who enjoy God do not give sacrificially. There is some truth in the adage, “Give ’till it hurts.” But it is a welcome pain, like the warmth in the muscles after a good

workout. This is what David was saying to Araunah when he said, (2 Samuel 24:24), “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

The fun starts when we are in the sacrifice zone.

Joy in giving comes after we pay the price of sacrifice. A tipping mentality never thrills the soul. It doesn't thrill the soul of God and it doesn't thrill the soul of the giver. The fun starts when we are in the sacrifice zone. We feel like we are doing something, like our life matters. There is a certain adventure in the risk of giving more than you ever thought possible to a God who gave His all. This is an important dimension of giving for those who enjoy God. They do not see it primarily as a gift to the church; they see it as it really is, a gift to God. And they do not give only to the church. They often give to a variety of missionaries and ministries that have touched their lives over the years. They are open handed to fellow brothers in the church who are in need. It goes without saying they are not hung up on tax credit for these gifts; that is not their motive anyway. They only want tax credit so they can have more money to give to God. — Josh Hunt. Enjoying God Makes All The Difference.

13. We have all experienced a time when it really was a joy to give. Who can tell a story of a time when it really blessed you to give?

Early one chilly morning an American soldier was making his way back to the barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his jeep, he spotted a little lad with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier pulled his jeep to the curb, stopped, got out, and walked quietly over to where the little fellow was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot. The boy salivated and released a slight groan as he watched the cook place them onto the glass-enclosed counter ever so carefully.

The soldier's heart went out to the nameless orphan as he stood beside him.

“Son . . . would you like some of those?”

The boy was startled.

“Oh, yeah . . . I would!”

The American stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag, and walked back to where the lad was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply:

“Here you are.”

As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly:

“Mister . . . are you God?”

We are never more like God than when we give.

“God so loved the world, that He gave. . . .” — Swindoll, C. R. (2002). *Improving your serve*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

14. Ever receive a gift that meant the world to you? Who has a story about that?

In *Leadership*, pastor and author Stu Weber writes:

My youngest son is the third of three boys. The first two are high-powered; the third is not any less high-powered, but he's the third out of three. By the time you've had a brother who's All-Conference this and another brother who's All-Conference that, there's not much left for you to do.

As a father, I worried about our caboose. He is the most sensitive of the three. To encourage him, I spent a lot of time with him in the outdoors—camping, hunting, fishing. Anybody who has spent time in the outdoors knows that a pocketknife is essential gear—the man with the best blade gets the job done. So, whenever you're setting up camp, you're always looking for the knife.

My son Ryan had a pocketknife that became his identity. His older brothers always had to ask him to use the knife as we were setting up camp. That became his status in the tribe. He was the man with the blade.

My birthday came around one year, and my family was planning a party for me. Earlier in the afternoon my youngest walked into my office at home where I was studying. At first I didn't hear him; I felt him—I could sense his presence—and I turned around.

He had chosen this moment because he wanted to give me a birthday present but not at the birthday party. He wanted it to be just me and him. He handed me a present, and I opened it—it was his knife.

When we want to express our love for God, we also delight in giving him what is most important to us. — 750 Engaging Illustrations.

15. What is the opposite? What exactly does it mean to give grudgingly?

Nor is giving to be done grudgingly. *Lupē* (grudgingly) literally means, “sorrow,” “grief,” or “pain.” Giving is not to be done with an attitude of remorse, regret, or reluctance, of mourning over parting with what is given. And, as noted above, it is not to be under compulsion from any legalistic external pressure. — MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2003). *2 Corinthians*. *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (315). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

16. The word for “cheerful” in an interesting one. Anyone heard a sermon on that? What does it mean to be a cheerful giver?

The giving that God approves of comes from a cheerful giver. Cheerful translates *hilaros*, from which the English word *hilarious* derives. Happy, joyous givers, who are joyous in view of the privilege of

giving, are the special objects of God's love. — MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2003). 2 Corinthians. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (315). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

17. Why is a gift that is not cheerfully given a bad thing? Why does God love a cheerful giver? Is it true of us? Ever been given a gift grudgingly? How did it make you feel?

A Tampa chiropractor had paid alimony to his former wife for a long time. In 1994 he came to his final alimony payment of \$182. He didn't just want to send his money; he wanted to send a message. So in large scale he drew a check on the back of a pinstripe shirt. On the memo line of his shirt-check, he wrote, "Here it is—the shirt off my back!" The bank cashed it.

When there is no love, giving leads to bitterness. — 750 Engaging Illustrations.

18. Verse 10ff speak of God's provision for our needs. Can you think of other verses that speak to the idea that God will provide our needs?

If your father were Bill Gates and your computer broke, where would you turn? If Stradivari were your dad and your violin string snapped, to whom would you go? If your father is God and you have a problem on your hands, what do you do?

Scripture tells us what to do:

- Is your problem too large? "God . . . is able . . . to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20 NLT).
- Is your need too great? "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance" (2 Corinthians 9:8 RSV).
- Is your temptation too severe? "[God] is able to help us when we are being tested" (Hebrews 2:18 NLT).
- Are your sins too numerous? "He is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him" (Hebrews 7:25 NLT).
- Is your future too frightening? "God . . . is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault" (Jude 24 NLT).
- Is your enemy too strong? "[God] is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:21).

Make these verses a part of your daily diet. God is able to accomplish, provide, help, save, keep, subdue. . . . He is able to do what you can't. He already has a plan. — God's not bewildered. Go to him. —EVERY DAY DESERVES A CHANCE / Lucado, M. (2011). Live loved: Experiencing god's presence in everyday life. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

19. When has God provided for you in an amazing way? Who has a story about that?

According to USA Today, on Wednesday, November 23, 1994, a couple named Sandy and Theresa boarded TWA flight 265 in New York to fly to Orlando and see Disney World. Theresa was almost seven months pregnant. Thirty minutes into the flight, Theresa doubled over in pain and began bleeding. Flight attendants announced that they needed a doctor, and a Long Island internist volunteered.

Theresa soon gave birth to a boy. But the baby was in trouble. The umbilical cord was wrapped tightly around his neck, and he wasn't breathing. His face was blue.

Two paramedics rushed forward to help, one of whom specialized in infant respiratory procedures. He asked if anyone had a straw, which he wanted to use to suction fluid from the baby's lungs. The plane did not stock straws, but a flight attendant remembered having a straw left over from a juice box she had brought on board the plane. The paramedic inserted the straw in the baby's lungs as the internist administered CPR. The internist asked for something he could use to tie off the umbilical cord. A passenger offered a shoelace.

Four minutes of terror passed. Then the little baby whimpered. Soon the crew was able to joyfully announce that it was a boy, and everyone on board cheered and clapped.

The parents gave the little boy the name Matthew. Matthew means "Godsent." The people on board the plane "were all godsend," the father said.

Indeed, God had met the need through people who gave what they had and did what they could. God usually meets needs through people. — 750 Engaging Illustrations.

20. The Bible teaches that God blesses the generous. What price do hoarders pay?

In Other Words, a publication of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, recently told a story about Sadie Sieker, who served for many years as a house-parent for missionaries' children in the Philippines.

Sadie loved books. Though she gladly loaned out some, others she treasured in a footlocker under her bed. Once, in the quiet of the night, Sadie heard a faint gnawing sound. After searching all around her room, she discovered that the noise was coming from her footlocker. When she opened it, she found nothing but an enormous pile of dust. All the books she had kept to herself had been lost to termites.

What we give away, we keep. What we hoard, we lose. — 750 Engaging Illustrations.

21. What do you want to recall from this study?

22. How can we support one another in prayer this week?