

2nd Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9 - John Karmelich

1. Of all the lessons I've written in a good while, this is the first one where I admit I had to face some of my own shortcomings. With that said, this lesson "wrote easier than most others". There is an old saying that preachers preach best on own weaknesses, and maybe that is why this lesson wrote so easy. Let me explain the topic of this lesson and then I'll come back to this issue.
2. Both Chapters 8 and 9 are about the topic of giving.
 - a) First, let me give you the good news. I will not anytime during this lesson, or anytime in the foreseeable future ask you to send me money. That is not why I write these lessons. This study has nothing to do with financially supporting this bible study ministry.
 - b) Let me give you some more good news. This lesson will not tell you to give more to your favorite cause. I can't stand "pitches for money". I can't stand lectures where the purpose is to make one feel guilty that one is not donating enough to a specific cause. With that said, Christian giving should never be about doing it out of guilt.
3. If you haven't figured it out by now, the main topic of these two chapters of 2nd Corinthians is about how and when one gives as a Christian. "Giving" is my one word lesson title.
 - a) The term "giving" is more than just financial giving. It is also about the giving of one's time as well as giving of one's financial resources.
 - b) The essential idea is that Paul wants to teach all Christians that giving is a gift from God and is an extension of God's grace. In other words, God wants us to give not because we have to give or that we should give, but because we trust in God's grace, and that grace gives us the ability to be "givers".
 - c) Paul uses a word in Chapter 9, Verse 7 that I love. He says that God loves a cheerful giver. That word "cheerful" in the original Greek language literally means "hilarious". The idea is that one is so happy to be giving that it causes a state of laughter in how we give.
 - i) The point is not that we are giving so much or so little that we are laughing about it. The point is we trust in God's grace so much that we just naturally want to be givers to others. The idea is we want to give so much that it becomes "hilarious".
4. Let me state some of my favorite comments on the topic of giving and get them out of my system:
 - a) I do not believe Christians are required to "tithe". The word "tithe" means to give ten percent of ones income. Nowhere in the New Testament, are Christians commanded to tithe. God does ask us to give, but specific amounts are never stated. If Jesus or Paul expected Christians to tithe, I'm positive they would have said so in the New Testament.
 - b) An important idea is about giving proportion to one's faith. If one is "barely trusting God", then only giving a small amount of one's income may be all one can handle at that moment in time. If one is saved and making lots of money a "tithe" may not be enough.
 - c) Where one gives one's money is a separate lecture. I found the best way to give is a little like "picking stocks" in the stock market: One picks stocks to buy based on the best opportunities to increase one's wealth. Just as we look for stock growth, we should look for "Holy Spirit growth". We should give where one already sees the Holy Spirit working. There are lots of causes that need cash. The trick is to look for ministries where one sees the Holy Spirit making a difference and financially joining that cause.
 - i) Yes, that includes one's local church. I believe one should primarily give to one's church first, as one can see it bless their own lives as well as the lives of others.
 - ii) Next, look for places again, not based on need, but based on the "work of the Holy Spirit". If one is not sure, investigate and study causes that appeal to you.
 - iii) With that said, I hate giving to Christian causes that say, "Pay us now, or God will end this ministry tomorrow". I'm convinced God wants to bring some "unfruitful ministries" to an end, but people keep paying them to keep them going.

5. Now that I've cleared that out of my system, ☺ let me go back to my opening statement. If I had to state the one area of my life where I struggle, it is in dealing with finances. I give checks every week to my church. There are times when my income is low then my giving gets low as well. When my income increases, so does my income. So where is the struggle?
- a) The struggle comes in trusting God during the slow work times. I am self-employed, so my income is erratic. When the income is not coming in, and even if my bank account is "fine", I worry. My wife (thank God for her) has taught me to pray through such times and trust that God will work it out. The fear of "no money" is very real and it causes me to blame myself instead of trusting that God is trying to teach me something.
 - b) My struggle is not so much in the giving, but in the trust that God will somehow "work it out". Remember that Christian giving has nothing to do with a "pay until it hurts" mentality. What one gives to God is always based on one's trust in God. If one is not giving what one should, it is about a lack of trust in God to provide.
 - c) The idea of "giving" is like telling God, "I'm trusting You with my income. I don't know what is going to happen tomorrow, but You do. Just to show how much I trust You, here is a percentage of what income has presently come in. Let me give that to You as a way of showing I trust that You will provide for me tomorrow."
 - d) That leads to a related point. If God has "no need of things", why should we give to Him? It's not about God's needs. It is about trusting Him. It is about trusting that God will take care of us today, tomorrow and forever. We give not to support our favorite cause, but to show God that we trust Him to take care of us financially as well as in every other way one can think of.
 - e) OK, I'm exhausted. ☺ No more "money lectures" and I'll start the text.
6. Chapter 8, Verse 1: And 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.
- a) I want to start with a quick geography and history lesson. Macedonia is in the northern part of Greece. The Corinthian church is located in the southern part of Greece.
 - i) When the Romans conquered the northern part of Greece, they took with them much of the significant wealth. The point is the churches located in northern Greece (a.k.a., the Macedonia region) were poor places due to the Romans.
 - ii) OK John, your point is? Paul complimented the churches located in the Macedonia region for their generosity despite their poverty.
 - b) Notice what Paul does not specifically state: The amount of the donation. What I suspect Paul meant is that given the low prosperity state of the churches in that region, Paul was impressed with how much that church gave as a donation.
 - i) OK John, I thought you said there were not going to be any guilt trips in this lesson about how much we should give? I'm sticking to my word. ☺ The point is not the exact amount of the donation that these churches gave to Paul. The point is they were generous based on what they had.
 - ii) Which reminds me, one should not give what one does not have. If one is unemployed, God does not expect you to give if you don't have a lot to give. If one is living off their savings and has previously given based on the earnings from those savings, then one should not feel the need to give again.
 - iii) With that said, the point here is that the churches in this area didn't have a lot. They still made a nice donation based on what they did have.
 - c) OK, what is the purpose of this donation? Was it for Paul's retirement fund? Hardly. ☺ The answer is not stated in here, but we know from the book of Acts that Paul was taking up a collection for the Christian church in Jerusalem as they were very poor.

- i) To be a Jewish Christian in Israel meant that one was excommunicated from society. It means one lost their job and it was almost impossible to find other jobs as other Jews would not hire "converts". If that wasn't bad enough, there was persecution as well! The point is this church needed financial help.
 - ii) Paul believed other churches he founded owed a debt to the Christians in Israel as the Lord is still "Jewish". Paul's point is not that all Christians should be equal in wealth. Paul was simply asking people to help out with the cause of helping suffering Christians in Israel who couldn't make a living and faced persecution.
 - d) Getting back to the text, the point is Paul is singling out the churches he was currently visiting in the northern part of Greece for their generosity. Paul states in Verse 2 that these churches had joy in spite of their trials. The idea is that the churches in northern Greece had a positive attitude despite the suffering they endured. At the same time, despite their financial poverty, they were able to give Paul a nice financial donation.
 - i) One's generosity is based on the attitude of the heart and being willing to give. It comes back to the "grace of God" and trusting in God for one's provision.
7. Verse 3 (cont.): Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.
- a) Paul is saying that the churches in Macedonia pleaded with him to take the donation. In other words, Paul understood how poor this church was and how financially difficult it was for them to give this money.
 - b) It supports the idea that financial giving has little to do with how much wealth one has. Giving is an attitude of the heart and giving is about trusting in God.
 - c) It is more than just believing God will provide for me tomorrow. It is a willingness to help others and to use what one has to the benefit of other people.
8. 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.
- a) Paul is stating the "power source" behind the giving. Paul is saying these churches in Macedonia collectively "gave themselves first to the Lord" and then gave a gift to Paul.
 - i) In other words, these churches drew upon God's strength and power in order to give that financial gift to Paul.
 - ii) The lesson is, if one struggles in the area of giving, the secret is not to make more money or simply "force themselves" to write a check at church, but the secret is to draw closer to God and let Him work in us to be generous to others.
 - iii) Like every other aspect of Christianity, generosity begins by drawing close to God and then drawing on His power in order to have the courage to be generous.
9. Verse 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.
- a) In Verses 6 and 7 we see Paul asking the church in Corinth to follow through with the same type of generosity that was shown in Macedonia. In other words, Paul was giving the church in Corinth a "reputation to live up to".
 - b) In these verses, we get to a key point of these two chapters: One reason Paul is sending Titus (and others) to Corinth is not only to deliver "2nd Corinthians" but also to get the church in Corinth to follow through with a promised financial donation.
 - c) The point has nothing to do with how much money Paul could get out of Corinth. Paul wants the church in Corinth to grow in their generosity. Paul wants the Christians in Corinth (and everywhere for that matter) to trust in God for the ability to give to others.

- d) Let me put the principal of giving another way: One of the most difficult things in life to do is "follow through" with one's promises. One of the secrets to success in life is to follow through with one's plans. Most people have wonderful plans and ideas in life. Out of fear, we don't follow through with those plans.
 - i) In other words, we fear failure. Out of that fear of failure, we don't follow through in life with either things we want to do or things God wants us to do.
 - e) This gets me back to the opening statement of this lesson. The fear I personally deal with at times is that the fear of failure "hits me" in financially slow times. I've learned with help from my wife to pray my way through such times. I'm also learning that such fears have little to do with my earnings or money in the bank. The fears are rooted in a lack of trust in God to see my way through such times.
 - i) I understand that tough financial times often require a change in how or where one has to work. Such times often require us to look at life differently. My point is not that the lack of income is not a real issue to face. My point has to do with getting through the "mental aspect" of not fearing failure.
 - f) All of this does tie to what Paul is trying to get at: Overcoming our fears. The specific point at hand is that Paul wanted the church in Corinth to follow through with their giving. I don't think Paul cared about the specific dollar figure. What Paul wanted was to see that church learn to trust in God and that means trust in Him financially as well as to trust in Him for their salvation and their survival.
 - i) Paul is not saying "Give more so because you have more". Paul is teaching about learning to trust God with one's finances as well as every other aspect of one's life.
 - g) To sum this all up, Paul wants the Christians in this city to follow through in their giving to show their trust in God, not to "collect a bigger check".
10. 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.
- a) This to me is the most powerful verse in the chapter. It begins by stating that the Lord Jesus Christ was rich and for your sakes (i.e., for all Christians) He became poor. So what does that mean? Does that mean Jesus had lots of money in heaven and had to give that up in order to help out Christians? ☺ That would be the "no" answer.
 - i) Paul wants us to think about Jesus "becoming human" this way: Before Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph, He was God. That means Jesus had the full power to do all things and be all things. He could see the whole world at once and at the same time focus in on every detail of everyone's life. It means Jesus as all-powerful.
 - ii) When Jesus was born as human, He had to give up all that power. When Jesus was a human, he was now limited to live like a human. Jesus was no longer all-powerful. He knew that God the Father would raise Him back up again to His former status but in the meantime, Jesus had to suffer the price for sins.
 - iii) Paul's point here is that Jesus "became poor" in that He gave up being God in the sense He became human for our sakes. All God asks of us in exchange for that is to accept Jesus' sin payment on our behalf. In other words, Jesus became "poor" so that we as Christians can be "rich". How do we become rich? We get to share in Jesus' "rewards" of eternity in heaven. (See Ephesians 1:11 on this point.)
 - iv) This verse has nothing to do with becoming financially rich now. The bible never says, "Give me your heart and then I'll make you financially rich in this lifetime". If that were true, people would give their lives to Jesus not for the sake of having their sins forgiven, but so they could reap financial rewards in this lifetime.
 - b) What this verse is saying is that Jesus gave up "being rich" in the sense of being "Fully God" so that people who believe in Him can share in the eternal riches of heaven.

- c) OK John, I get all of that stuff about eternal rewards. What does that have to do with my ability to write a check on Sunday? ☺ The answer is everything. If we have given our lives to Jesus, that includes giving all we own, including our finances to Him. God asks us to give part of our income to Him not because God "needs it", but in order for us to demonstrate our trust in God to take care of us through all situations.
 - d) Let me put it another way: In what ways do we put our trust for survival for the next week, year or ten years? Are we trusting in God or our financial wealth? If we refuse to give of our wealth to God, then we are not trusting in God, but are trusting in our wealth.
 - i) Giving is about showing God that we are trusting in Him and not our money. It is following through with our commitment that we trust God with all that we have.
11. Verse 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.
- a) These verses continue with Paul's desire that the church in Corinth "follow through" with their previous promise to give a donation for the Christian church in Jerusalem.
 - b) Paul says that when he was in Corinth a year earlier, he remembered the church there had a desire to give, and now he wants that church to follow through with that desire.
 - i) Paul is teaching in a sense for us to "face our fears" and follow through with our trust in God. How do we face our fears? The answer has to do with seeking God and giving those fears to Him. We then ask for God's strength to work our way through those fears and take actions to overcome them.
 - ii) If one's fear is money, (as an appropriate example here), then take a step in faith and "give something". If one has a high amount of fear, then start by giving a little. Don't feel pressured into giving a specific amount. One should give from the heart, and not based on pressures from a church or "whoever". Let God work on one's heart to overcome one's fears.
 - iii) Let's suppose one's fear has nothing to do with money. Suppose it is something non-materialistic like overcoming a bad habit. The method to overcome that fear is the same. It starts by placing that fear into God's hands. One then asks God to help us overcome that issue. We then take "baby steps" in the right direction. We take bigger steps as we trust God more. Support group(s) are usually helpful as one deals with such issues.
 - c) The point of all of this is God wants us to overcome all of our fears by "Trusting Him". I know that sounds like a cliché, but it is true. The way we deal with our fears is not by "trying harder", but by trusting God and drawing on His strength to "follow through".
 - d) The interesting "side effect" is that if one learns to trust God in all areas of one's life, it tends to make us more successful in this life however we define "success". My point is if one learns to follow through with one's commitments to God, that strength and power spills over into every other aspect of our lives.
 - i) As an example, if one is afraid to give at church out of fear of losing that money, once one overcomes that fear and learns to "follow through" with a commitment, that ability to follow through spills over into other aspects of life as well. If we can learn to follow through with our commitments to God, we will also overcome any and all other fears we have in life and become more successful in this life as well.
 - e) This lecture on giving ties directly to these verses. Paul is urging believers to follow through on their promise to give a financial gift. God is asking us to trust in Him for our future by "following through" with God's desire to trust Him with our money.

12. Verse 13: Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.
- a) This is a misunderstood verse. Paul is urging the Corinthians to give in order for there to be equality. What does Paul mean by "equality"? Paul is not preaching "socialism". Paul is preaching equality in the sense that Paul desires that all Christians have a giving heart and trust God with their finances.
 - i) Look at this way: Paul took an offering from the churches in Macedonia, which was a poor area of Greece. If Paul really wanted "social equality", he would have taken money from Corinth and given it to the churches in Macedonia.
 - ii) If Paul really wanted social equality he would have specified exact amounts of donations so that every Christian would have an equal figure.
 - b) Paul desires all Christians to have a generous heart in that we trust God with whatever financial resources He has provided to us.
 - i) That does not mean God wants us to give everything we own to Him and take a vow of poverty. It means that God wants us to give a percentage of our income to Him to show our trust in Him to provide for our future.
 - ii) There is an old expression that says in effect, "We shouldn't give so much that we become part of the poor that others have to now support."
13. Verse 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."
- a) Paul is saying there may come a day when the church in Jerusalem may have to take up a collection for the church in Corinth. Remember that the church in Jerusalem was full of Jewish people who were "kicked out of society" for their conversion to Christianity.
 - b) We are back to the idea of what is, and what is not equality. What equality is not is the equal distribution of wealth for every Christian. What it "is" (or should be) is a desire in our hearts to help those Christians who don't have the resources to survive.
 - i) Let me put this another way: If we give to our local church, what should they do with that gift? Part of it should go for the financial needs of the staff. Part of that money should also go to help missionaries spread the gospel. Part of it should also go to help people who are in true financial need.
 - ii) Paul is urging those who have a lot of financial resources to use part of that wealth to support other Christians that are quite literally starving.
 - c) In the Old Testament, the Israelites were not allowed to harvest their fields twice. In other words, whatever they missed the first time they harvested their crops, was to be left for the poor to eat off of. At the same time, the Israelites were to purposely keep part of their fields for the poor to eat.
 - i) That type of principal is what is being taught here in Corinthians. God is asking us to be generous with our resources (think of our wealth as our "fields") so that those who don't have much can survive off of the wealth God has blessed us with.
 - ii) You may say, "Well, I'm not a farmer. How do I leave part of my "fields" for others? That is the idea of giving and let part of that giving be to help others.
 - d) This leads me back to the issue of "facing the fear of losing money". Often we don't give to God our fear of losing our wealth. We may rationalize, "I need to hang on to all of my money, because I don't know what will happen to me tomorrow." That actually leads to Verse 15 that reads, "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little." That is a quote from Exodus 16:18.
 - i) If you recall, God "rained down" manna for the Israelites to eat while they were wandering in the desert. The point of that Exodus quote is no matter how much the Israelites gathered, be it a little or a lot, everybody had enough for that day.

- ii) In other words, God is saying to us in effect, "Look, I'm the one who provided you with enough to last for today. Trust me with your stuff as I'm the one who gave it to you in the first place. Give part of that stuff back to Me as a sign that we trust in Him to provide for us tomorrow as well as today."
- 14. Verse 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.
 - a) In these verses, Paul is commending the "heart" of Titus. In other words, it was not just Paul's idea to go to Corinth to collect an offering and Titus was his messenger. Paul is saying that it was Titus's concern as well as Paul that Titus was enthusiastic about going.
 - b) Think of it this way: If Titus was not crazy about going he could have had fears of being "driven out of town" empty handed. Titus was taking his life in his hands by taking the risk of going to Corinth for the purpose of asking for a donation.
 - c) If someone was coming to our church or our house asking for a donation, how willing are we to be open to that person? How much would we trust that person? Grant it, Paul was not a "stranger" in the sense that Paul founded this church. Therefore, the donation was not for a stranger, but for someone this church knew and trusted.
 - d) The point here is that when God wants something done, He finds a way to put a desire in the heart of people to get that "thing" done. In this case, God gave Titus a heart to travel to Corinth for this collection.
- 15. Verse 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.
 - a) Along with Titus, an unnamed person also traveled with him. Scholars debate over who is this unnamed person. My view is if God wanted us to know who is this other person, the scripture would have named him by name.
 - b) Paul wanted to give credit to the fact that another person was willing to travel with Titus on what could be a deadly journey. In fact, the churches in northern Greece (again, Macedonia) specifically choose this person to travel with Titus on the journey.
 - c) I suspect part of this has to do with the biblical principal of "two or more people must be in agreement on something" in order for it to be accepted as true. (See Deuteronomy 19:15 and Matthew 18:16 on this point.)
 - i) In other words, if Titus went by himself, the Corinthians might think, "Well, how do we know Paul sent you to collect this money?" Having a second person in agreement lends support to Titus's cause, especially if this other unnamed person tells the story how he was chosen for this cause.
- 16. Verse 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.
 - a) Paul wanted to avoid criticism in this collection effort. Paul did this by sending more than one person to Corinth.
 - b) One of my favorite lectures I ever received from my father was about "doing things to avoid criticism" whenever possible. There was a business situation where my father went out of his way not only to do what was legally right, but to go out of his way to do it in a way that was above criticism by people. That is what Paul is doing here.

- c) Verse 20 says, "We administer this liberal gift." Remember Paul was sending Titus and other unnamed people to Corinth to take up a collection. So why does Paul call this action an "administration of a liberal gift"? Does that mean Paul was a liberal? No. ☺
 - i) The "gift" has nothing to do with the amount of money being promised or collected. The "gift" is about "we" (in this case Titus and the other travelers) to be trusted in collecting the money. It is about God blessing their trip and protecting their efforts. That is the administration of the liberal gift.
 - ii) Any effort to collect from other Christians requires the trust of those who are actually collect the money. A church or charity should be open about where the money it collects is spent. That trust should include having the "books open" to anyone who gives to that group.
17. Verse 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.
- a) Paul ends this "sales pitch" with one more reminder to the Corinthians to follow through with their commitment to God to take up this collection. Paul says he has "pride in this church". Remember that Paul founded the church in Corinth. What Paul is doing here is giving the church a reputation to live up to.
 - b) So was Paul more concerned with the church in Corinth actually giving to his particular cause or was he more concerned about the churches ability to give in the first place? The answer is probably both. Anybody who is involved in a particular charity usually has a heart for that charity and does what they can to be supportive of that cause. At the same time, Paul was concerned that the church in Corinth has a heart for giving and that they trust in God on the issue of giving in the first place.
 - c) What does all of that mean to you and me? Does this mean we have to support the Christian churches in Jerusalem or any particular cause? What it does mean, is that God wants us to be "givers". If we trust in God for every aspect of our lives including our finances, then we should follow through with that trust and be "givers".
 - i) So what cause should we give to? The best answer is whatever God puts on your heart. The answer will be different for you than it will for me. If you are married then one should also decide with one's spouse and jointly make an effort to support each other's causes.
 - ii) To further answer the question, remember what I said in the introduction in that giving is a little like "picking stocks in the stock market". One picks stocks based on looking for a good return on one's money. One should pick Christian causes based on where one sees the Holy Spirit working and then try to collect dividends by joining in where God is working. That includes one's local church. If we are being blessed by our church, then one should support it.
18. Chapter 9, Verse 1: 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.
- a) Paul continues his "sales pitch" in Chapter 9. Paul is still giving the Christians in Corinth a reputation to live up to" Paul is saying in effect that he was bragging to the churches in northern Greece (i.e., Macedonia) how much of a "giver" are the Christians are in Corinth.
 - b) Paul used his trust in the Corinthian church as a "motivational speech" to the churches in the Macedonia region. Paul is even stating that his bragging about the church in Corinth was the reason the Macedonians gave so much. Then Paul gives the punch line of "Since I've now given you this great motivation to live up to, I would like you to follow through with your promise to give when Titus and friends come to collect".
 - c) Does this mean the church in Corinth and "us" need to respond to pressure? I think a better answer has to do with responding to our commitments.

- d) One of the greatest character traits in life is to be a "man and woman of our word". It is a matter of being trustworthy and following through with our commitments.
 - i) It is one thing if this church never promised to give Paul any money in the first place. It is another to make a commitment and not follow through with it. In other words, it is "putting our money where our mouth is".
 - e) Suppose things have "changed" since that commitment was made and now there is less money available? The answer is still to follow through as much as possible as one has given their word. If things have truly changed (e.g., one has lost their job) then explain that. People are usually very understandable about such things.
 - i) If it is simply a matter of the money "went elsewhere", that is no excuse.
 - ii) The issue at hand is not the amount of the gift, but giving our word. If this church gave their word to give a certain amount, one should stick to their word.
 - f) Let me give one more example on this issue. Every year, many, if not most churches plan how much money they are going to give to missionary projects or other "giving" causes. As the money comes in every month, funds are set aside for such causes. If a church or a group has made that commitment, they should follow through as much as possible. Nobody forced that church to make that commitment, so it is a matter of being men and women of our word and following through on our actions.
19. Verse 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.
- a) Notice that when 2nd Corinthians was delivered, Paul did not expect the money at that point. Paul is saying I'm sending people "ahead" to get the collection.
 - b) Paul is saying that he does not want to be ashamed of the church in Corinth if they fail to follow through. My point here is that this is not a salvation issue. This is an issue of trusting God and following through on one's trust in God. Paul didn't want the issue "hanging there" when Paul personally showed up for his next visit.
 - c) The next idea being conveyed here is a principal that should apply to all believers. It is that one should be prepared to give. In other words, when the plate is being passed around in church, one should not at that moment, open their wallet and decide how much to give. One should be prepared in advance based on one's earnings.
 - i) What if I forgot my checkbook? Then mail it in the next day or "double it up" next week. Yes, I've had times when I forget to prepare. I'm not claiming to be perfect here. I'm just stating a principal that we should be prepared to give prior to coming to church.
 - d) The longer I live, the more I realize that "planning" is a bigger issue than having the money in the first place. I have found the lack of giving stems from a failure to "plan" to give in the first place, more than an issue of funds existing.
 - i) As I stated in the introduction, this lesson is not a "sales pitch" for any particular Christian cause. I'm also not asking you to give more than one has. What I am suggesting is that one plan well when it comes to giving. The amount one gives is not as important as one learns to develop a trust in God to get them through life and that means trust with one's income.
 - ii) This issue "perfectly" leads us to the next verse.

20. Verse 6: Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.
- a) Let me start with explaining what is "sowing". This is a farming term. It is about taking seeds and putting them into the ground to raise crops. If one is worried about "not losing one's seeds" than one would save some in the barn and only put some seeds in the ground. The principal here is that if one wants a bountiful crop, one has to be willing to take the risk and put lots of seed in the ground. Will all of the seed sprout? No. But if one expects a bountiful crop, then one should put a lot of seed in the ground.
 - b) To explain this, let me give you a biblical principal: There is a false view that one cannot take their "stuff" with them to heaven. One does not take "stuff" with them to heaven by stuffing it in their casket. ☺ One does it by sending it up ahead of time! What I mean by that is somehow, someway we personally benefit in heaven based on how much of a difference for God we have made in our lifetime.
 - i) Know that being a good giver has nothing to do with our salvation. At the same time God wants Christians to make a difference for Him in this lifetime. Giving is one aspect of "making a difference".
 - ii) God wants Christians to reap generously. That means He wants the "seeds we plant" to make a difference for Him. That includes any effort we make to spread the Gospel and any effort we make to help people grow in their faith. It also includes the concept of giving so that the Holy Spirit can work in people's lives.
 - iii) This leads me back to the point of "taking it with us". When we give, it somehow benefits us in the next life. The bible does speak of rewards in heaven based on how we live. How we receive rewards in heaven is a mystery. My personal view is that some people are going to enjoy heaven far more than others simply because such people used their lives to make a difference for God and that joy carries over into the next life. (Source for "taking it with us": Matthew 5:12, 6:1, Luke 6:23.)
 - iv) The idea of "taking it with us" is the concept of using the resources God has given us to make a difference for Him". In that way, we take our resources "with us" to heaven as we benefit in the next life based on how we have lived in this life. How that exactly works is a mystery, but the concept is taught in the bible.
21. Verse 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.
- a) Here is my favorite verse in the lesson. It is memorization time. ☺ In particular I happen to love the word "cheerful". It comes from the Greek word that literally means "hilarious."
 - b) The main point of this verse is not that we should be literally laughing as we give. The point is we are so cheerful in wanting to help others that it fills us with happiness.
 - c) This gets back to the idea that we should not give because we feel compelled or under pressure based on a great speaker. We should give because it is in our heart to give.
 - d) Let me talk a little more about giving "willingly" versus giving under compulsion:
 - i) If a church or a group has a legitimate need, it is ok to ask for money. It is ok for someone to get in front of a church and say in effect, "We would like you to help in this cause ". That speaker should stop at that point and see if the Holy Spirit helps out that cause. It's also ok for to set up a table outside for people to give.
 - ii) My problem is when churches design some sort of competition or pressure people to give to that cause. I can't stand "big thermometers" in church. ☺ I don't like churches where people are congratulated when they give big checks.
 - iii) To summarize the difference, one should ask, "Is the Holy Spirit behind this cause, or is it pressure from people who want this cause to be successful?" If a church wants a cause to be successful, they should ask for money, but not "force" people to give out by placing people in some sort of "group pressure".

22. Verse 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.
- a) One of the things we Christians need to learn is that God repays when we give to a Christian cause, assuming that giving was "Spirit lead" and not "pressure lead".
 - b) The word "grace" is used in an unusual way in this verse. The essential idea is that God will give us the ability to keep on giving when we give to others. The point is, it is God's grace extended in our lives so that we can keep on giving.
 - c) Let me explain this with an illustration:
 - i) God wants us to be like a "water channel" for giving and not a "water reservoir." That means God wants to continually supply us with the ability to give so we can keep on giving. We are not a "reservoir" with limited resources for giving. We are like a lake with a continuous water input so that we can have a continuous water output. The point is God promises to somehow "repay" what we give, not so we have more in our "reservoir", but so we can give more.
 - d) I have heard a lot of tremendous stories in my life of people who have given a lot of what they have and then somehow they got repaid what they have given. In other words, when we give, God somehow takes care of us to supply our needs and supply a financial "grace" on us so we can continue to give.
 - i) Does that mean if I give to every cause that asks, I will receive back every dollar I give? No. The trick is to give where the Holy Spirit is leading. When in doubt, give something and watch the results.
 - ii) Does this mean I can become rich in this lifetime by just giving enough? The purpose of God replenishing our wealth is not for us to "hoard" them, but to keep on being givers to others.
 - e) This leads me back to where I struggle. Out of fear of losing my "resources" I do struggle in worrying about how and where money is being spent. I am very grateful for my wife, who is a much better giver than I am. She loves to do things to help people. Sometimes I complain to her about the money and that is part of my weakness. Lately, I have become aware how popular my wife is at church. I've become aware of all the people who love to greet her and say hello. She is a big giver of her time and resources to help at church.
 - i) That struggle does tie to this verse. This verse reminds you and me that God will somehow repay whatever we give so that we can be a continual source of giving.
 - f) Let me end this discussion with the reminder that "If we give to some cause" it does not guarantee God will repay us. God wants to lead He wants us to follow. I don't have a problem with "testing the waters" to see where God is leading me. I may start by giving a small amount to a cause and then see if God is "blessing" that giving.
23. Verse 9: As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."
- a) This is a quote of Psalm 110, Verse 9. The idea is God "gives gifts" to the poor. That does not mean wrapped gift falls from the sky unto the heads of the poor. ☺ It does mean that God has His way of repaying those who give to others.
 - i) The point of this verse is that God works through people to help the poor and it is one-way God shows off His "righteousness" (i.e., does what is right) to the world.
 - b) It is also a reminder that God desires we help the poor. I believe in supporting local missions that reach out to poor people. Spreading the Gospel should not just be to those who are self-sufficient, but also to those who are financially poor. I do believe Christians should help those in need. I am well aware this is difficult at times to separate the needy from those who just want to "use" us.
 - i) When I am asked for a handout by a food store, I will sometimes offer to buy them food as opposed to a cash handout. That's how I test the sincerity of their need.

24. Verse 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.
- a) We're back to the idea that God will "supply" what was given in His name to others. This also gets back to the idea of us being a "channel" for God as opposed to a "reservoir".
 - b) Verse 11 literally says we will be "made rich in every way" to be generous. When we are givers, God finds a way to replenish our giving so that we can keep on giving.
 - c) I'll ask again: Can I can become rich "in this life" by being a giver? That can happen, but again, I would "test" God in the sense that I would give initially in small amounts to certain causes and see if God is blessing that giving with more resources to give.
 - i) Again, the point is God will not repay our giving so we can "hoard" what we get back from God. The idea of "rich" is based on what "flows through us", not what we hoard for ourselves.
 - d) A problem with giving is we will get a lot of solicitations to give to causes. There are lot of wonderful causes out there, but that may not be where God wants us to give.
 - i) In the same way I don't ask for money in this ministry, I also don't give to people who solicit from me. Some of the solicitations I get sound wonderful, but they are not where I am called to financially give. The point is we are to give where God calls us to give and not where we are pressured to give.
 - e) Some people have a wonderful spiritual gift to give. Some people, like my wife have an easy time of being a giver. My point is that we should not use that as an excuse to not be a "giver" just because others can do it easier than us.
25. Verse 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.
- a) Paul is back to his sales pitch to the Corinthians. He is saying that by helping the Christians in Jerusalem, you (the giver) will be "overflowing" with thanks from God.
 - b) The idea is again that we can't out give God. If we give to causes that God supports, He finds a way to give back to us so we can keep on giving.
 - c) A point here is Paul is asking for a financial gift that this church already promised to give. Paul believes in asking, but he doesn't believe in forcing people to give. In other words, Paul doesn't go person by person to the Corinthian church and say in effect, "OK, the first person gave this amount, so lets force the next person to match that amount." ☺
26. Verse 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.
- a) Paul is not saying we should give in order to be praised by men. Paul is saying that it will become "evident" of the grace of God in us when we are givers.
 - b) If you recall from earlier lessons, the City of Corinth had the reputation of being the home of people with no self-control. In Greek plays of that time era, when they wanted to portray a drunk, they would say that person was from Corinth. So when the church in Jerusalem would receive a collection from the Christians in Corinth, that would be physical evidence that the grace of God is in work in Corinth based on their change.
 - i) My point is not that giving is only for "former drunks". My point is others will see the change in our lives when we are givers. It is one thing to claim to be a believer. It is another when there is evidence to others of the change in our lives.
 - ii) One way we become a witness to others is when we give. It is evidence to those around us that we "put our money where our hearts are". That does not mean we should give in a public way. Jesus taught against that in Matthew 6:3-4. It does mean that God is aware of how we give and those who receive the gift will be aware of our giving.

27. Verse 14: And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.
- a) So what do the Corinthians get out of this deal, other than some thanks from Paul and the knowledge that God wants them to give? They will get prayers from the Christians in the Jerusalem church. So what is the big deal about that?
 - i) Never, ever underestimate the value of other Christians praying for you. I am convinced that the knowledge and wisdom I get to write these studies are "fueled" by the prayers I receive. I am eternally indebted to those who pray for me.
 - ii) In a similar manner, I am sure the Corinthian church somehow benefited from the prayers they get from the church in Jerusalem.
 - b) Let me also add that I know the willingness to pray for people is one of the best witness techniques for Jesus. I have found that those who have not given their hearts to Jesus don't mind if we pray for them and over them. It's a strange but true contradiction that some people don't want Jesus, but still don't mind being "prayed over".
28. Verse 15: Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!
- a) Paul ends this whole discussion on giving by reminding us that to "give" is a gift from God. Further, the ability to "get back" what we have given is also a gift from God. Both of these gifts are an extension of God's grace and that is Paul's point.
 - b) Did Paul personally care about his own favorite cause, which was the suffering church in Jerusalem? Yes he did. Did Paul want Christians to grow in the area of giving for "them in general" as opposed to just for his cause? Yes, he cares about that just as much. Paul wants to see Christians be "givers" not just so that his favorite cause would benefit, but also so that Christians would grow in the specific type of "grace" that comes from trusting God by giving.
29. Let me wrap this up with a few more thoughts and reminders on giving:
- a) Notice the word "tithing" is never used in these two chapters on giving. Christians that say we are required to "tithe" are putting themselves under the "law" in this area. God wants us to give, but He never forces Christians to give a specified amount. God wants us to ask others to give, but never to pressure people to give.
 - i) What's the difference? The difference is when we make someone feel guilty for not giving when the person next to them has given.
 - ii) But isn't that what Paul making others feel guilty by saying these other churches have given? Not exactly. Paul is asking the Corinthian church to follow through on promises they already made to him. He does not use any methods to force people to give or make them feel guilty because others are giving more.
 - b) I also want to add that if anyone takes part of this study "out of context" and uses it to try to force others to give, I will reach out through your computer and slap you around. ☺
 - i) If you write to me and say that the Holy Spirit told you to contact me to donate, well, don't expect much of a response. In summary, "asking" is an acceptable practice, but pressuring someone to give is never acceptable.
30. Since most of us need help in this area, let's end it in prayer.
31. Let's pray: Father, Help us to be givers. Help us to show the grace that You have put in our lives by sharing that grace with others. Help us to trust that You do supply all our needs and You do take care of us. Help us to be givers to others. Help us to make a difference for You by helping other Christians around us. Give us the discernment to know where and when to give to causes and to give out of our heart, and not do to pressure. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.