



THE GOD WHO CHANGES US SESSION 11

ONCE GREEDY, NOW GENEROUS

2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-15

HIS STORY

The Call to be Generous

For Paul and the Macedonian churches, casting aside greed and discontentment and spreading the love of God through sacrificial generosity made perfect sense because it was rooted in what Jesus did for us. Jesus was rich, but for our sake, He became poor so we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul wasn't talking about money—that is too trivial of a way to measure poverty and wealth. Instead, Paul had Jesus' richness in glory in mind. The Son of God left His place of honor and glory with the Father (His riches) and became poor when He took on flesh and dwelt on earth with sinful people whom He had created. It was through His poverty that we exchanged our spiritual poverty for the riches of salvation.

- ▶ Since generosity demonstrates the genuineness of our love, what does your generosity say about your love for others? About the state of your heart?
 - ▶ What can you do to have a more godly approach to generosity in the future?

God's Gifts Are Meant to be Shared

God does not give us the wealth of His grace for us to greedily keep it to ourselves. The same grace that gives our salvation impacts our witness. This is why Paul wrote about finishing the task.

Why should people with surplus share with those who lack so that all may have some? Because we are all people made in God's image, standing equally in need of the gospel before the only holy God. Paul put this in spiritual context when he described monetary and material generosity as reflections of the gospel. We can financially and materially raise others up in a way that reflects our equality as persons—within the church, of course—to reflect our equal status as brothers and sisters in Christ. Thinking of it this way, we now worry much less about who hasn't "earned their keep" or worked as hard as we have for what we've achieved. All notions of earning and achieving go out the window when we realize we've been given an inheritance in heaven that nothing can destroy.

God Desires Cheerful Generosity

The Bible tells us that man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). This is why the widow was praised for her tiny offering (Luke 21:1-4)—not because what she gave was impressive, but because she gave with real generosity, sacrifice, and joy. In contrast, the one who gives a large sum of money, but gives with strings attached, has not given much at all.

Essential Doctrines

Moral Influence Theory of Atonement: According to this theory, Jesus' sacrifice should be seen as a demonstration of God's love, a display that produces a change of attitude within humanity. This theory is only part of what Christ accomplished on the cross, since it leaves out God's wrath against sinners and His requirement of satisfaction for sin. Still, it does remind us that the cross is the greatest example of God's love—a love that must provoke gratitude and praise on our behalf.

The Point: God gives to us so we can share with others in need.

Leader Note: Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.

YOUR STORY

- Even the materially poor can be graciously generous with others. How?
- Describe a time when someone was sacrificially generous with you or your family. How did it affect you?
- What are some ways you can expand your ability to be generous with others?
- How is our thankfulness for what we have connected to our level of generosity?

YOUR MISSION

Head

Since Christians have something so much better than any possessions this world can offer, we can joyfully accept it when our possessions are lost or taken from us (Heb. 10:34). This is exactly what Paul was saying in 2 Corinthians 8. He knew that once people find the treasure of Christ, all earthly treasures become small in comparison. This doesn't make money or material possessions unimportant, but it does mean they are not the most important things.

- What did Paul mean when he said generosity “completes” grace (2 Cor. 8:6)?
- Why would generosity be a good way to verify our love?

Heart

Solomon said God has put eternity into our hearts (Eccl. 3:11). This is a space only God can fill. Because we are made in God's image, we were made for more than life right now—we were made for eternity. Material possessions don't fill this deepest longing of the heart, only God does. When we experience God, we see money and possessions for what they really are—not a source of joy, but a means to joy as we live generously with what God has given us. Joy is not found in what we hold onto, but in what we give.

- How can we as individuals and as a church strengthen the picture of giving as worship?
- What are some material possessions that could become idols in your heart?

Hands

Those who have not experienced the gospel often struggle to understand sacrificial giving. The world's value is to take care of yourself first and then, if you have anything left over, be generous. This generosity only comes from the surplus of a person's surplus—after savings, school costs, car payments, travel, and so forth have been made. Sacrificial giving is a foreign concept, before adding the idea of doing so “cheerfully.” When we give this sacrificially and cheerfully, we have the opportunity to present the gospel in powerful ways to those around us.

- Will we receive a financial return on whatever we give financially (2 Cor. 9:6)? Why or why not?
- How should the promise that we will always have what we need impact our level of generosity to others (2 Cor. 9:8)?