

Time to Sow: STUDY GUIDES

April, May, 2010



west london
ALLIANCE CHURCH

Time to Sow: STUDY GUIDE #1

IN PREPARATION FOR THE SERMON ON SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 2010; 2 Corinthians 9:10 "SUPPLYING OR MULTIPLYING"

KEY VERSE: 2 Corinthians 9:10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

To begin, check out what was going on in the Roman Empire when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 9 by reading the following New Testament mentions of the response of various churches to the effect of a famine (or a series of famines!) on the church in Jerusalem (in the province of Judea). **NOTE:** The New Testament texts are dated according to Bible scholars' current best estimates.

Acts 11:27-30 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius) So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. **[NOTE: Claudius was Caesar from 41-54 A.D. Several famines took place during his reign.]**

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 (53-55 A.D.) Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 (Written about one year after 1 Corinthians) We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ... I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 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. And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

2 Corinthians 9:1-5 (Written about one year after 1 Corinthians) Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

Q.1 What do the responses of these early churches tell us about our responsibilities today? Does it seem to you that you are living out these responsibilities as a Christian? If you think so, why do you? If you think not, why not? If not, can you see what needs to change so that you do meet your responsibilities?

Q.2 To better understand 2 Corinthians 9:10, consider these statements about God's involvement in the details of human experience. What can you conclude about God's involvement in people's poverty or riches?

1 Samuel 2:1-10 And Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. ... The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world...."

1 Chronicles 29:11-12 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

Psalms 104:1-28 Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. ... You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart. ... The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens. Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening. ... O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

Matthew 6:25-33 Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

2 Corinthians 9:9 As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

Q.3 Compare 1 Samuel 2:7 to Proverbs 10:4. How do these two Scriptures relate to one another? That is, what part do people play in their own experience of poverty or wealth? How is God involved, in light of the above Scriptures?

1 Samuel 2:7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.

Proverbs 10:4 A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Time to Sow: STUDY GUIDE #2

IN RESPONSE TO THE SERMON ON SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 2010; 2 Corinthians 9:10 "SUPPLYING OR MULTIPLYING"

KEY VERSE: 2 Corinthians 9:10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

Q.1 "Sowing" means giving to God's work (or to someone or something else) some of what God has given to us (seed = some of the money, abilities, time, energy and opportunities God has given to us) and "reaping" means experiencing the consequences of that sort of "sowing." Compare what Paul wrote to the Galatians about sowing 'to our own flesh' or "to the Spirit" and "reaping" accordingly. What sorts of actions ("sowing") is Paul trying to encourage and discourage?

Galatians 5:19-23 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 6:7-10 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Q.2 Since "seeds" (money, abilities, time, energy and opportunities) are the gifts that God gives us ("supplying and/or multiplying"), and since we are invited in the Bible to make our requests known to God in prayer, then if we desire more "seed" we should ask for it. According to James, what ideas should direct us in our praying?

James 4:1-4

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Time to Sow: STUDY GUIDE #3

IN PREPARATION FOR THE SERMON ON SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2010; 2 Cor. 9:7 "RELUCTANTLY OR CHEERFULLY"

KEY VERSE: 2 Corinthians 9:7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Q.1 From what you have already concluded about "sowing" and "reaping", what is to be understood from the mention of "tears" and "weeping" and "laughter" and "shouts of joy" in Psalm 126?

Psalm 126 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with **laughter**, and our tongue with **shouts of joy**; then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in **tears** shall reap with **shouts of joy**! He who goes out **weeping**, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with **shouts of joy**, bringing his sheaves with him.

Q.2 From what you understand of the thinking of the apostle Paul, what sort of joy do you think he has in mind when he writes to Timothy of God providing us "with everything to enjoy?"

1 Timothy 6:17-19 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Q.3 What changes has God been challenging you to make as you have been studying 2 Corinthians 9?

Time to Sow: STUDY GUIDE #4

IN RESPONSE TO THE SERMON ON SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2010; 2 Corinthians 9:7 "RELUCTANTLY OR CHEERFULLY"

KEY VERSE: 2 Corinthians 9:7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Q. 1 From what you have learned in your study of 2 Corinthians 9, how do you explain Paul's concept of a "cheerful giver"?

Q. 2 From what God has been revealing to you, do you consider yourself as cheerful a giver (of money, abilities, time, energy) as God intends you to be?

Q.3 The apostle Paul has written that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof (rebuke or reprimand), for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17). From your study of 2 Corinthians 9, in what ways has this series of sermons and studies taught you, reproved you, corrected you and trained you in righteousness? (Can you see how all four experiences can contribute to your transformation into a more "cheerful giver"?)

Teaching

Reproof (rebuke, reprimand)

Correction

Training in righteousness