

From 2 Corinthians 8 we learned that it is important for Christians to be generous. To be clear, I'm not talking about church offering in particular. The point is that Christians should identify other Christians in need and should help each other out, because we are all in this together. Since the Bible makes it pretty clear that many who walk with Jesus will suffer in this world, we are called to identify and help alleviate financial needs of our brothers and sisters with the riches God bestowed upon us. The message is clear, but it is difficult to put into practice. We work hard to earn money. Our bank accounts are like buckets, which we fill by working. But at the same time our expenses are like holes in the bucket. Many of us work in jobs we don't like just in order to keep our buckets from becoming empty. Being generous is like adding another hole to the bottom of our bucket. When we are working so hard to fill it, it is so hard to give.

In chapter 9, Paul speaks about this struggle, and the attitude we should have towards giving. In vv. 1-7 Paul says that it is most important to give with an attitude of joy. In these verses, Paul once again gives the backstory behind his exhortation to the Corinthians. When Paul told them about the dire need of the church in Jerusalem, they were the first to express eagerness to give, so much so that the Macedonians were stirred to give abundantly, even beyond their ability. However, some time has passed. The Macedonians have already given generously, but the Corinthians have yet to act upon their commitment. Paul is going to visit them, and some Macedonians may come with him. If they find that the Corinthians have not given anything yet, the Corinthians will undoubtedly give, but out of shame, obligation, and embarrassment. Paul doesn't want them to give reluctantly or out of compulsion. He says in v. 7 that we should give freely out of joy. So he sends this letter along with some brothers to visit the Corinthians some time in advance to prepare their gift. But what's the difference between giving now and giving when Paul comes? How is it not out of compulsion if these brothers visit first? The key is that they come *in advance* so that the Corinthians have time to prepare their hearts to give with joy. They have time to pray to God and ask for a generous heart so that when they give, they will not be reluctant but joyful. We should not give out of guilt or compulsion. We should not give just to get a tax deduction. We should not be like Ananias and Sapphira, who gave in order to make themselves look good (Acts 5). When we give, we should check our hearts. Every time I place a

check in the offering box, I tell God that it is to honor and worship Him, a gift to my God and King.

In vv. 8-11, Paul acknowledges the difficulty of giving. He knew that it can be a struggle to add another hole in our bucket when we already are hemorrhaging cash on living expenses. Many of us struggle just to keep expenditures lower than our income. Why is it so difficult to let go of money? In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller explains that money is just a surface idol, which conceals deeper idols. The love of money is not for its own sake, but for security and control of one's own life, for social advancement and prestige, or for power over other people. Each of us has different reasons for being reluctant to give. Paul knows why it's so hard to give, yet he says here that if we give God will supply us abundantly so that we may give even more. God is not stingy, but generous. And through His generosity, we are able to be generous. But it is hard to believe because we know putting a hole in our bucket will decrease the water level, not increase it. Therefore giving is an act of faith in God. There is no guarantee that whatever quantity we give, God will give us back with interest. We must trust that if we give even more, God will still provide for us both spiritually and physically, not so we can enjoy more, but so we can give even more and with even more joy. This is not an investment. God gives more to us so that we give to others.

Finally, in vv. 11-15 we see that the result of being generous is thanksgiving to God, praise to God, and prayers to God. When we give generously eyes are turned towards God because of His generosity. Praise goes to Him, not to us. He enables and motivates us to give. So let us look for those in need and meet those needs with joy, because 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.