

Warm-up Activity or Question

Choose one and pursue it as a group.

1. **Activity.** Hand a coin to everyone who does not have one with them. Then go around the room and for the year on the coin that the participant is holding, ask them to share with the group something from their life in that year that was memorable or significant in their life.
2. **Question.** Take a silent minute to recall the most generous thing anyone (other than Jesus) has done for you. Then we'll go around the group and ask you to describe how that made you feel. What impact did it have on your relationship with the giver? On the course of your life?

Can You Relate?

In this week's Scripture God calls us to heartfelt Christian giving - cheerfully given in response to God's goodness – and highlights the blessings of righteousness that flow from our faithful giving.

1. **We're all in.** Read aloud 2nd Cor 9:7-8 in a couple of translations, if you have them. The NLT reads: "*You must each decide....*" God leads by example with grace. In an unfathomable act of generosity, He gave the ultimate gift – and it is His gift that moves us to give. He doesn't want our money. **He wants our hearts. Everyone's.** Whether financially wealthy, average, or poor. Here are some key components of Christian giving. Let your Christian giving be given:
 - **Thoughtfully** (not flippantly determined). v.7a ("*decide*").
 - **From the heart** (taking account of God's grace in our lives). v.7a ("*in his heart*").
 - **Voluntarily** (not under compulsion/pressure; it's not a gift if it's mandatory). v.7b.
 - **Cheerfully** (to the delight of your heavenly Father). v.7b.
 - **Proportionally** (based on what you have and are receiving). 2nd Cor 8:12. Luke 3:11.
 - **Sacrificially** (the widow's mite; giving should impact your lifestyle). Luke 21:1-4.
 - Believing that **our needs are met by Him and not by our labors**. v.8a.
 - **For His glory** (not our own; it's not a gift if it's in exchange for recognition). Matt 6:1-4
 - Take a minute of silence – and think of each of those eight elements as applied to your own Christian giving – and identify ones where you are not doing well or have struggled the most. Which of these is illusive or challenging for you?
 - Then let's go around the group and invite anyone who is willing to share those struggles/challenges.¹
2. **Want to delight your Heavenly Father?** God's Word draws us to Himself. Verse 7b declares "*God loves a person who gives cheerfully*" (NLT).
 - Let's envision that verse. Close your eyes as one of you reads slowly: Envision a father in his yard. Working on a project. Surrounded by his children, each of whom are delighting in getting to help with the father's work. Listen for their gleeful banter. Now look at the father's face, as he enjoys with loving delight the sight of his children locking arms with him in the work that he is doing.
 - Can you connect with the love of God in that image of Fatherly joy in the delight of His children joining with Him in the work that He is doing?
 - **As a parent:** have you experienced that with your children? Please share.
 - **As a child:** do you have any recollection that you can share with the group of cheerfully joining in the labors of your parents?
 - What would be your advice to a young college grad who's joining our church on how to get to cheerfulness in Christian giving?

3. **A Harvest of Righteousness.** In verses 10-15, Paul describes the “*harvest of righteousness*” (NIV) that flows from Christian giving. Read those verses aloud. Let’s talk through the different ways that faithful Christian giving can lead to a harvest of righteousness:
- Cheerful Christian giving provides **evidence** to the giver of their changed heart.
 - It provides **conviction** of faith to the recipient in realizing the givers’ faithfulness.
 - It provides **encouragement** to the recipient that God is with them.
 - It produces expressions of **thanksgiving** to God by the recipient for the gift.
 - It can lead to **prayer** by the recipient in **gratitude** for the givers.
- What more would you add to that list?
4. **Giving By Grace.** Re-read verse 11. Paraphrased, we give not out of the fruit of our labors, but out of the gifts of God. And our needs are assured not by our labors or our clinging to money, but by God’s goodness. “Living by faith includes giving by grace.” (Chuck Swindoll)
- Discuss how you balance the duty to work (2nd Thess 3:10) with the call to rely on God and not our labors for our needs?
5. **Why?** There have been a flood of fabulous contemporary Christian songs in our lifetimes.
- Why are there none (or almost none) about Christian giving? Discuss your thoughts.
 - There was one a long time ago. *Thank You* by Ray Boltz was the 1990 Gospel Song of the Year. If you can play this for the group, here is a version with lyrics:
<https://youtu.be/zBXTwHS9xa0>
 - Decades of YouTube Comments indicate the resilient impact of these lyrics.
 - Which stories/experiences/relationships from your life come to mind as you hear the story told in this song?

Live It Out

Let’s take a moment and go around the group to identify what we want to take away from this discussion. Any quiet-time reflection required?

- SOAP quiet-time journaling is a great starting point for drawing closer to God. Consider pledging with someone in the group to do quiet time this week - and texting one another for support as you go through it.
- Try resolving to start each day pursuing the love of God in your Christian giving.
- **How?** This week, **before you get out of bed** (making God your first priority), pick up your phone or tablet and play *Thank you* by Ray Boltz. **Try closing your eyes as you listen.** Absorb the lyrics (“Each one somehow touched by your generosity”). Play them back in your head through the day. Report next time on how that went. Here is a moving, ancient rendition of that song before an audience back when it was comparatively new to them: <https://youtu.be/962RR-IEcOU> (look past the ancient hairstyles!).

Encourage members of the group to commit time to praying for one another, encouraging and meeting one another’s needs, fellowshiping together, and interceding for the other members. Contact absent group members and encourage them to continue to meet and to return together at the next scheduled gathering.

¹ Note to Facilitator: Be mindful. This question is about struggles, not successes. Steer folks away from revealing their own acts of sacrificial giving, lest they exchange their reward in heaven for recognition here on earth. s