Lesson 12 - Voluntary Offerings

I. WELCOME, 15 mins.
Plan one to two icebreakers for the purpose of mixing around and getting group participation or getting acquainted.

II. WORSHIP, 20 mins.
Prayerfully choose a few songs to lead people into God’s presence. During this time, cell leaders will encourage cell members to listen to the Holy Spirit and release the words of strengthening, encouragement, and comfort they have received for the cell group, the church and nations. Upon each word shared, the cell leader will lead members by thanking and praising God for His promise and/or praying aloud together for the needs, etc.

During this time, the cell leader will also lead the group to pray aloud for: (1) the mission organization or daughter church that the cell group adopts (2) the church ministry needs (3) blessings for new comers, the sick.

MISSION ORGANIZATION: ____________, their needs: ____________
(Please contact the church if you don’t know the needs of the mission organization.)

CHURCH MINISTRY:

III. WORD, 45 mins.
A. Sharing from last Sunday’s message.
   1. What is the main message from last Sunday sermon? What did God say to you from the message?
   2. How would you respond to the message? What action will you take after listening to the message?

B. Discussion Topic: “Voluntary offerings”

Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 8: 1-24
Memory Verse: For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

(2 Corinthians 8:12 NIV)

I. Foreword
In 2 Corinthians 8-9 Paul mentioned offerings made by the Christians. At that time the church in Jerusalem was suffering from poverty. During his missionary journey, Paul kept preaching the gospel. He also kept reminding the believers to help each other out, and finish the work of meeting the needs of the church in Jerusalem.

Paul already gave very clear instruction on how to take the collection in 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Here, Paul addressed the attitude for offering. What kind of attitude for offering will please God? What kind of attitude for offering will God remember? This is the lesson each of God’s children has to learn well, so that we can be truly blessed when each of our voluntary offerings will be pleasing to God and be remembered by Him!

II. The exemplary offerings made by the Macedonian churches (2 Corinthians 8:1-4)

1. Offerings made in the midst of a great poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-2):
   The Macedonian churches including the ones in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. The believers there were in the midst of a severe trial, (Philippians 1:29-30; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:4). Although they were facing great persecutions from the world and living a hard life, they could still make voluntary and joyful offerings because of God’s grace that they felt from within.

   Often people would argue whether there is any teaching on tithing in the New Testament, or whether people should tithe 10% before or after tax. Actually we should offer our whole bodies and souls (Romans 12:1). The poor widow offered all she had to live on (see Luke 21). Her holistic offering will always please Jesus and be remembered by Him.

   We are obligated to tithe 10% (Malachi 3:10), and God uses the rest of the 90% to train us to be His great stewards.

2. Offerings made beyond the ability (2 Corinthians 8:3):
   Why the Macedonian churches set a good example for the other churches isn’t because they just used their surplus to help others out. Even when they were in great need, they still made voluntary offerings out of the Lord’s great compelling love and grace. Offerings should not be limited to wealth, but also include talents, love and compassion, etc. It is impossible for us to love our enemies out of our sinful nature, but because of God’s love, we are willing to make offerings beyond our abilities instead.

3. Pleading for the privilege of sharing in making the offerings (2 Corinthians 8:4)
Making an offering is to acknowledge God’s existence and His faithful provision, and to offer to God all we have by faith. Anyone making a genuine offering should feel he is doing so after “many offerings” rather than being forced! Likewise, we serve God not because we are forced by our pastors or someone else, but because we are willing to be used by God. This kind of attitude will definitely be pleasing to God.

III. Jesus’ sacrifice as our example (2 Corinthians 8:8-9):

1. The grace of his complete sacrifice: Before Jesus became man he had all the glory, honor and power (richness) in heaven. Nevertheless, because he loved the world, he made himself nothing by being made in human likeness (poverty) and died on the cross for us. How great the grace is, for he cared for us and completely offered himself.

2. To make others rich (benefited): Making an offering is some kind of giving, and in some way some kind of sacrifice. However, others are benefited because of our voluntary offerings, just like how we received salvation and all the other kinds of spiritual blessings because of what Jesus did for us.

IV. Offerings made by God’s children:

1. Excel in the giving (2 Corinthians 8:6-8):

   The Corinthian church was blessed greatly by God in gifts (faith, speech, knowledge, complete earnestness and love). Here Paul reminded them that they had to move forward from receiving God’s blessings to giving out grace (benevolence), and excel in the giving, which was to show their richness. We have already received greatly God’s grace. How can we not make offerings of love in return?

2. Show willingness in the giving (2 Corinthians 8:10-15):

   As precious as the willingness is, we must take action by actually giving. When? Just now! “Now finish the work” doesn’t mean we don’t have to do it until we are in surplus. Instead, we offer to the Lord what we have (“according to what one has”), just like the boy that had five loaves and two fish offered that insignificant amount of food of his to the Lord, who then fed more than five thousand people.

3. Share the work of giving (2 Corinthians 8:16-24)

   Giving is something we feel proud of, something we do in public, and something all we share! Haven’t we all experienced God’s grace and blessing ever since we started the Shekinah Glory Building Project? Isn’t there special grace from God? Let’s make full use of the last moment of “Strong prayer, wholehearted giving” to finish the work in building God’s glorious church!

Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of attitude can we learn from the Macedonian churches?
2. What kind of example did Jesus set for us?
3. How did Paul make use of the offerings from his fellow Christian? What can we learn from Paul?
4. If God is so full of richness, why does he still expect us to offer anything to Him? How would giving benefit us?
5. Why is the Shekinah Glory Building a blessing for us? Please share you experience of giving by God’s grace.
6. It takes giving and real action to show love. Take a moment to think of some benevolent actions to take inside your cell group to help those in needs.
7. Just imagine how our church will look like when the new building is finished. How are you going to help reach the goal of “strong prayer, wholehearted giving” in your cell group?
8. For the cell leaders, please use today’s verse to lead a prayer with group members, so that everyone may have the willingness to please God. Encourage each other to attend the children center grand opening ceremony on May 5 to bless the next generation.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, we thank you and we praise you, for you loved us first by becoming poor for us, so that we can become rich in you. May you fill us with your sacrificing love once again, so that we can go out of our comfort zone and help those in need. May you help us to care for the needs in God’s house, especially the Shekinah Glory building project, so that we can bless our next generation that you raise up through giving. Please let us share in this great ministry. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen!

II. WORK (Pray for each other), 10 mins.

Please break into group of 2 or 3 to pray for each other’s needs.