

11. Stewardship and Mission (3Q 2026 1 and 2 Corinthians)

Biblical material: 2 Corinthians 8–9; John 3:16; John 17:5; Luke 9:58; Rev. 13:8; Rom. 12:8; Rom. 15:26, 27.

Quotes

- Let me remember your blessings—all of them and each single one of them—with great reverence and care so that henceforth I may return worthy thanks for them. I know that I am unable to give due thanks for even the least of your gifts. I am unworthy of the benefits you have given me, and when I consider your generosity my spirit faints away before its greatness. All that we have of soul and body, whatever we possess interiorly or exteriorly, by nature or by grace, are your gifts and they proclaim your goodness and mercy from which we have received all good things. *Thomas a Kempis*, prayer
- Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work and driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for—in order to get to the job you need to pay for the clothes and the car, and the house you leave vacant all day so you can afford to live in it. *Ellen Goodman*
- Out of the cross comes the resurrection. Out of weakness comes real strength. Out of repentance and admitting you are weak comes real power. Out of giving away and serving others comes real strength. Out of generosity and giving your money away comes real wealth. That's the gospel story line. *Tim Keller*
- If we are going to be kind, let it be out of simple generosity, not because we fear guilt or retribution. *J.M. Coetzee*
- Generosity is to materialism what kryptonite is to Superman. *Lloyd Shadrach*
- Do you not know that God entrusted you with that money (all above what buys necessities for your families) to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless; and, indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of all mankind? How can you, how dare you, defraud the Lord, by applying it to any other purpose? *John Wesley*
- We keep what we give away. *Tim Hiller*

Questions

What stops us from being generous? While we understand that the church organization needs money in order to operate, do we need to be continually reminded by studies on stewardship? What was the basis for Paul's call for help from the Corinthians? How do we reflect the character of God in our generosity? How does this illustrate God's dealings in the great controversy?

Bible summary

In 2 Corinthians 8–9 Paul talks about their previous generosity and encourages them to continue. John 3:16 speaks to God's giving of himself. John 17:5 is part of Jesus' prayer, asking his Father to glorify him in the Father's presence. Jesus points out that he has nowhere to lay his head in Luke 9:58. Revelation 13:8 speaks of everyone on earth worshiping the beast. In Romans 12:8 Paul says that if you're giving then you should give generously. He mentions the gifts from Macedonia and Achaia for the poor in Jerusalem in Romans 15:26, 27.

Comment

Paul now turns to matters of practical help for others. While we can see this as an issue of stewardship, Paul prefers to look at it as a question of generosity. This reflects more the attitude of liberality that comes from the thankful, grateful heart of a committed Christian.

The word "stewardship" can seem like an imposed duty, a defined requirement, rather than a wonderful opportunity to bless as you yourself have been blessed. So let's see Paul's words in this light. For what is of true value anyway?

If your treasure is in heaven, you are going to it; if your treasure is on earth, you are leaving it behind. As Jesus tells us, where your treasure is, that's where your heart is too...

The tragedy of placing your confidence in wealth and possessions is that they cannot save you. In the end, you discover that all the physical things we value are worthless. Instead of amassing wealth, we are to use our means while we can. The only real value in money is to bring benefit, especially to others. You cannot eat money, or clothe yourself with it, or live in it. Ultimately in and of itself money is worthless unless it is used. Sitting in a bank it does nothing. Only as it is exchanged for things of utility is it worthwhile. Yes, you may think it brings you security for the future. But nothing lasts, least of all your life. And like the miser Scrooge, what real benefit was there sitting there counting his money? Only as he used it for good did Scrooge gain true benefit.

This shows us a great deal about God and what is of real value in his universe. It is not in gold or silver, but in the currency of heaven: love, kindness, goodness, mercy, compassion, hospitality, and especially generosity—all of which have to do with valuing the other rather than yourself.

While we certainly need to be able to live, our blessing to others is in giving and sharing. It is not in keeping our means to ourselves. Why does God love a cheerful giver? Because it speaks about the giver—that the person is not self-centered, not primarily concerned about themselves, but wanting to share through giving so that others may benefit. In the same way that God gives above and beyond what we can ever imagine, we are share by giving—not simply to organizational causes, but to those we meet who need our help. The key is to recognize that we are to concern ourselves with the things of true value—about becoming rich toward God.

The rich young ruler was enthusiastic, but went away disappointed, for he did not understand the values of the Kingdom. Jesus' comment on how hard it is for the rich to enter amazed the disciples, who followed the usual philosophy that the rich must be specially blessed by God. Not so, said Jesus—in fact, quite the opposite, maybe. He inverted the whole value system, and concluded by affirming that the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

What God wants us to demonstrate is that we are not selfish people, concerned only about ourselves. He has no need of the money—everything is his anyway—but he knows how much we value our possessions. Of course this is tragic, since like the rich young ruler we can become preoccupied with what we think we have. But ultimately, what do we really have? A little time, some resources for a short period, and then life is over.

Can't we afford to be generous?

Ellen White Comments

Christ read his heart, and in His teaching He dwelt upon the principles of benevolence that strike at the very root of covetousness. He presented before Judas the heinous character of greed, and many a time the disciple realized that his character had been portrayed and his sin pointed out. But he did not confess and forsake his unrighteousness. He was self-sufficient, and instead of resisting temptation he continued to follow his fraudulent practices. . . . {CTr 264}

Wealth is obtained by every species of robbery—not robbery of people alone but of God. People are using His means to gratify their selfishness. Everything that they can grasp is made to minister to their greed. Avarice and sensuality prevail. . . . {CTr 349}

We are to be faithful, trustworthy subjects of the kingdom of Christ, that those who are worldly wise may have a true representation of the riches, the goodness, the mercy, the tenderness, and the courtesy of the citizens of the kingdom of God. {RH, October 24, 1907 par. 11}

Trustworthiness in your place and calling, a willingness to deny self for the purpose of benefiting others, will bring peace of mind and the favor of God. {4T 353}

All along the path we travel we are to leave waymarks of the love of Christ. This love, acted out in the life, always brings a response. It causes offerings of gratitude to be brought to God by those who appreciate his goodness. {RH, November 24, 1910}

True Christian benevolence springs from the principle of grateful love. {SD 264}