

Explore the Bible: Giving Faithfully

May 2, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for May 20 focuses on 2 Corinthians 9:1-15.*

One of the most beautiful things about reconciliation and renewal—explored in the previous lesson—is the aftereffects of such change. A broken friendship that is restored brings a fresh hope to people. Depression that gives way renewed living gives a person fresh eyes to see living for God.

Of all the aftereffects of being changed by God, generosity is probably the most noticeable and significant. As God has been generous to us, we want to emulate his generosity. Ask your group: *How well has generosity defined your walk with God?*

When we look at the early believers in Acts, we see a community defined by generosity: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had” (Acts 4:32).

This example in the early church was meant to be emulated by communities of faith throughout the world. Now, the Apostle Paul is ready to encourage the Corinthian believers to follow the examples of generosity before them. We should do the same today.

Confidence Expressed (2 Corinthians 9:1-5)

This is one of the most positive messages from the apostle to this church. The Corinthian Christians' words and "eagerness to help" have inspired other communities to emulate. This is wonderful, but Paul is careful to help the Corinthians follow through on their promise to be generous in action.

We are told that Cicero—a wealthy orator and Roman politician—once used this same tactic to avoid incomplete confidence. He sent a letter to a benefactor to urge his words to become action so his hope would not be disappointed (Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, p. 211).

What is the biggest fear we have when we are promised something? Disappointment may be an answer. In response to this concern, we see Paul's proactive work to avoid shame for both himself and the congregation.

Look closely at the motive found in verse 5: "Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given." *How does this motive impact giving from the church?* Ask your group specifically: *How do you avoid giving grudgingly?*

Benefits Found (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

If there is a word to consider for looking at the benefits of giving, it is the word "investment." *How do we normally think of what an investment is?* The gardening language of sowing and reaping is a reminder that you will "reap what you sow." Put that in context, and we see we need to sow generously to reap generously.

Is our motive only to gain from what we give? Jesus told a parable of

sowing seeds (Luke 8), and the seeds were God's words. With this in mind, our motive to share is to spread God's words, in particular the good news, so they will benefit others. This means our motivation is not for ourselves, but for God's purposes.

What is our motivation? Give to God and give to others so God will do what he does best. *What is our attitude?* To be "cheerful" as we give. *What is our mindset?* We need to see that every gift we give is an investment in God's kingdom. Ask your group: *How should this change what we give and how we give?*

Adoration Gained (2 Corinthians 9:12-15)

We all have the opportunity to participate in God's glory. Even though we are to be generous givers, since God supplied what we give, he also reaps the glory of what we give. This is only natural, and this is what helps us continue kingdom-minded work.

Here is the beautiful part: God welcomes us in his work, and he invites us to share in what is his. *How does this make you feel? Why does this sound better than obligation or hollow promises?* This is a work and plan much bigger and greater than ours.

Paul also told the church at Philippi, after thanking God for their partnership in sharing the gospel, that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). What God starts in us, he shares with us, and it is much bigger than us.

Conclusion

Before getting to our text today, Paul gave this advice to Corinth: “Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it” (8:11). God makes us able to give, and he wants us to complete what he calls us to give. Ask your group: *How have you been obedient or disobedient in this?*

Richard Dawkins, an outspoken atheist, once said, “Let us try to teach generosity and altruism because we are born selfish.” While he does not believe in God as we do, his words point to the necessity of generosity and our naturally selfish state.

Remember, to be a generous giver in response to your new life in Christ, it requires fighting against your natural state. Selfishness has no room in God’s kingdom, and we serve the most selfless Savior. Let his generosity lead us to be generous followers and givers.

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