Scheduled for study Sept. 16-22, 2019. God loves a cheerful giver. How happy are we in our service to others? Do we do it kicking and resisting all the way, or do we run to it with joy? What does it take to learn to be happy in service?

Day 1

2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:5-15 - I can cheerfully share what I have to bless the poor and needy.

Record your impressions in your journal or notebook. You might write in a study journal, make notes in the margins of your scripture, add notes in your Gospel Library app, or make an audio recording of your thoughts.

I would like to loosely paraphrase what Paul is saying to the Saints in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. This is how I read these verses. I am including information I found in the footnotes as well.

> Brethren, we wish to declare to you the grace of God given to your fellow Saints in Macedonia; how in the great trial of their deep poverty they obtained abundant joy through the generosity of their sincerity. In their poverty we did not ask anything of them, but they begged us with much entreaty to accept their donations or gifts for other Saints. They gave themselves to Christ, and through his grace they found the power to go beyond themselves in the service of others. We hope to see that you also love the Lord enough to "prove the sincerity of your love."
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> You know that Christ, though rich, possessing all things, made himself poor that others might, by listening to him, become rich in the things of eternity. When you give to others do not give beyond your ability to afford the gift. The Lord accepts the gifts given by a

willing mind. When all give according to their desires and abilities there is sufficient for all, and all become equally prosperous.

Using this loose paraphrase of Paul's comments to the Saints in Corinth, I would like to take a side step and relate a personal experience. For a number of years I was not just poor, but destitute. I learned a number of interesting lessons about what it is like to be poor beyond reckoning.

When you have nothing, and mean literally nothing in the way of income, it becomes possible to feel free from all the cares of the financial world. After all you have nothing to give, so many of the decisions required of anyone with any income disappear. All your choices for spending vanish, for there is absolutely nothing to spend. While it is very freeing in one sense, it is also an imprisonment in another sense, for you feel so helpless and useless. It is very hard on your self esteem.

Once I had even the smallest amount of income, I found that after having been destitute for a while my gratitude was such that I loved to share what little I had with others. It became a privilege to give to my fellow poor. We all shared what little we had with each other, so that all had at least some. The problem appeared and developed as I began to make more money.

When you have a little money your financial choices are very limited. After all, you can only spend $20 in so many ways. But when that $20 turns into $100 your options for what you can buy and how you can spend that money has just multiplied by at least 5 times. The burden of what to do with your money has just increased. When that money then turns into a $1,000 you now have many ways to spend the money, and the burden of being responsible with the money increases accordingly. What used to be a choice between two or three things you could do with $20 now becomes a host of choices with $1,000.

I also learned that the more money I began to make the more caught up in my own spending and saving I became. I became almost resentful of those who wanted my hard-earned money. I shared less and less with those who didn't have anything. That was quite a revelation to me to realize that the more I was given the less likely I became to share my bounty with others. It was so easy to get caught up in all the possibilities of how I could make life easier for myself that I increasingly shut out having to think about the needs of others.

Eventually, I realized that my definition of what I could "afford" to give to others was being defined by how little that giving would impact my own comfort. Mind you, it wasn't my needs that were being impacted, but my wants and comforts. I became ashamed of myself for coveting my own possessions in the face of others' needs.

Paul didn't want the Saints to give more than they could afford. What he wanted them to see from the example set by the Saints in Macedonia was that even in their deep poverty, the Saints were able to use the grace of God that blessed their lives every day to part with at least a little of what they had for the benefit of others who needed perhaps less than they themselves did. They had willing minds and open hearts. They loved God for His many blessings, and they wanted to show their love for others by

giving what little they could. Paul was trying to show the Corinthian Saints that when we are willing to give of our substance to others that the Lord is able to bless all to have sufficient so that none need lack for the necessities.

God loves a cheerful giver, and when we come to realize that we can still be happy without all the trappings of the world, it becomes a privilege to give of our time, talents, and substance to others. This is how God gives to us. He doesn't count the cost to Himself, for He perfectly understands that it is through giving to others in any way that we can that we find abundance for ourselves.

Day 2

2 Corinthians 11 - False prophets seek to deceive.

Record your impressions in your journal or notebook. You might write in a study journal, make notes in the margins of your scripture, add notes in your Gospel Library app, or make an audio recording of your thoughts.

In my opinion, people don't set out to become a false anything, let alone a false prophet, or what Paul refers to as a false apostle. Unless someone is determined from the beginning to destroy another's faith, most people who end up in this category begin as well-meaning members who wander down the wrong doctrinal road and never get back on the straight and narrow path.

Sometimes, when we adopt an incorrect idea or doctrine we do so without realizing it is wrong. But over time, because we haven't periodically checked to make sure that what we believe is in line with the teachings of the prophets, our notion becomes embedded with custom, and sometimes others who share our mistaken idea, which just cements it further in our thinking. It can't be wrong if so many people say it is true, right? So we preach our false narrative as though it is the truth, not realizing we are leading others further away from the teachings of the prophets, and we aren't even aware of it. What cements one as a false prophet is when the truth is taught to us and we fight it. Pride causes us to dig in our heels and refuse to

We don't have to know we are a false prophet to be a false prophet. When we teach or support others in false doctrines or ideas that are not accepted as official in the Church, we do more damage than good. This is why it is so important that we have the ability to cite our source for what we teach. Unfortunately, there are false teachings that are available to us that come directly from the apostles. One such example is the idea of progression between kingdoms after the final judgment.

In my article, Treating Personal Revelation - 6 Guidelines, I talk about an example given by Brother Sweat, a BYU-Provo professor of religion. He gives three quotes from apostles that say there IS progression between kingdoms after the resurrection and judgment then gives three quotes from apostles that say there IS NOT progression after the judgment. Finally, he gives the Church's official stance on that doctrine that was given back in the 1960's. It says that the Lord has not told us if there

is progression between kingdoms, therefore we have no official doctrine regarding eternal progression after the resurrection. To teach either for or against progression between kingdoms is to preach a doctrine that is not accepted by the Church - it is false.

For years I assumed that because an apostle said there was no more progression between kingdoms that it had to be true. It never even occurred to me to look for an official position from the Church on the matter. I can't even imagine how many people I led astray on that issue because I was not careful in what I taught. While there are those who deliberately try to destroy the testimony of others, there are probably far more who do just as much damage over the course of years by being sloppy with what they teach others.

The Lord will hold us accountable for what we teach others. Before we teach it we should know that what we are teaching is the truth. And when we learn we have taught falsely, we need to humbly repent and teach the truth.

Day 3

2 Corinthians 11:3; 13:5-8 - I should "examine" my faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Record your impressions in your journal or notebook. You might write in a study journal, make notes in the margins of your scripture, add notes in your Gospel Library app, or make an audio recording of your thoughts.

I learned something new today, the definition of a reprobate. To be a reprobate is to be held up to a standard of purity or to be tested for soundness and found impure or wanting. With this in mind, reread these verses and think of substituting the words weak, or sinful, or sinners. Those are words we are more familiar with. The 1828 edition of Webster's Dictionary gives this great scripture verse as part of its description of the word reprobate

> They profess that they know God, but in works deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work *reprobate* Titus 1:16.

With this concept under our belt, let's go back to 2 Corinthians 11:3.

> 3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

What is the simplicity that is found in Christ?

What was the subtilty used by Satan to deceive Eve?

What subtleties does Satan use to corrupt us and make us reprobates or sinners?

I don't want to be unkind to the ancient Jews, but they were great examples for us of those who willingly and happily followed Satan down the garden path to destruction. They sought for complexity where there was simplicity. They wanted detail where simple general guidance was all that was truly needed. The simplicity of God's direction didn't seem to be good enough for them, they wanted it to be hard and complicated, so He let them have hard and complicated. But the scriptures tell us that pure religion, undefiled, is to take care of the widows and orphans. In other words, to minister in love to your fellow sisters and brothers around you.

So let's examine ourselves. Are we keeping Christ's gospel simple? Are we filling our lives with minutiae that complicates almost everything we do? I think if we learn to get rid of all the extraneous parts of our lives that currently prevent us from experiencing the simplicity that is in Christ, we will find the gospel a lot more pleasant to live and easier to enjoy.

Day 4

2 Corinthians 12:5-10 - The Savior's grace is sufficient to help me find strength in my weakness.

Record your impressions in your journal or notebook. You might write in a study journal, make notes in the margins of your scripture, add notes in your Gospel Library app, or make an audio recording of your thoughts.

In studying these verses I learned something in a new way I hadn't thought of before. God's power to change us is not found through ease and comfort, but through weakness and distress. This took me some processing to think my way through.

The point of mortality is to utilize the Savior's atoning payment for our sins. It is only through the changes his atonement makes possible that we can become someone who is worthy and capable of living in celestial glory. We are weak by nature. That very native weakness is why we needed a Savior in the first place. But our Father has also given us specific weaknesses in mortality that each of us needs to overcome to become the person He knows we can become. Our weaknesses, though distressing now, are given to us in this life because they also provide us with the greatest opportunity to become strong through Christ.

The atonement doesn't just provide relief from retribution for bad behavior. The purpose of the atonement is to provide a means to change and become more like Christ. When we are forgiven of a sin, because we have exercised faith in Christ, the Spirit is able to change our attitudes, our disposition, and to augment or increase our desire to be better than we were before. This happens in small steps, incrementally as we repent. Over time we go from being people who delight in stubbornness and the lusts of the flesh to someone who finds genuine delight in acting like Christ,

ministering, giving, serving, blessing other's lives, etc. Our desire to do evil has gradually been replaced with a greater desire to do good.

If we have ease in our life, we tend to lose our desire for change. We like the status quo, everything to remain the same. It is only when we are uncomfortable or miserable that we actively seek change. When we are further along in our process of changing we begin to discover that we actually find joy in this process of becoming more like Christ. This is when we begin to seek to repent and change without having to be pushed to it out of misery.

This is why Paul says that in his ignorance he asked the Lord to remove his suffering, whatever his weakness or trial was. He asked three times, and finally the Lord taught him that it was through his trials that He could make Paul strong in Christ. So Paul learned to revel in his trials, punishments, and difficulties, for he learned to see that it was these very hardships that would make him more like Christ and bring him his greatest joy.

Day 5

2 Corinthians 13:1 - What did Paul mean when he spoke of "two or three witnesses"?

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Just a note to add to what the manual teaches about this subject: It was the Lord who gave the law of witnesses. Before the world was even framed He determined that no one can be taken at their word if they witness of themself. Another witness must always accompany someone's own witness. It doesn't really matter how many other witnesses add to the initial witness, as long as there is at least one other.

When we look at the Godhead we see a perfect example. Even if an individual member of the Godhead states who they are, there is always another member of the Godhead who witnesses that that member is who He says He is. The Father bears witness all throughout the scriptures that Jesus is His Son. The Spirit also bears witness of the Father and the Son. And Christ bears witness of the Spirit and his work among us.

As you read the scriptures notice how the Lord never sends just one person to preach His gospel, there are always additional voices added, even if it is just the Spirit. Usually, there is a companion to the prophet. Unfortunately, we don't always have the spiritual record telling us about his companion, but each time the prophet bears witness of God in any way, there is another witness as well, whether it is another human backing up his witness or the Spirit bearing witness to their souls that he speaks the truth. There is always at least two witnesses. So never believe anyone who testifies of himself alone. It

goes against the law of witnesses the God Himself set up, honors and obeys. This law was given to us as a protection for us.

Scripture Study and Home Evening

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 - How can we make service to others more cheerful?

Many of us were born selfish. That is just part of our nature. We like to have everything be convenient for us, for others to do for us, without us having to do things for others. It takes maturing and growing in the things of righteousness to learn to feel differently. It is just the opposite for deity. Their lives are lived around putting the needs of others before their own. They sacrifice, give up, and do all in their power to bless others. This is the essence of the virtue we call charity.

As I wondered about the comment in these verses that God loves a cheerful giver, I thought, "Really? we have to give to others, but that is not good enough, we must also be cheerful about it?" Why does cheerfulness enter into the mix? I think the cheerfulness is what best describes the joy God derives from doing good for others. He loves those who have learned to find the same kind of pleasure in serving others He and the rest of the Celestial crowd derives in giving and serving.

If I am correct then this describes a small part of the motivation and delight of God, Himself. He loves those most who are like Him. For those who are most like Him feel as He feels, and love as He loves. They "get" him. When we are forgiven of our sins and the Spirit slowly changes the disposition of our hearts, we learn, over time, to derive the same kind of pleasure out of giving to others God does.

Here is a PDF of this week's study material.
Print it out for greater convenience in your studies.

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