

GIVING

FROM A GENEROUS HEART

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 112

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Exodus 25:1-7; 35:4-29; Leviticus 27:30-33; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

EXODUS 35:20-29

²⁰ Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, ²¹ and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the tent of meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. ²² All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the LORD. ²³ Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen, or goat hair, ram skins dyed red or the other durable leather brought them. ²⁴ Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze brought it as an offering to the LORD, and everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work brought it. ²⁵ Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun—blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen. ²⁶ And all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the goat hair. ²⁷ The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. ²⁸ They also brought spices and olive oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. ²⁹ All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the LORD freewill offerings for all the work the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8

⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.

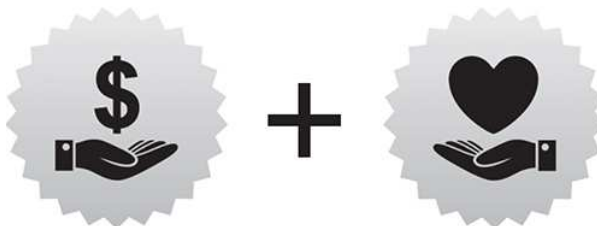


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KEY VERSE

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.—2 Corinthians 9:6

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recall how the Israelites demonstrated generosity in funding the tabernacle's construction.
2. Compare and contrast the Old and New Testament texts in today's study with regard to giving.
3. Identify one way that he or she can better express generosity in giving and make a plan to do so.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. "Giving While Living"
- B. Lesson Background

I. Old Covenant Giving ([EXODUS 35:20-29](#))

A. Willing Givers ([vv. 20-22a](#))

B. Valuable Gifts ([vv. 22b-28](#))

Hearts Moved

C. Obedient Givers ([v. 29](#))

II. New Covenant Giving ([2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8](#))

A. Law of the Harvest ([v. 6](#))

Sowing for Hope

B. Decision of the Giver ([v. 7a](#))

C. Love of God ([v. 7b](#))

D. Ability of God ([v. 8](#))

Conclusion

A. Common Factor

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. “Giving While Living”

In 2012, Chuck Feeney made a remarkable and highly publicized announcement: he had decided to stop giving. That marked the end of a 30-year campaign to give away the large majority of his considerable fortune. The son of Irish-American immigrants, Feeney was born during the Great Depression and served as a radio operator in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean conflict (1950-1953). To make extra money, he started a small side business selling duty-free alcohol to American soldiers; by 1960, at the beginning of the travel boom, Feeney had begun to build an international empire of duty-free shops.

But in 1984, Feeney changed course, deciding to give rather than receive. After selling his share in his company, he established a foundation to promote global education, public health, care for the elderly, and peace efforts. Feeney’s foundation closed in 2016 after fulfilling its objective of distributing \$8 billion (U.S. currency).

In many ways, this low-key approach reflects the biblical perspective. Feeney’s foundation used the slogan “Giving While Living” to summarize his view that people should not simply amass wealth to leave to their heirs, but instead use what they have to do good while they are alive and well. God consistently calls us to give while living, viewing the financial resources we have as assets to be used for his purposes.

B. Lesson Background

The exodus from Egypt and the receiving of the law at Sinai marked the beginning of the nation of Israel. We should remember Abraham’s descendants had lived in Egypt for many generations, and over time they had become quite familiar with the religious views of their Egyptian overlords. Perhaps for this reason, the first two of the Ten Commandments stressed that God’s people were not to worship like the Egyptians, who believed in many gods. The Israelites were to serve no gods other than the only true God and were not permitted to make idols or other physical representations of him ([Exodus 20:1-6](#)).

To further assist in the religious reeducation of the people, God commanded Moses to construct a sanctuary, a national center of worship. That large, semiportable tent-complex came to be called the *tabernacle* ([Exodus 25:8, 9; 26:1](#)). Significantly, God did not miraculously provide the construction materials for the project. Instead, he called for an offering “from everyone whose heart prompts them to give” ([25:2](#)). That challenge takes us to the result.

I. Old Covenant Giving

([EXODUS 35:20-29](#))

The Old Testament passage of our lesson takes us into a whole-community assembly of the Israelites at Mount Sinai, with Moses in charge. He has just finished specifying in some detail the material needed for construction of the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the nature of the garments to be worn by priests ([Exodus 35:4-19](#)).

A. Willing Givers ([vv. 20-22a](#))

^{20, 21.} Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses’ presence, and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the tent of meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments.

These two verses and the next set the tone for the remainder of the passage. Two points are particularly notable. First, all those who give do so willingly, as they are moved in their hearts. This theme is repeated several times to emphasize not only the personal commitment of individuals but also the spirit of national unity that emerges around the project ([Exodus 35:22, 29; 36:2, 3](#)).

Second, the people’s response addresses all areas of God’s instructions given through Moses regarding construction of the tabernacle proper (see [Exodus 36:8-38](#)), its furnishings (*for all its service*; see [37:1-38:8](#); etc.), and the priestly *sacred garments* (see [39:1-31](#)).

^{22a.} All who were willing, men and women alike, came

Another theme that runs throughout this passage is that contributors are not limited to a select group since *men and women alike* give (compare [1 Chronicles 29:1-9](#)). God’s call does not go out only to the wealthy but to everyone. The people respond as their hearts move them.

B. Valuable Gifts ([vv. 22b-28](#))

^{22b.} and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the LORD.

God has instructed that many of the fixtures and furnishings in the tabernacle are to be gold-plated, while the priestly garments are to be gold-embroidered and covered with precious gems (examples: [Exodus 25:11-13, 24-28, 38-40; 26:6; 28:11-28](#)). Such costly materials call attention to the majesty of God and symbolize the significance and the sacred privilege of worship.

What Do You Think?

How do we decide when “going first class” on church furnishings is worth the extra cost?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Considering beauty and functionality
- Considering life-cycle cost
- In handling designated gifts
- Considering interest on borrowing to do so
- Considering ministry opportunities lost by doing so

We may find it surprising that the Israelites, who had left Egypt as slaves, are able to provide the necessary gold and gems primarily through donations of personal jewelry. But God had made a way for the Israelites to give, even before they realized it would be necessary to do so. When God first appeared to Moses in the burning bush to announce delivery of the Israelites from slavery, he also promised to “make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave [Egypt] you will not go empty-handed” ([Exodus 3:21](#)). Just before the exodus, the Hebrew women were to ask the Egyptian women “for articles of silver and gold and for clothing,” with the result that the Hebrews would “plunder the Egyptians” by escaping with their personal goods ([Exodus 3:22](#)!)

These instructions were followed ([Exodus 11:2, 3; 12:35, 36](#)), and the Israelites left Egypt with a substantial amount of gold, silver, and precious gems. Now, having experienced God’s deliverance in crossing the Red Sea, the people realize that this plunder was not for their personal benefit, but for the good of the people as a whole. Thus they willingly contribute as God, through Moses, requests.

HEARTS MOVED

Bill and Melinda Gates, one of the wealthiest couples in the world, established the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2000. Through it the couple has given billions of their own dollars to, among other things, improve health and well-being in developing countries. The couple knows that not all of their projects will be successful. But they continue to try because they have a heart to “help all people live healthy, productive lives.”

To have a heart that is willing is where true giving begins, as today’s text makes clear. That willingness is founded in realizing that one is involved in something greater than self. Bill and Melinda Gates give so people have the best chance possible to live their best lives. The Israelites were generous in constructing something that would help everyone in their community lift eyes to God: the tabernacle.

What thing bigger than yourself motivates you to give? Perhaps you know of children whose only daily meal is provided in school. Perhaps you see homeless people living in deplorable conditions. People are often more receptive to the gospel when their physical needs are met. Not having the wealth of Bill and Melinda Gates is no excuse for not giving. See [Luke 21:1-4](#).

—S. K.

HOW TO SAY IT

acacia *uh-kay-shuh*.

ephod *ee-fod*.

Judea *Joo-dee-uh*.

Macedonia *Mass-ch-doe-nee-uh*.

onyx *ah-niks*.

Sinai *Sigh-nye* or *Sigh-nay-eye*.

tabernacle *tah-burr-nah-kul*.

Thummim *Thum-im* (*th* as in *thin*).

Urim *You-rim*.

^{23a.} Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen,

The word *everyone* stresses again the broad participation in the special offering. The precious fabrics mentioned here include various colors of cloth. Such fabrics are an expensive commodity in the ancient world, where all fabrics are hand-dyed (compare [Proverbs 31:22; Acts 16:14](#)). Dyes are produced from natural elements, usually shellfish harvested from the Mediterranean Sea.

Fine linen refers to a bright white, high-quality Egyptian cloth spun from flax fibers. Extant samples recovered from ancient Egyptian tombs are so finely woven that they resemble silk in appearance and texture. The *blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen* will be used to make the hanging curtains of the tabernacle ([Exodus 26:31, 32](#)), as well as the priestly garments ([39:1, 2](#)).

^{23b.} or goat hair, ram skins dyed red or the other durable leather brought them.

Use for the material we see here is found in [Exodus 26:14; 36:14, 19](#). *Ram skins dyed red* are created by tanning and dyeing, producing a look and texture similar to modern Moroccan leather.

^{24a.} Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze brought it as an offering to the LORD,

Many of the tabernacle’s fixtures are to be fashioned from *silver or bronze* ([Exodus 26:11, 19-21; 27:2, 3, 6, 10, 11, 17-19](#)). Such material is likely obtained by melting down jewelry and other household items that the Israelites acquired from the Egyptians.

^{24b.} and everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work brought it.

Acacia wood comes from a thorny tree common in the Sinai Peninsula. No doubt the Israelites harvest this locally. Acacia is an exceptionally durable building material, harder than oak and highly resistant to wood-boring insects. Perhaps for this reason, the wooden sections of the tabernacle itself and all its furnishings, including the altar and the ark of the covenant, are to be made of acacia wood (see [Exodus 25:10, 23, 28; 26:15-30, 32; 27:1, 6-8](#)).

²⁵. Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun—blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen.

Skilled refers to those who have the skill of weaving (see [Exodus 28:3](#)). The larger flow of the passage suggests that men, who work primarily outside the home and have oversight of flocks and fields, bring natural resources (lumber, skins, dyes) to their wives and daughters, who in turn work to produce the needed fabrics. The overall impression is that entire families are involved in responding to the call to give.

²⁶. And all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the goat hair.

The fabric mentioned here is doubtless obtained from the Hebrews' herds of long-haired goats. These produce a coarse, black cloth often used for making tents (such as the tabernacle will be).

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to serve God generously with your talents?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding talents that don't seem to have much spiritual applicability

When time is tight

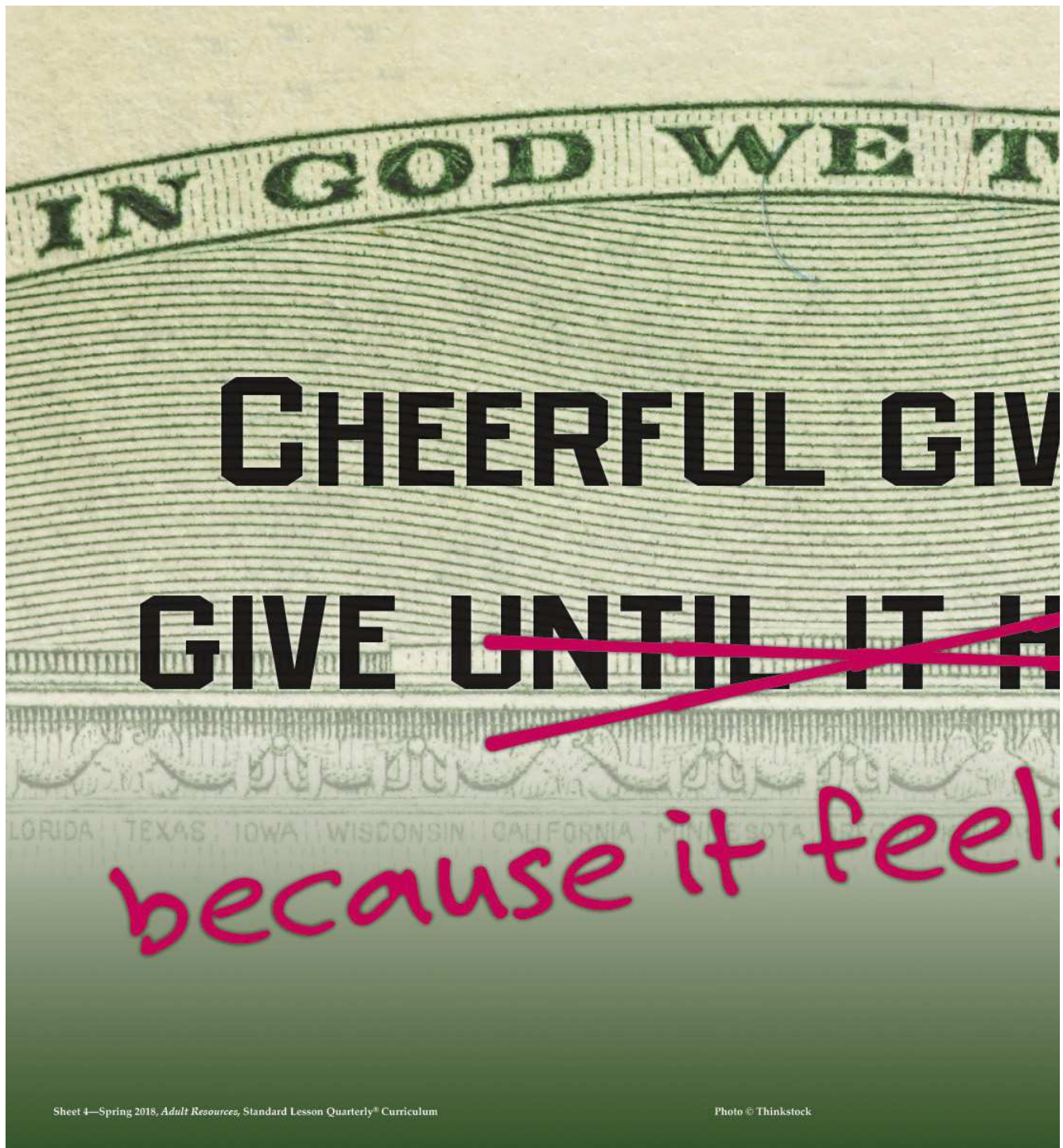
When your church isn't sure how to make use of your talents

Other

²⁷. The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

Not surprisingly, the leaders of the people, being generally wealthier, provide the more costly items that others might not easily obtain. *The ephod and breastpiece* are garments worn by the high priest during his service in the tabernacle. The ephod is a large vest worn as an outer garment; *onyx stones* engraved with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel are attached to the shoulders of the vest to serve as a symbol of the people when the high priest appears before the Lord ([Exodus 25:7](#); [28:6-14](#)).

The breastpiece is a woven garment worn over the ephod and is also mounted with 12 precious stones in gold settings, one for each of the tribes. The breastpiece contains pockets that hold the Urim and Thummim, which are used to determine the Lord's will on serious matters ([Exodus 28:15-30](#)).



Visual for Lesson 10. Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, “Why are both of these sentiments biblically deficient?”

²⁸. They also brought spices and olive oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense.

Specific amounts and kinds of *spices* will be used along with *olive oil* to create *the anointing oil*. The recipe for preparing this is found in [Exodus 30:22-25](#); its use—and penalty for misuse—is specified in [30:26-33](#).

Olive oil for the light refers to this oil being used as fuel for the flame of the tabernacle’s lampstand ([Exodus 27:20, 21; 35:14; 39:37](#)). Burning of the *fragrant incense* will happen concurrently with tending to the lamps ([30:7](#)). As with the anointing oil, instructions for creating and using this incense are provided ([30:34-36](#)); the penalty for misuse is identically severe ([30:37, 38](#)). Doubtless God intends that this unique scent will communicate a special sense of his presence to the Israelites in their worship.

C. Obedient Givers (v. 29)

^{29a}. All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the LORD freewill offerings for all the work

This verse summarizes the persistent theme of the passage. First emphasized is the involvement of *all the Israelite men and women* in this undertaking. One senses that people at every social level contribute to ensure that God's house is completed as planned.

^{29b}. **the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do.**

Also noted is that the master plan for this tabernacle is not of human origin; it has been *commanded by the Lord*, to be supervised by *Moses*. That leader will eventually inspect the finished effort and bless the people for having done as the Lord commanded ([Exodus 39:43](#)).

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to remind ourselves that all good things come from God?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding helpful Scriptures to memorize
- Considering prayer patterns that should change
- Considering how doing so serves as a witness

II. New Covenant Giving

(2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8)

About 15 centuries pass as we reach the New Testament passage of today's lesson. The apostle Paul is on his third missionary journey as he pauses to write to his beloved Corinthians. As today's text opens, he has just reported on the generous financial gifts that the churches of Macedonia have sent to help meet the needs of Christians in Judea/Jerusalem who are suffering severely ([2 Corinthians 8:1-15](#)).

Assuming that the Corinthians will follow suit, Paul plans to send several of his associates to collect their contributions to this worthy cause ([2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5](#)).

A. Law of the Harvest (v. 6)

⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

Paul uses a commonsense principle from the world of agriculture to illustrate a spiritual truth. The person who *sows* few seeds will get little yield, whereas those who invest more aggressively will gain a larger and more profitable harvest. Applied to the situation at hand, those who give *generously* to help others in need will receive a larger reward than those who give less.

This verse is not promising that those who give to others will necessarily receive a financial bonus in return; Paul's own experiences, which he recounts in some detail in [2 Corinthians 11 and 12](#), prove that God does not operate that way. There's a fine line to walk here. We must not doubt that our giving will be rewarded, but we must not give with the attitude that God "owes" us something as we tap our foot impatiently waiting for the blessing to show up.

SOWING FOR HOPE

Born to a teenage mother and living in the worst parts of town, basketball superstar LeBron James is grateful for his great fortune. So he is giving back. Drafted into the NBA right out of high school in 2003, LeBron founded the LeBron James Family Foundation in 2004 to help single parents and their children who are in need.

The perennial all-star has also donated \$41 million to pay college tuition for 1,100 youth in Ohio. Those who enroll in his "I Promise" program at the University of Akron will be eligible to receive this scholarship. LeBron states that the young people are "the reason I do what I do. These students have big dreams, and I'm happy to do everything I can to help them get there."

LeBron notes that many African-American children can only dream of attending college because of the expense. The more LeBron earns, the more he gives to provide hope to many for a better life. He is sowing into lives generously and will reap generously the joy of helping improve lives.

It is often said that we get out what we put in. Athletes become superstars by constant practice. Great inventors spend countless hours creating new products. Great chefs suffer many failures on their way to prepare food as no one else does. Sowing involves risk. But so does failure to sow. See Jesus' parables about servants who were entrusted with resources ([Matthew 25:14-30](#); [Luke 19:11-27](#)).

—S. K.

B. Decision of the Giver (v. 7a)

^{7a}. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion,

Paul's counsel to potential givers echoes the attitude of the actual givers who supported the construction of the tabernacle. That giving was from those whose hearts were "willing" ([Exodus 35:22](#)), and Paul insists that true giving must come from the *heart*. To give from the heart is the opposite of giving *reluctantly* (example: "I'd rather keep the money, but I guess I'll give") or *under compulsion* (example: "It's my duty to give a certain percentage").

C. Love of God (v. 7b)

^{7b}. for God loves a cheerful giver.

This statement does not suggest that we earn God's love by giving, of course. It simply communicates that God is pleased when his people give out of a genuine desire to do so, rather than from a sense of obligation.

What Do You Think?

How do you make sure that your attitude about giving honors the Lord?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- During lean times

During bountiful times

D. Ability of God (v. 8)

8. 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.

This verse indirectly addresses the unspoken thought that often lies behind contemplated acts of generosity: “If I give away what I have, what will happen if I myself need it back someday?” Paul’s answer shows that the question is misguided. God owns everything, is concerned about all his people, and *abundantly* blesses those who follow him.

This being the case, we can be confident that he will always supply what we need. As Paul writes elsewhere, “My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” ([Philippians 4:19](#)). Our future need might even be met by those whose needs we meet now (see [2 Corinthians 8:13-15](#))!

What Do You Think?

How do these passages impact you?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding how they affirm your attitude and practice of giving

Regarding how they challenge or correct you

Conclusion

A. Common Factor

The challenges of Moses to the Israelites and of Paul to the Corinthians were for different reasons. The Israelites were challenged to give to construct a place of worship by which they, the givers, would benefit. The end result could be seen and touched as a physical reminder of God’s presence. By contrast, the Corinthians were challenged to give to meet the needs of people they had never seen and might never see.

Although the anticipated outcomes of the two giving plans were different, they shared a common factor: willingness—actual on the part of the Israelites; anticipated on the part of the Corinthians. When we find ourselves faced with an important and valid opportunity to give to meet a need, we should examine our attitude before we examine our bank account ([2 Corinthians 8:12](#)). A good place to start to test for a proper giving attitude is to recall the ultimate example of having a willingness to give: Jesus. “Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” ([8:9](#)).

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, sometimes it’s hard to let go of what we have in order to help others. Teach us to trust you enough to give cheerfully. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who gave his all for us. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

A proper attitude about giving
trumps the size of the gift.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Divide students into small groups, giving each group a poster board and some markers. (If poster board is not available, paper will do.) Challenge groups to think of an outlandish, made-up charity organization and then design a fund-raising poster to promote it. Have them come up with a name for the organization, a catchy slogan, and some statistics or success stories that support their efforts.

If students need an example, you can mention “The Human Fund” from the TV series *Seinfeld* or “Support the Rabid” from the TV series *The Office*, etc.

Alternative. Distribute pens and copies of the “Really Real or Really Not?” from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually to determine which charities are “real” and which are “really not.”

After either activity say, “There are a lot of great organizations that would like our financial support as well as fake ones to avoid. We want to be good stewards in our generosity, but what principles help us express that generosity? The Bible gives us important insights about that.”

Into the Word

Bring to class a handful of beans and a pan of soil. (If you can’t bring these items, use coins to represent beans.) Give two volunteers an equal amount of beans. Ask one volunteer to plant three beans in the soil and keep the rest. Ask the other volunteer to plant all the beans he was given. Then ask, “How valuable are the beans that were left unplanted? Who will reap the bigger harvest based on what was sown? Who is better off in the long run?”

Read aloud [2 Corinthians 9:6-8](#). Discuss the principles for giving in this text. Frame the discussion in terms of how much to give, how to give, and why give.

Then read aloud [Exodus 35:20-29](#). Discuss how this incident reflects the principles Paul gave to the church in Corinth. Who gave, what did they give, and why?

Have students skim the text and name things that God’s people gave, including things other than money. Then give each student three index cards and a pen. Have students think about the gifts they have to offer. On one card have students write a gift they can give to God that involves TIME. On another card have them

write a gift that involves their TALENT or abilities. On the last card have them write a gift that involves money or other earthly TREASURE.

When students are finished, have them put the cards in order according to how happy they would be to give each gift. Challenge them to use the cards over the next three months and give each gift to God with a cheerful heart.

Alternative. Distribute pens and copies of the “Cheerful Givers?” activity from the reproducible page. Assign each character and text to a small group. Have each group read its text and answer the questions that follow.

Into Life

Make a transition by writing these two commands on the board:

Give until it hurts

Give because it feels good

Divide the class into two groups. Have one group name reasons to “give until it hurts”; have the other group name reasons to “give because it feels good.” After allowing a few minutes discussion, bring groups together to share their ideas.

Talk about whether or not it is possible to do both, or whether the concepts are contradictory. Finally, be prepared to tell, if no one else does, why neither is the best motive for giving from a biblical perspective (since both are based on feelings).