



Overflowing Grace

Growing In Faith Study Notes
exploring how we can
'excel in the grace of giving'



Overflowing Grace

Bible studies from 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9

Session 1: Poverty and generosity

Starter

Have you ever received unexpected generosity or alternatively found yourself wanting to give generously - especially from or to someone outside your own family or close friendship group?

Searching the Bible

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Prompts for discussion

One of the poorest churches, Macedonia, gave the most generously. Looking at verses 1-5 can you suggest why this might have been?

In verse 8 Paul writes of, 'testing the sincerity of your love'. Why does Paul consider that giving is somehow a litmus test of love and obedience for the Corinthians – and for us?

We usually think about giving to meet needs. Looking at verse 9, what does Paul suggest is the ultimate motivation for Christian giving?

So what now?

What does this mean for us in the world, our church and our individual lives?

The Macedonian church had experienced a severe trial (v2) and they were also extremely poor. What stories in the news of people and nations experiencing hardship and poverty are especially touching your heart at the moment?

What would a church that 'excelled in the grace of giving' (v7) look like – and how does our church shape up?

Can you share a time in your life when you have been challenged to connect your giving to your faith in Jesus?

Taking action:

Find out about a charity which is supported by your local church and is working in a different part of the world.

Alternatively, a fabulous resource can be found at <http://prayercast.com/nations.html>. Here you can choose countries and regions from all over the world with each country providing a local overview, prayer points and a prayer video. You might like to think about the countries you may have visited or the stories you see on the news and use this resource to find out more and to pray for them.

Closing worship

Use the prompts for prayer from the Barnabas trust (www.barnabasfund.org.uk) which gives support and encouragement to churches facing persecution and difficulties across the world).

Read Philippians 2:1-11 and then spend some time in silence or with a worship CD or songs from You Tube playing quietly in the background.



Session 2: Completion and equality

Starter

Billy Graham said, "God has given us two hands – one to receive with and the other to give with. We are not cisterns for hoarding, but channels made for sharing". How sensible is it to keep things for a rainy day? When does this become hoarding?

Searching the Bible

Read 2 Corinthians 8:10-15

Prompts for discussion

Why do you think that Paul is willing to give advice about giving but will not command the Corinthians to do something? (see also v.8)

What does Paul mean in verse 12 when he talks of 'giving from what you have'? Is it about giving from what we have left over when everything else is paid for or from our income as a whole?

What does Paul mean by, 'equality' or 'fair shares' in verses 13-15? (You may find turning back to Exodus 16:18 quoted in verse 15, the story of Gods provision of manna in the desert, helpful.)

How do we respond to the needs of others as a church? How far do we reflect the principles of giving expressed in verses 13-15?

So what now?

What does this mean for us in the world, our church and our individual lives? In this section we ask questions in each of these three areas.

Why does the world have a short attention span regarding generosity to those in need once a crisis has faded from the news report or special days such as Comic Relief are over?

Looking at our own giving in the light of 8:11 what is our personal challenge: is it our *willingness* to give generously or is it our ability to plan our giving and complete the task?

Taking action:

Paul talks about fair shares. Find out how you could support our Foodbank on a regular basis.

Look for opportunities to give in some way each day this week – and do them cheerfully and in absolute privacy if at all possible.

Look over your budget (or get started on making one) and consider how much and what proportion of your income you give away. How do you plan this so that you can keep charitable commitments?

Closing worship

Sing together or listen to, 'I the Lord of Sea and Sky. You may like to print out the words to make it easier to follow.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:11. Leave a time for quiet prayer.

Session 3: Promises and personalities

Starter

John Wesley said, "Earn all you can, give all you can, save all you can" When you were growing up what money advice was passed on to you – and now that we are wiser (!), what money advice would we pass on to others?

Searching the Bible

Read 2 Corinthians 8:16 - 9:5

Prompts for discussion

What practical steps does Paul propose to take in handling the gift from the Corinthian church (verses 8:16-23)? Why?

Why in 9:1-5 is Paul concerned that the desire to give is followed by practical action and planning to make their gift?

How do we make decisions about spending in our church? What would be considered good and bad practice?

So what now?

What does this mean for us in the world, our church and our individual lives? In this section we ask questions in each of these three areas.

Read 2 Cor 8:16-24 How does the way our church communicate about money, manage and make spending decisions about money compare with the high standards that Paul wants to set?

Why is it important to have transparency and accountability in financial affairs? How much interest do we take in the finance of our church?

Taking action:

We cannot meet every need personally, but we can act together to support others and be a generous church. If you do not already, would you like to make a regular contribution (and Gift Aid it)?

Look over your budget (or get started on making one) and consider how much and what proportion of your income you give away. How do you plan this so that you can keep charitable commitments?

Closing worship

Sing together or listen to, 'Brother, Sister let me serve you'. You may like to print out the words to make it easier to follow.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3,4 and 13:11. Leave a time for quiet prayer.

Session 4: Grace and thanks

Starter

If you had a million pounds right now, what would you do with it?

Searching the Bible

Read 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15

Prompts for discussion

What does the illustration of the sower teach us about giving?

What does the passage suggest are the blessings and benefits of generous giving?

Verse 8 is a tough verse. It promises God's abundant provision so two tough questions:

- How do we feel about trusting God for everything that we need – and can anyone share a personal example of this?
- What advice would you give to someone in serious debt or money worry as they read this verse?

So what now?

What does this mean for us in the world, our church and our individual lives?

Which charitable causes raise the most money – and why? What are the triggers that prompt your friends, colleagues and neighbours to give?

How can your church help, 'supply the needs of Gods people *and overflow with thanks*'. What would this look like week by week in services, small groups, community activities etc?

Looking at these verses what words might we use to describe the heart of a generous Christian giver?

Taking Action

At the end of this short study, prayerfully write down three practical steps that you can take to grow as a more generous and cheerful giver

Read Philippians 4:6 and spend a little time at the end of each day this week practicing an 'attitude of gratitude' for all the blessings that God has given you.

Closing worship

Ask the group to offer prayers of thanks, avoiding asking God for anything at this stage. Explain that when there is a lull, you will leave a time of silence as it is likely that more things for which to be thankful will occur to them at this point.

You may wish to distribute a seed or a nut or even a small plant to each person and ask them to hold it and pray for guidance as to how to take part in sowing generously for God's harvest. Ask for grace to be cheerful givers.

