

FOCUS:

Gaining and saving money is only valuable if it expands our capacity to give.

APPLICATION:

In the grand scheme of things, gaining and saving money are worthless endeavors if we don't choose to be generous with what we gain and save. Additionally, we can be even more generous if we practice good habits when gaining and saving. When we choose to give, we are demonstrating that we love God and other people more than we love money.

GOD'S WORD:

2 Corinthians 9:6-8;
Proverbs 11:24-25

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GIVE ALL YOU CAN

SMALL GROUP LESSON 3



2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

LET IT GO

My niece was three years old when Disney's "Frozen" came out in theaters. As you might expect, she quickly became a huge fan of Elsa and Anna. She loved the movie so much, and watched it so many times when it came out on video, that she walked around the house singing the chorus of the hit song "Let It Go" almost without ceasing. It was a trying time for my brother and sister-in-law.

While the lyrics to the song aren't particularly applicable to 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, the title of the song is. When you love something, it's difficult to "let it go." How many times have we seen parents struggling to keep their composure as their children head off to college? What about having to let a pet go because you are moving and can't take them with you? The fact is, the more you love something, the harder it is to release it.

This is the same with money. If you love money, it's hard to let go of it. In fact, for many Christians, even tithing is a hard thing to do. We find ourselves giving "reluctantly or under compulsion," as verse 7 says, because that money is important to us. We trust more in the power of that money than in the power of God. But, because God directs us to give, we do, but not cheerfully.

PROVERBS 11:24-25

“One person gives freely,
yet gains even more;
another withholds unduly,
but comes to poverty.

A generous person will
prosper; whoever refreshes
others will be refreshed.”

That is why these verses are hard to swallow. Paul tells us that we shouldn't just give, but we should give freely and cheerfully. Two people can give the exact same amount and not be equally generous. Think of it this way: two people each walk up to you and hand you \$100. The first person tells you they were instructed by a judge to give you the money or go to jail. The second person tells you they are giving the money to you as a gift because they love you. Which gift means more? Which person is more generous? It's the same way with our tithes and offerings. If we give because we feel like we have to, then we are missing a key component of generosity: choosing to give because we love who we are giving to more than the money we are giving.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever been forced to give someone money or forced to do something nice for someone else? How did that feel differently than the times you gave money or effort freely?
2. Verse 8 implies that, as we give, we still “have all that you need.” How does giving cheerfully reflect a trust in God to take care of our needs?
3. Verse 7 says, “God loves a cheerful giver.” In your own words, how would you describe a cheerful giver?

GIVE AND GET

Read Proverbs 11:24-25

Proverbs 11:24-25 can easily be mistaken as proof of what has been labeled the “prosperity gospel,” which is the idea that God wants Christians to be rich. The problem with this concept is that it is contradictory with reality, and gets twisted into the idea that, if a person is impoverished, they must not be seeking out God's blessing, or must not be following God's Word.

But the truth is, this verse isn't as contradictory as it first seems. When you are generous, you do receive a reward. Sometimes it is financial in nature, but often it is not. Maybe, because you gave

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freely, you witnessed someone's life being changed because of your gift. Maybe, because you gave freely and formed a relationship with someone through your gift, that person helped you out of a predicament. Maybe, because you were generous, you received a raise when your employer recognized your generosity as a good trait and rewarded you for it. But, often, we don't see the rewards for our gifts. The fact is, even though God rewards generous givers, we can't fall into the trap of giving for the sake of receiving rewards. That is a transaction, not a gift, and the Kingdom of God doesn't work that way.

Most people today aren't willing to part with their money if it doesn't benefit them in a tangible way. You want to get something in return for what you give. When you make an investment, you expect a return. But when you give to God, there shouldn't be strings attached. Trust that God will do more with your money than you could ever do on your own. If you are going to trust your money to someone, why not let that someone be the Creator of the universe? There is no greater reward than knowing your money is making a difference in the Kingdom of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some examples of non-monetary rewards a person might receive for being generous?
2. Have you ever had the opportunity to "repay" someone else's generosity toward you? How were you able to do that?
3. What do you think Proverbs 11:25 means when it says, "Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed?"

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MOTHER TERESA

Perhaps one of the most well-known religious figures in recent history, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, known as Mother Teresa, was a Roman Catholic nun and missionary who worked tirelessly to help the poor and reach them for Christ. She founded the Missionaries of Charity in 1950, an organization still actively involved in helping the poor, the orphans, the refugees and those suffering from diseases like AIDS and leprosy.

Mother Teresa made the choice at a young age to serve God through mission work. Early in her ministry, she felt called to live among the poor, so she could actively minister to them and understand their plight. The Missionaries of Charity, in addition to vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, also profess this vow: to give wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor.” From the very beginning of her ministry, she believed in placing the welfare of others above herself.

Although she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 and was canonized in 2016, Mother Teresa didn’t choose to serve others because of those rewards. She also clearly didn’t serve others to pad her own pockets, as she chose a life of poverty for herself as she ministered to others. That is not to say that we are required to live in poverty if we are to be generous, but it is further evidence of her true motivation: to serve the Kingdom of God.

Mother Teresa wasn’t perfect, but she is a great example of someone who gave all she could. She dedicated her entire life to ministry—financially, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. She made this commitment without expectation of reward. Although I am sure she would have been humbled in knowing she was canonized by the Catholic Church, I am just as certain that she didn’t make the choices she did with the hopes that she would one day be recognized for her work. Her reward came through the smiles she saw on the faces of the impoverished people she helped. She received joy from the laughter of the orphaned children whose lives she helped make better. Her greatest reward took place the day she went to Heaven and saw the faces of all those she brought to Christ through her ministry.



PROFILE: MOTHER TERESA

Born August 26, 1910

Died September 5, 1997

Occupation: Roman Catholic
nun and missionary

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COMMISSION

Think of a person or people group to whom you can minister this week. Make an active choice to reach out to that person or group and be generous toward them without expecting anything in return.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. It is a difficult choice to abandon all comforts and choose to live like Mother Teresa, and God doesn't expect all of us to go to those extremes. But He does expect us to be committed fully to Him. What are some ways that you can commit fully to Christ and be generous in your life, both now and in the future?
2. Despite her generosity, Mother Teresa still received criticism from those who believed she had ulterior motives. In a world that doesn't understand the concept of giving without expecting something in return, how should we respond to those criticisms or misunderstandings?
3. Have you ever known someone who dedicated themselves to generously helping a certain person or group of people? Share about that person's ministry and how they exhibited true generosity through their work.

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