



## Small Group Leader Guide

### 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 | What Jesus said about...the poor

#### Prepare: Things to do before your small group gets together

- **Reflect** upon your standard of wealth. What factors contribute or detract from your financial wealth? What constitutes being wealthy or being poor? How significant is your financial worth to your peace of mind or sense of well-being?
- **Pray** and spend time with God letting him examine you. **Thank** God for his provisions to meet your daily needs. **Express** your gratitude for His provision that meet your eternal needs. **Invite** God to speak in to your life to show you how you can assess your true worth correctly and relate appropriately to your financial worth.
- **Read** 2 Corinthians 8:1-12 **Notice** the themes on poverty, wealth, generosity. Submit your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to use you to be a teacher of influence for each person in your group, for the glory and cause of Jesus. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

#### To The Point – What to impart to your small group

**Key Verse:** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9, ESV)"

**Objectives:** Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

**Discover** God's standards of poverty and wealth, and God's intent for your use of financial resources.

**Discuss** God's economy and how you fit into it.

**Apply** God's command for generosity to address poverty.

#### **Biblical Background - Insight and commentary to assist your preparation**

The apostle Paul's relationship with the church in Corinth could be described as "rocky." His initial year-and-a-half stay from Spring AD 50 to fall 51 is detailed in Acts 18, as is his departure and subsequent replacement by Apollos. As Paul ministered in Ephesus for the three years beginning in AD 52, he wrote instructive letters to the Corinthian church. 1 Corinthians 5:9 suggests his first letter was lost which would make 1 Corinthians his second letter, written in

response to reports by Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11) and the ministry team of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17) of additional problems.

Paul visited for a second time in 54, a "painful visit" that was impinged by an immoral man who was likely spreading doubts through the fellowship of Paul's authority as a church leader (2 Cor. 2:1,5-11; 7:12). Paul returned to Ephesus, where he apparently wrote a scathing letter (2:7:8), carried by Titus.

After a reunion with Titus in Macedonia in 55, Paul learned that the Corinthian church was improving. From Macedonia, Paul wrote the letter now regarded as 2 Corinthians, most likely in fall 55. Paul made a third visit to Corinth that winter (see Acts 20:3, in relation to 2 Corinthians 12:14).

2 Corinthians devotes a large portion to the defense of Paul's apostolic authority, since it was apparently in question. However, in chapter 8, the tone and attention shifts, having settled the matter of Paul's authority to provide leadership and direction to this struggling church. In chapter 8, Paul resumes instruction based on the authority he has re-established, and encourages the church in Corinth to give to the poor in Jerusalem. In the first seven verses, he illustrates the example of the Macedonians (particularly the Philippians).

Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to give, regardless of the tension that may have existed between them, because the need was great. He encouraged the church with a three-dimensional appeal. That encouragement still speaks to the church today, for the need is great and the opportunities are present.

Note: Some scholars argue that "the painful letter" mentioned in 2 Corinthians is either 1 Corinthians or is text mentioned in 2 Corinthians 10-13. These are compelling arguments, although internal evidence for both theories are problematic and suggest otherwise.

## Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience

### Conversation Starter: Relative Wealth

**Say** Consider for a moment how much money you (or your household) earns in a given year. Some of you know you are "comfortable," while some of you may be living paycheck-to-paycheck, while others of you may be upside down (or spending more than you're earning). And whenever we start talking about money, people get uncomfortable, especially when we talk about it around a small group.

**Ask** Without revealing how much you make in a year, let's take a poll. For the sake of this poll, we will go with the assumption that at least for the next couple of minutes, we all make the same amount of money (annually). So, as I give the various scenarios, you raise your hand where you think our "shared salary" fits in globally. I'll share the answers at the end of our survey

- First, let's say each of our households makes \$1 Million annually. How many of you would humbly agree this is wealthy? (*allow people to raise hands*). Raise your hand if you think this puts you
  - in the top 10% of global wealth (*allow people to raise hands*)....
  - Top 1% (*allow responses*)
  - or Top 1/10 of 1% (*allow responses*).
- Maybe we can't all imagine what it's like to make \$1 million annually. So let's downward adjust our family income to \$100,000. Now, raise your hand if you think this puts you
  - in the top 10% of global wealth (*allow people to raise hands*)....

- Top 1% (*allow responses*),
- or Top 1/10 of 1% (*allow responses*).
- Okay, perhaps that's still a little more than we're comfortable saying. Now, our household income is \$20,000 per year. Now, raise your hand if you think this puts you
  - in the top 10% of global wealth (*allow people to raise hands*)....
  - Top 1% (*allow responses*),
  - or Top 1/10 of 1% (*allow responses*).

**Say** According to the website [globalrichlist.com](http://globalrichlist.com),

- a \$1 million annual salary puts you not in the top 1/10th of 1 percent of wealth, but in the top 1 percent of the top 1 percent. There are fewer than 600,000 wealthier than you, and more than 6 billion people poorer than you.
- a \$100,000 annual salary put you in the top 8 percent of the top 1 percent of global wealth. While there are more than 5 million people wealthier than you, there are still more than 6 billion people poorer than you!
- a \$20,000 annual salary puts you in the top 3.65% of global wealth. There are 219 million people wealthier than you, but there are 6 billion people poorer than you!

Here is a little more data to consider:

- The United States spends more than \$1 trillion a year to fight poverty in the United States
- The Domestic poverty rate in 2012 (the most current data available) shows that 16 percent of the United States population lives below the poverty line, and more than 20% of children.
- The poverty line is determined at \$11,570 +4,060 for each person more than 1 in a family, e.g., a family of four earning less than \$23,850 is living below the poverty line.

**Ask** What data here surprises you most? Why?

*Allow participants to respond.*

**Say** In our time together, we are continuing our conversation on what Jesus said about the poor. We are going to look at an encouraging example to the response of addressing poverty, striving toward the Christian ideal of generosity, and the practical approach to generosity...all to address the needs of the poor. In doing so, may we be Christlike in our efforts and bring him glory in the process.

**Open** in prayer for your time together.

### The Macedonian Example (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

What stands out to you in this passage?

*Allow the group to respond. Among the many possible observations that may be noticed:*

- *Paul begins with a report of the news of the Macedonian Christians, and frames it as an account of the grace of God exhibited through them.*
- *Paul explains the great report of their generosity is given in the context of their facing great affliction. The result is great joy amidst great poverty, demonstrated through great generosity toward the Jerusalem poor.*
- *Paul did not focus on the quantity of their gift, but on the quality of it.*

- *They gave according to their means and beyond their means.*
- *They committed themselves first to the Lord, and then to others.*

What does it mean to you that they gave according to their means and beyond their means?

*Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:*

- *Giving "according to their means" means that they gave from what they had. They did not take on debt to give to the offering.*
- *They took stock of what they had, even amidst their poverty, to determine what they could sacrifice to address the poverty of others.*
- *Giving "beyond their means" means that they indeed gave sacrificially. They gave liberally from their resources, not just "what they could afford without missing it." Their gift did in fact come at a cost to them.*

What does it mean to commit yourself first to the Lord and then to others? Why does that make a difference in addressing the needs of the poor?

*Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:*

- *Committing yourself first to the Lord is primarily an act of worship. It is orienting yourself correctly to God. It is recognizing that He is sovereign, and that He alone is your provider. It is an act of worship to trust Him with your own needs, to express gratitude for your own provisions from which you are able to share.*
- *Committing yourself to the Lord is determining to participate in His work on earth. It means to be a partaker in His suffering for His glory's sake. It means being available to serve Him as He leads you.*
- *Committing yourself to others means to move from the theoretical to the real. It means to committing to be used by God to be the tangible blessing to others.*

How have you seen such a commitment (first to God and then to others) and giving according to and beyond your means bring about a similar great report of joy and blessing in your own life?

*Allow the group to share their experiences.*

### **Applying the Macedonian Example (2 Corinthians 8:6-8)**

Paul moves from the Macedonians' inspiring example to exhort the Corinthians to follow. What are the five areas where the Corinthians excel and what do you think these mean?

*Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:*

- *Faith - The Spirit-born substance of their belief, rooted in Jesus Christ, and their expectant hope in Him.*
- *Speech - their ability to communicate and convey the Gospel and ministry of Jesus Christ.*
- *Knowledge - their understanding of the correct doctrines of the faith.*
- *Eagerness - their willingness to participate in the work of God and the ministry to the world.*
- *Love - the incarnational benevolence toward others.*

Is it possible to excel in these five areas and still not be generous to the poor? Why or why not?

*Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:*

- *It may be impossible to excel in these if you are not excelling in generosity. Can you*

*really be excelling in any of these if it does not translate to a persevering effort to relieve the suffering of others and to address others' poverty?*

- It may be stated (as it is here) that you can excel in these, but a determination to apply them to meeting the needs of others is still required.*
- It may be necessary to excel in these as the means by which generosity is enacted to meet the needs of others (to wit, if one is weak in faith, or knowledge, or love, it is unlikely that they would be compelled to address the poverty around them)*

Why is verse 8 significant?

*Verse 8 is significant because Paul was not commanding them to be generous. Though he had Apostolic authority to do so, issuing such a command and eliciting a response to it could have done so devoid of love and been completely unlike the Macedonian example as a result. Instead, Paul was exemplifying the Macedonians and inspiring the Corinthians to emulate the selfless, sacrificial example. He was appealing to their highest ideals rather than manipulating by power or authority.*

### **The Christian ideal of Generosity (2 Corinthians 8:9)**

What is so powerful about the restatement of the Gospel here, with Paul's use of "divine economy" terminology?

*By framing the Gospel in this manner, Paul masterfully accomplishes multiple results:*

- He idealizes the stark wealth of Jesus relative to the abject spiritual poverty of man. He shows that Jesus literally divested Himself of all His heavenly wealth to dwell upon earth as man among men, allowing Himself to be killed by His creation. He showed the moral bankruptcy of man in his willingness to rebel against the loving benevolence of God to the point of murder.*
- He puts the opportunity to be generous in perspective. In one sense he shows how much "smaller of an opportunity" this is, relative to the generosity of Jesus in assuming the poverty of man, and therefore so much simpler to participate. Yet, at the same time, Paul shows that the opportunity is indeed significant and real because the poverty is indeed significant and real, and therefore the Corinthians have a unique, timely opportunity to emulate the ideal of Christ by their participation in selfless generosity.*

Do you think your generosity is affected by revisiting the generosity of Jesus, in relation to His giving up His wealth and taking on your poverty so you may be rich? If so, how?

*Allow the group to respond.*

### **Being Practically Generous (2 Corinthians 8:10-15)**

What principles do you see in this passage toward being consistently generous to address poverty?

*The following principles are detailed in this passage:*

- Remember your past participation (v. 10)*
- Remember your earlier good attitude (v. 10)*
- Keep participating...see it through to the end (v. 11)*
- Give according to your means (v. 11)*
- Keep a good attitude (v. 12)*

- You're not expected to give from what you do not have (v. 12)
- You're not expected to give to the degree of impoverishing yourself (v. 13)
- God provides your abundance specifically to meet others' needs (v. 14)
- Reciprocity is a Christian ideal (v. 14)
- God's purpose is sufficiency for all His children, and He uses you to accomplish it! (v. 15)

Which of these principles is most encouraging or inspiring to you? Why?

*Allow the group to respond.*

With these principles in mind, how will your generosity be practiced differently?

*Allow the group to respond. Among the many possible responses:*

- I can give more.
- I can give more consistently.
- I can have a better attitude in my giving.
- I can remember that giving is a reflection of what I have received.
- I don't have to give with a closed hand because God knows what I can afford to give.
- I can give with an open hand because God knows better than I do what I need to live.
- I can trust that my giving is an investment in the Kingdom, and I don't have to worry about not having enough money later.
- I can rejoice...have joy...in knowing that I'm participating in the work of God using me to meet the aim of sufficiency in this world!

### Jesus in Focus

Where in this study do you see Jesus: Christ-like practices, examples, principles?

*Among the many acceptable answers:*

- Verse 9 serves as the fulcrum of theoretical to practical, and Jesus is the ideal who makes it possible.
- Only by daily living in the realization of our wealth in Jesus as heirs to God through Him can we be liberally generous to others in need.
- We can realize that we are continually blessed with the richness of God's provision in His Holy Spirit who provides us with our daily needs of Himself.

What are some other Scriptures that come to mind or are relevant to this chapter's themes, teachings, or emphases?

*Among the many acceptable possibilities:*

- Phil. 2:5-11
- John 4:10-15
- Rev. 22:5, 17

What is one "take-away" for you from this chapter?

*Allow the group participants to respond.*

**Say** Your opportunity to be generous to meet the needs of the poor is ongoing. Through your regular tithes and offerings, through your participation in ministry to the underserved, through your faithful generosity. May we be inspired by the biblical examples, and may we inspire and encourage one another to persevere in selflessness, to the glory of Jesus!

**Let's close in prayer:**

**Invite** the group to pray for one another. **Pray** over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. Pray over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important. **Confirm** your plans for your next gathering!