

August 12
Lesson 11 (NIV)

GIVING

JUSTLY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Proverbs 3:9, 10, 13-20, 27, 28

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 8, 9

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15

⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—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. ⁹ For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich.

¹⁰ And here is my judgment 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 one does not have.

¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, ¹⁵ as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”



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KEY VERSE

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.—2 Corinthians 8:9

LESSON AIMS

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

1. Identify the circumstances of the offering Paul anticipated receiving from the Corinthian church.
2. Explain how Paul's use of [Exodus 16:18](#) supports his argument regarding sharing through giving.
3. Perform an act of material kindness toward someone in the week ahead.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Robin Hood Justice
- B. Lesson Background

I. Excellent Giving (2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-9)

- A. Corinthians' Goal (vv. 7, 8)
The Giving Pledge
- B. Jesus' Example (v. 9)

II. Freewill Giving (2 CORINTHIANS 8:10, 11)

- A. Well Begun (v. 10)
- B. Get It Done (v. 11)

Follow-Through

III. Equitable Giving (2 CORINTHIANS 8:12-15)

- A. Willing and Able (v. 12)
- B. Relief and Burden (vv. 13-15)

Conclusion

- A. Their Examples
- B. Our Obligation
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Robin Hood Justice

The exploits of Robin Hood and his Merry Men in Sherwood Forest have long entertained imaginations. Numerous film versions have been made of the Robin Hood saga, including remakes of the story on an asteroid, among gangsters in Chicago, and in an animated version in which the hero is a talking fox.

Central to the Robin Hood legend is his role as a “social bandit” or “heroic outlaw,” as expressed in the description that he “robbed from the rich to give to the poor.” In Robin Hood’s world, the rich are wealthy because of severe taxation, exploitative labor practices, and/or downright dishonesty. The poor are hard-working and honest, but suffer poverty because of oppression from the rich.

Robin Hood is therefore a hero to the poor (for whom he provides money and goods) and a villain to the rich (from whom he steals). His thievery is justified because of the positive things he does with his stolen wealth.

With some allowance for motive (Proverbs 6:30, 31), the Bible never condones stealing, however. The eighth commandment, “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15), is applied consistently. The Scriptures also have harsh words for wealthy people who oppress the poor, which may be a form of stealing (Proverbs 22:16; Amos 5:11, 12; James 2:6, 7).

Is there a better way to correct economic inequity than to resort to Robin Hood’s methods? Is robbing the rich the only way to relieve the poor? Within the church, Paul teaches another way. It neither steals from the rich nor ignores the desperate plight of the poor. This is the subject of today’s lesson.

B. Lesson Background

The travels of the apostle Paul gave him bases of operation in several cities of the Roman Empire in the mid-first century AD. He was a native of the commercial hub of Tarsus and studied in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). He became a leader in the early Christian center of Antioch (11:25, 26). He founded churches in important Greek cities such as Philippi (16:11-40), Corinth (18:1-18), and Ephesus (19:1-41). He served as a bridge between the Greek/Gentile world and the Jewish world in the first-century church.

The latter was clearly evident in Paul’s role in the project we often refer to as the Jerusalem collection or the offering for the poor saints in Judea. Paul and Barnabas visited Jerusalem around AD 51 to help decide whether circumcision would be required of Gentile Christians (Acts 15:1-29; Galatians 2:1-10). They left the city assured that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised and with the responsibility to “remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10). This was more than just a request to be charitable. There seems to have been an expectation that Paul would be asking his network of churches to give money for the economic relief of suffering Christians in and around Jerusalem.

This relief project is mentioned several times in the New Testament. In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church (written about AD 56), Paul instructed the Corinthians to make weekly contributions to the fund so that it would be ready when he visited. They were also to select men who would accompany him in taking the offering to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

The collection of this gift provides the backdrop for Paul’s teachings on Christian stewardship that are found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians about a year after writing 1 Corinthians, thus around AD 57. This indicates that the Jerusalem relief project was a plan spread over several years, for Paul did not arrive in Jerusalem until AD 58.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-6, which immediately precedes today’s lesson text, Paul informed his readers of some details of this relief offering for the poor Christians of Judea. The offering from the Macedonian churches was complete, which likely includes the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (see Acts 16:12; 17:1, 13). The generous results of the collection effort encouraged Paul. Titus was coming to Corinth as Paul’s envoy to help the Corinthians complete their part of the relief mission (2 Corinthians 8:6).

HOW TO SAY IT

Antioch *An-tee-ock*.

Apollos *Uh-pahl-us*.

Berea *Buh-ree-uh*.

Caesarea *Sess-uh-ree-uh*.

Macedonian *Mass-eh-doe-nee-un*.

Philippi *Fih-lip-pie* or *Fil-ih-pie*.

Tarsus *Tar-sus*.

Thessalonica *Thess-uh-lo-nye-kuh* (*th* as in *thin*).

I. Excellent Giving

(2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-9)

A. Corinthians' Goal (vv. 7, 8)**7^a. But since you excel in everything—in faith,**

Paul commends the Corinthians for five specific qualities. To *excel . . . in faith* indicates they continue to be strong believers in spite of the various controversies within the church.

7^b. in speech, in knowledge,

To excel *in speech* refers to the quality and fidelity of the preaching and teaching ministry. Paul's commendation of the Corinthians' *knowledge* refers to their growth in doctrine as gained from Paul, Apollos, and others (compare [1 Corinthians 3:2, 6](#)). A connection between the two characteristics is easy to see since a person speaks what he or she knows (compare [1 Corinthians 1:5](#)).

7^c. in complete earnestness

Earnestness is a quality we may not tend to associate with the Corinthians as we read of their besetting problems. But Paul uses the same Greek word also in [2 Corinthians 7:11](#) to refer also to the church's earnestness. The picture is that of a congregation emerging from controversy and being stronger for it.

7^d. and in the love we have kindled in you—

The word *we* refers to Paul and Titus in this fifth of the five commendations. At times the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians has been strained (examples: [1 Corinthians 4:18-21](#); [2 Corinthians 1:23-2:5](#); [6:11-13](#); [10:10](#); [12:19-21](#)). Relationships can be repaired when there is an underlying foundation of love and respect for one another. When love is lacking, even small disagreements can be fanned into flames of church warfare.

7^e. see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Paul desires that along with the five qualities just noted the Corinthians should strive to *excel* in a sixth: the *grace of giving* for the relief of the suffering of others. The words *this grace* refer back to "this act of grace" in [2 Corinthians 8:6](#), which in turn refers to the giving program of [8:1-5](#).

Churches still need a multifaceted foundation to become most effective and generous in their grace of giving. This is especially true of giving for purposes outside the congregation's local needs. A church with a shaky foundation in the five qualities noted for Corinth may find it difficult to fund even the local monthly costs of building maintenance and staff salaries.

8. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

Paul is not issuing a command for the Corinthians to collect money for this offering. Christian giving should be a joy, not a duty; a privilege, not an obligation. Paul's point is that the Corinthians and other churches have agreed to support this project. To keep this promise is not a test of fellowship, but a demonstration of the *sincerity* of the Corinthians' *love*. The Greek word translated "earnestness" in the previous verse occurs again here, translated the same way. The *test* idea is reflected again in the concluding verse of this chapter.

THE GIVING PLEDGE

Noted businessman and investor Warren Buffett challenged his employees to predict the winners of the 2016 college basketball championship tournament. Any employee who guessed every correct pick in the first two rounds would win \$1 million a year—for life! No one accomplished that feat, but two employees split the consolation prize of \$100,000 for making the most correct picks in the first two rounds.

A few years earlier, Buffett had joined Bill and Melinda Gates in a more significant challenge: they called on the world's billionaires to give more than half their wealth to philanthropic causes. As of June 2016, 154 individuals or families from 16 countries had joined the Giving Pledge, as the agreement was called. The causes they support are wide-ranging, with urban renewal, global economic opportunities for women, environmental issues, and scientific advancement among others.

We may be tempted to think that billionaires like them can afford to give all that money, but not us—we're too strapped to give very much money away. Would the apostle Paul be impressed with that line of thinking? The benevolent cause to which he refers involved unwealthy Christians whose hearts were touched by the needs of Christians who were even worse off than they were ([2 Corinthians 8:1-4](#)). This situation challenges us continually, does it not?

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

How do you avoid basing your giving on unscriptural principles?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding a partial or unbalanced consideration of biblical giving principles

Regarding secular "feel good" motives

Other

B. Jesus' Example (v. 9)**9. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich.**

Paul sometimes points to himself as an example ([1 Corinthians 11:1](#); [Philippians 3:17](#)), but not here. Christ's willingness to leave his heavenly home and come to earth to live among men and women was an act of great humility ([Philippians 2:6-8](#)). Paul does not see Christ's sacrifice as being limited to the cross. It began with his becoming human, the Word of God taking on flesh ([John 1:14](#)). Jesus was born to a simple peasant couple and grew up in an obscure Galilean town. His was never a life of luxury ([Luke 9:58](#)).

This creates a great and wonderful paradox for Paul. Christ's humility and *poverty* make his followers spiritually *rich*. With Christ taking human form and dying for human sins, those who have accepted him have become sons and daughters of God, and fellow heirs with Christ ([Romans 8:17](#); [Titus 3:7](#)). Paul sees that true

wealth is found in the blessings of grace and salvation that God has provided for us in Christ ([Ephesians 1:7; 2:7](#)).

What Do You Think?

How does your giving to Christian causes and organizations differ from your giving to secular causes? How should it?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In times of immediate crisis
- In terms of motive
- In terms of delayed giving via pledges
- Other

II. Freewill Giving

([2 CORINTHIANS 8:10, 11](#))

A. Well Begun (v. 10)

¹⁰. And here is my judgment 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.

The reminder to the Corinthians of their spiritual wealth leads Paul to give them his *judgment* concerning what they should do to finish the offering for those in need in the Jerusalem church. Paul begins this by reminding them that of the initiative they took *last year*, both in giving and in having *the desire to do so*. Should they now leave this project half finished?

B. Get It Done (v. 11)

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.

Churches and other Christian organizations often launch building campaigns or other projects in which financial pledges are received for future giving. Sometimes a project lingers without being completed for several months or even years. These projects are good endeavors, but they can become discouraging if not completed.

Rather than push the Corinthians for a specific amount, Paul tells them to do their best to collect what they can and move on. Remember: giving should be motivated by love, not guilt.

What Do You Think?

How do you stay motivated to keep giving?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- When finances are tight
- When tempted to divert a regular offering to buy a luxury item
- Other

FOLLOW-THROUGH

Follow-through is stressed by coaches in many sports. Good coaches know that the most effective motion is one that doesn't stop when the bat or club strikes the ball or when objects leave the hand.

Follow-through counts in other areas of life also. A prime example is how well children do in school. The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research reports that three factors affect success in school. The first is a student's belief that hard work can bring improvement. Second, a student must have confidence that he or she belongs in school and can thrive in that setting.

Finally, the student must believe that what one does in school is valuable and relevant to life. Educators have found that students who don't have these attitudes aren't likely to succeed. In other words, these values help the student to "follow through" when school is difficult.

Paul's counsel for his readers to follow through and make good their commitments is his counsel to us as well. Satan will try to defeat efforts to follow through (compare [Nehemiah 4:6-11](#)). But follow-through is too vital to let him win.

—C. R. B.

III. Equitable Giving

([2 CORINTHIANS 8:12-15](#))

A. Willing and Able (v. 12)

¹². For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

Two elements must be present for money to be given: (1) there must be willingness to give and (2) there must be ability to give. If a person is willing to give but not able, then no giving occurs. If a person is able to give but not willing, then no giving occurs.

Both elements of willingness and ability have been addressed in [verse 11](#), but Paul senses that more needs to be said about ability. Assuming that *a willing mind* desires to give, that *willingness* results in the acceptability of a contribution that comes from available resources (compare [Mark 12:43, 44](#)). There is no guilt trip here (compare [2 Corinthians 9:7](#)). No potential giver is expected to think of what he "should" give, then make up any shortfall by borrowing money. The readers

are not expected to give money they don't have. While there is room for faith and growth in giving, it is irresponsible for church leaders to push people to give beyond their means.

B. Relief and Burden (vv. 13-15)

^{13a}. **Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed,**

Paul also wants the Corinthians to know that no recipient of the gift will end up living a life of ease due to this offering. This is a matter of helping supply others' needs, not aiding them in becoming wealthy.

Likewise today, it is improper to ask church members to give to support extravagant lifestyles for their leaders. The televangelist scandals of decades past still stand as somber reminders of the dangers in this area.

^{13b, 14}. **but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality,**

The two instances of the word *equality*, are easy to misinterpret, and we must ask the question, "Equality in terms of what?" As always, it is context that determines: Paul is discussing how churches are to handle issues of dire need.

The equality he pushes for is equality in terms of meeting basic subsistence needs. People in one area may be experiencing a good economy, a bountiful harvest, etc., while people in another location live near the starvation level because of drought, war, etc. Such disparity may be regional, as it is in this situation between churches in Greece and churches in the Jerusalem area. When such a need and a corresponding abundance are known, the needy can be helped.

Should this situation be reversed in subsequent years, the helpers may become the helped. The Corinthians who offer help now may be the ones in need later. We must be ready both to give and to receive, depending on the need. Relief offerings can be one-time projects, such as the one with which Paul and the Corinthians are involved. There can also be ongoing efforts by congregations to support food banks and clothing closets for the needy. All in all, we should not understand Paul to be calling for exact equality of wealth, resulting in neither wealthy nor poor people in the church.

What Do You Think?

How would you deal with the challenges of depending on someone else's generosity?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- When making your need known
- In receiving the gift
- In maintaining the relationship
- Other

¹⁵. **as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."**

Paul concludes this section by quoting [Exodus 16:18](#), a verse drawn from the wilderness experience of the nation of Israel. The lesson the verse gives is related to the miraculous provision of manna for the people of Israel.

[Exodus 16](#) shows that there were many rules associated with the manna. There was no value in gathering extra to save, for it would spoil. The exception was gathering an extra amount on the day before the Sabbath. No one was allowed to hoard a surplus. When all was gathered, everyone had just enough.

Paul challenges his readers then and now to learn from Israel's example. Just as the Israelites had to exercise faith in God in their gathering of manna, so it is when we give offerings for the poor. Many of us do not have substantial reserves of money. We give and have faith that God will provide for our future needs.

What Do You Think?

How do you establish the dividing line between unbiblical hoarding and reasonable savings for future needs?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding short-term emergency or "rainy day" savings
- Regarding long-term retirement savings or investing

Conclusion

A. Their Examples

Frank Houghton (1894-1972) was a missionary in China. During the persecution of Christians there in the 1930s, he wrote a beautiful Christmas song titled "Thou Who Wast Rich Beyond All Splendor" to encourage his fellow missionaries. Its two opening lines are drawn directly from our lesson's key verse, [2 Corinthians 8:9](#). Houghton and his fellow missionaries had given up much to preach the gospel to the Chinese, but he reminded them that the example of Christ surpassed by far anything they could ever have done.

Houghton is just one example of a long line of individuals who gave up much for the sake of Christ. This line stretches all the way back to the New Testament, beginning with Peter, who had a fishing business ([Matthew 19:27](#)). Paul himself was a highly educated rabbi who came from a family wealthy enough to send him from Tarsus to Jerusalem for schooling ([Acts 22:3](#)). Yet he adopted the vocation of an itinerant missionary who had to live hand to mouth at times ([Philippians 4:12](#)). The examples they set for giving includes martyrdom by some.

B. Our Obligation

Churches and individual Christians should help relieve suffering for two reasons. First, it's a biblical requirement to do so ([1 John 3:17](#); etc.). In the Old Testament, assistance to the needy was seen as reflecting God's compassion toward them ([Psalm 140:12](#); [Jeremiah 22:16](#)). For his people to go through the actions of worship while ignoring the genuine needs of destitute people around them made their worship a sham and an insult to God ([Isaiah 1:10-17](#)).



Sheet 2—Summer 2018, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Visual for Lesson 11. *Pass this poster around class and invite learners to write on it their responses to the question it poses. Discuss results.*

Second, and less obvious, the giving of aid can help free the giver of selfishness, greed, and prejudice against those in need. And we probably have more of a fortune than we think, from which we can give. Consider this conclusion by Pew Research Center, published July 9, 2015:

The U.S. stands head and shoulders above the rest of the world [in terms of income]. More than half (56%) of Americans were high income by the global standard. . . . Another 32% were upper-middle income. In other words, almost nine-in-ten Americans had a standard of living that was above the global middle-income standard.

Most of us *do* have extra dollars; it just takes planning and sacrifice to free them up. It might be as simple as one less cup of coffee a week or as complicated as downsizing a home to make cash available. But the first question is, do we care?

C. Prayer

Heavenly Father, may we look for opportunities to share with those in need of the bounty you have entrusted to us. May we be people who love others as you would have us to love them. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Measure generosity as God does.

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

Write this statement on the board: “Unless we share our wealth, we will share their poverty.” Ask, “In what ways can this statement come true for a church or for individual Christians who are aware of others in dire need but do nothing to help?”

Jot responses on the board. Try to keep the discussion from becoming political with regard to what governments should do; keep it focused on the church. Anticipate that your more astute learners will voice the issue of spiritual poverty that results from and/or in failure to help relieve a known physical need.

Say, “In [Matthew 26:11](#), Jesus told his disciples that the poor would always be with them. But he did not intend that truth to be used as an excuse to do nothing. Today’s lesson examines principles for responding to situations of dire need among fellow believers.”

Into the Word

Ask, “As you hear the lesson text read, be alert for differences between Christian and secular philosophies and methods of crisis response.” Read [2 Corinthians 8:7-15](#) to the class, then call for reflections on those differences (expected responses, stated in terms of the Christian system’s superiority, may include grounding in love for Christ and his church; eternal significance; connection with sharing the gospel; reasonable expectations [no guilt trip]; future reciprocity; fulfillment of God’s promise to supply needs).

Jot all responses on the board. Work through them individually, asking for the respondent to clarify where necessary.

Alternative. Form learners into groups and distribute copies of the “Mission: Money” tour map activity from the reproducible page, which can be downloaded. Say, “While Paul was evangelizing areas of Asia and Europe, he was also helping desperately poor Christians.” Instruct groups to follow the instructions on the map, tracing Paul’s mission and following the money. After groups reconvene for whole-class discussion, ask students to ponder out loud the scope of one man’s response to one area’s need. (*Option.* On a world map, make your own “Mission: Money” map, drawing lines from your church to places you’ve sent assistance; discuss.)

Into Life

Write on the board the following statement from the commentary in two lines:

*Christ’s humility and poverty
make his followers spiritually rich.*

Form students into small groups to discuss the following questions (write the questions on the board). *Option.* Distribute to the small groups handouts on which you have reproduced both the statement above and the questions below.

- 1—How is the first line related to the second line?
- 2—What is the relationship between spiritual riches and willing generosity?

After 10 minutes, have groups share conclusions in whole-class discussion. Brainstorm ways for spiritual riches to result in one act of intentional generosity as a class and/or as individuals in the week ahead.

Option or Alternative. Give each student a copy of the “Case Studies” activity from the reproducible page. Begin by naming a few benevolence ministries of your church, such as food pantry, Operation Christmas Child, Compassion International, and/or IDES disaster relief. Allow one minute for each student to write a similar case study; they should not put their names on them. Collect the stories, shuffle, and redistribute so students can read case studies that are not their own. As time permits, ask volunteers to read aloud. Conclude with the prayer on page 431.