

Generosity

Lesson 1—Generosity and God’s Grace¹

TRUTH

God has been unbelievably generous toward us through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Does this glorious truth impact your generosity? Of course, it is folly to assume we can “pay back” God for our life in Christ. C.S. Lewis touched on this theme when he wrote, “I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.”

So, what is Gospel-driven generosity? It’s a theme that is pervasive throughout Scripture, and yet we often reduce it to a legalistic requirement or an obligatory task. This study will help you consider the different aspects of generosity—from hospitality to finances to forgiveness—as joyful responses to God’s grace towards us. Money is only one form of currency, so generosity goes far beyond our finances. While some people do need to work on their hearts when it comes to financial generosity, others find it easy to write a check but much harder to give of their time, or open up their home, or generously forgive others. With this in mind, this study is organized around a *holistic* approach to generosity.

A few years ago, pastor J.D. Greear wrote an article called “The Generosity Matrix,” offering several helpful insights for thinking about giving, generosity, and possessions.² Gospel Coalition blogger Justin Taylor summarizes Greear’s article as follows:

[Greear] begins by identifying two different extremes that Christians often hold with regard to possessions. Either:

1. God wants you to give 10%, and after that, you can do whatever you want with your money.
2. Whatever you give, you should be giving more.

The second position, he says, is much better, but it’s imbalanced and leads to despair and constant guilt. He gives three problems with it:

1. It never ends.
2. It’s out of sync with what the Bible says elsewhere about possessions.

¹ A significant portion of this study was drawn from Tim Keller and the staff at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Copyright, 2016.

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-generosity-matrix/>

3. It ends up as a spiritualized sense of “compulsory” giving (contra 2 Corinthians 8-9).

Greear goes on to provide a scriptural matrix on this issue. “Any one of these principles, taken alone, will lead you out of balance and into error. You are to hold all 6 of these principles in a reverent tension. We like rules, formulas, and black and white prescriptions. Instead, the Bible gives complementary principles we are to hold in tension.”

1. It is the joyful duty of those who have to share with those who have not.
2. We live with radical generosity to others in response to Jesus’ radical generosity to us.
3. The Holy Spirit must guide us as to which sacrifices we are to make.
4. God provides for His people richly and delights in our enjoyment of His material gifts.
5. *Don’t* trust in riches and *don’t* define your life by the abundance of your possessions.
6. Wealth building is OK.

Consider Greear’s “Generosity Matrix” as you answer the questions in the EQUIP section.

EQUIP

1. What extreme have you struggled with concerning generosity and/or possessions? Why?
2. Which of the six principles is hardest for you, and which is easiest? Why?
3. Read Luke 18:9-17 and Micah 6:6-8. In the passage in Luke, Jesus describes two men who went up to the temple to pray. What do the two men have in common? How do they differ?
4. What do their prayers tell us about both their view of God and what they believe is acceptable to him?
5. What do the Pharisee and Jesus' disciples have in common (vs. 16-17)? How do they regard others of lower status?
6. The Pharisee considered himself great because of his tithes and fasts, but in the Micah text, we see that even the most extraordinary works are insufficient for meeting God's demands. What did the Pharisee and the readers of Micah fail to grasp about what God truly desires? What does this say about our efforts to earn God's approval?
7. What do we learn from the parable in Luke about the necessity of Jesus' sacrifice for sin? How does His voluntary humility change our posture toward God?

ACCOUNTABILITY

NOTE: Your study group does NOT need to go through every one of the following questions. Devote the final 30 minutes of your study time to the ACCOUNTABILITY section, and cover as many questions as you can depending on your group's size.

1. Think back to the parable in Luke 18. To which of the characters do you more readily relate? Why?
2. What are some of the "good deeds" you rely on to earn God's favor?
3. How does the experience of God's grace and generosity to us, shown in the sacrifice of Jesus, radically alter our motivation for good deeds?
4. What events over the past week encouraged you? What *discouraged* you?
5. Without focusing on something you're "doing," describe your relationship with the Lord.
6. How have you worshipped the creation rather than the Creator?
7. What lies have you been believing?
8. Describe a situation or relationship that you would like prayer for.
9. Which spiritual discipline (prayer, study, fellowship, etc.) has blessed you recently? Why?
10. Which spiritual discipline have you neglected lately? Why?

MISSION

1. Village Seven's 2020 emphasis is **For the City: Gospel Love, Living Local**. How can God use you to seek the welfare of Colorado Springs?
2. Do you have a place where you serve in Colorado Springs? If so, how's it going? If not, what are some places where you could get excited to serve and engage?
3. God has placed you at your job, in your neighborhood, and in this city for a reason. Who are people in your life that don't know the Good News of the Gospel?
4. We are praying as a church for God to give us boldness to have spiritual conversations with non-believers we know. How are you doing with this?

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Week 2—Generosity and Relationships³

TRUTH

Financial generosity will translate into relational generosity. Generosity is not a *part* of one's life; it is a response and disposition that touches *all* areas of life. Financial expert Brad Leeper has said, "Generosity is now the best apologetic we as Christ-followers have to a watching and needy world."

Indeed, the world is not only watching how Christians use their money, but also how their convictions translate into loving and serving people. Are we being generous with our time, talents, and relationships? Money is only one form of currency in our world today.

We live in a time when people are more aware than ever of what other people are doing—or not doing. Our Christian witness is not only demonstrated by how we steward our resources, but in how we *live*. The apostle Paul touched on this theme when he wrote to the church at Thessalonica: "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God *but also our own selves*, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8, emphasis added).

Pastor Tim Keller helps us understand Paul's statement by shedding light on the cultural dynamics of the first century. He writes:

"The early church was strikingly different from the culture... the pagan society was stingy with its money and promiscuous with its body. A pagan gave nobody their money and practically gave everybody their body. And the Christians came along and gave practically nobody their body, and they gave practically everybody their money."

The early Christians were deeply transformed by the grace of the Gospel, and as a result, their financial *and relational* generosity was on display for all to see. They were generous in forgiving others, for example, because generous people cancel debts and absorb the cost themselves.

³ A significant portion of this study was drawn from Tim Keller and the staff at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Copyright, 2016.

EQUIP

1. How has our culture affected your relationships, whether for better or worse?
2. Compare and contrast the Church in the first century and the Church today. What can we learn from them?
3. Read Luke 17:3-10 and Leviticus 19:17-18. In the Luke passage, Jesus makes it clear to His disciples who they really are—servants whose extraordinary debt to God, their master, has been forgiven. As a result of experiencing such forgiveness, the appropriate response is to seek reconciliation with those who wrong them. What is *your* response to being called an “unworthy servant” whose duty it is to offer unlimited forgiveness?
4. What is the connection between Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness (Luke 17:3-4) and his response to His disciples about faith and duty (vs. 6-10)?
5. What are the specific steps listed in Jesus’ command to forgive, and how is this different from the ways we have thought of forgiveness?
6. What do you think it means to “rebuke your neighbor frankly” in the context of loving your neighbor as yourself?
7. Jesus came “not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). How does Jesus’ life as a servant transform your understanding of what it means to forgive?

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1. How does the forgiveness God offers us through Jesus radically transform the way we extend forgiveness to others?
2. We are called to be people of reconciliation and peace, yet we often find ourselves in situations where unforgiveness has alienated us from those who have wronged us. What are some practical steps we can take to reach out to those who have sinned against us?
3. What events over the past week encouraged you? What *discouraged* you?
4. Without focusing on something you're "doing," describe your relationship with the Lord.
5. How have you worshipped the creation rather than the Creator?
6. What lies have you been believing?
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Week 3—Generosity and Wealth⁴

TRUTH

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church and author of numerous bestselling books including the *The Purpose Driven Life*, suggests a simple way to determine whether or not you are actually generous. “Show me your calendar and checkbook stubs, and I’ll tell you what is really important to you,” he explains.⁵

As Americans in the 21st century, we live in an unprecedented time of wealth, comfort, and prosperity. It is true that the way to someone’s heart is through their wallet. Once in a while, such as on Christmas morning, we revel in the joy of giving rather than receiving. But what about the other 364 days of the year?

Time and again, we buy into the lie that we will find joy and fulfillment in *stuff*. We are a culture controlled by instant gratification and consumerism, with very few threats to our comfort. We know that it’s better for us to eat kale than to go to McDonald’s. But fast food is cheap and convenient, and those greasy, salty fries just taste so good going down! We’d rather enjoy the fleeting pleasures of the drive-through than think about what a fatty diet will do to us in the long term. In other words, we don’t keep the end in sight.

We often do the same thing with our finances. Rather than investing in the future, or in the Kingdom, we spend for the here-and-now. Pastor Tim Keller notes, “Americans of 40 years ago would be shocked to see what Christians today think of as necessities. But we view things this way because we keep defining ‘basics’ the way the consumer capitalist culture wants us to—which is always being defined upward, and fast.”⁶

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⁵ *Generosity in the Present and Future* by Evan Kirkpatrick

⁶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/more-than-money-tim-keller-on-how-to-live-generously/>

EQUIP

1. What do your calendar and your checkbook reveal?
2. What does it mean to “keep the end in sight” in the context of our spirituality and specifically regarding our wealth?
3. What are the possessions you hold most dear?
4. Read Luke 18:18-30 and Deuteronomy 10:12-15. In Luke 18, the rich ruler claimed that he had faithfully kept all the commandments since his youth. Why, then, was it so difficult for him to follow Jesus’ command in verse 22?
5. Is Jesus’ command to sell everything and give to the poor required of everyone who seeks to follow him? Why or why not?
6. What are some of the things in which we place our trust and security? And why are these things such spiritual traps?
7. According to Deuteronomy 10:12-15, what was lacking about the rich ruler’s obedience?
8. Jesus says that no one who has forsaken family or riches to follow him “will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.” What are some things we find in Jesus that our idols cannot provide?

ACCOUNTABILITY

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1. What would it look like to faithfully serve God with our wealth and all he has given us? What area of your life would be most affected?
2. What are some ways we can be more generous with our money? How could we limit some spending in order to increase our giving?
3. In what ways do we make our wealth and material things more important than they actually are?
4. What events over the past week encouraged you? What *discouraged* you?
5. Without focusing on something you're "doing," describe your relationship with the Lord.
6. How have you worshipped the creation rather than the Creator?
7. What lies have you been believing?
8. Describe a situation or relationship that you would like prayer for.
9. Which spiritual discipline (prayer, study, fellowship, etc.) has blessed you recently? Why?
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Week 4—Hospitality and God's Grace⁷

TRUTH

Many people in the West, if not most of them, have bought into the lie that their homes and possessions are meant to serve their own purposes. “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours!”

Against this backdrop, the Christian virtues of generosity and hospitality are profoundly counter-cultural. And yet Scripture is clear, throughout the Old and New Testaments, that hospitality will be a marquee characteristic of the people of God.

In the book of Leviticus God says, “The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself” (Leviticus 19:34). The apostle Paul commanded the followers of Jesus in Rome to practice hospitality. The word “practice” in that passage literally means that we are to *pursue* hospitality. Similarly, the apostle Peter admonishes his readers to practice hospitality ungrudgingly toward one another (I Peter 4:9). Meanwhile, the author of Hebrews tells us we should not neglect to show hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:2).

Without question, we are to be hospitable! And our friendliness should not be limited to people that are easy to love. We are to be hospitable to *everyone*, whether friends, family members, or strangers.

Of course, boundaries are important. Even Jesus withdrew from the crowds when necessary. We need to practice good boundaries and know ourselves well enough to understand when it’s wise to rest and recharge. Even so, our natural inclination is to be *less* hospitable, not more, and that can be problematic.

What would it look like to steward our homes and let them be used for the Kingdom? Rather than driving straight into the garage at the end of the day and shutting the door, how can we be more welcoming and approachable? Can our homes be warm places where people are brought together, rather than fortresses in which we escape and shut ourselves off from the world? When we are hospitable, we are reflecting the grace and generosity of our God.

The Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:12-24) helps illuminate this idea. In Jesus’ time, there was no organized welfare system. Wealthy people in the community were expected to help neighbors who had economic problems. But this system was not in

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any way rooted in compassion for the poor and marginalized; rather, it was based on a system of self-interest. When the wealthy aided the poor, it was done with great fanfare as a sign of their status in the community. In the same way, when those with resources showed generosity and hospitality, the acts were done with the expectation that the favor would be returned in the form of political preferences, economic breaks, and public acknowledgment.

Jesus' teaching was radically different. When He told the Parable of the Great Banquet, He was outlining the typical way a wealthy man in that culture would have sought to sustain and create new relationships with those who received his patronage. But in the parable, the host discovered that the expected guests turned down his invitation. Instead, the invitation was accepted by those who couldn't begin to repay it. This picture of biblical hospitality points to the Gospel itself.

EQUIP

1. How do you struggle with seeing your home and possessions as “yours,” meant to serve you only?
2. Who is a new person, couple, or family you know that you could invite into your home in the next month?
3. Read Luke 14:12-24 (the Parable of the Great Banquet) and Isaiah 25:6-9. Who are the people you are most likely to invite to a party?
4. In verses 15-24 in the parable, two different groups of people are invited to a great banquet at two different times. How would you describe the first group that was invited?
5. How would you describe the second group?
6. How would you describe the feast in the Isaiah passage, and what does this tell you about God and His kingdom?
7. What do you learn from the Parable of the Great Banquet about the heart and intention of God?

ACCOUNTABILITY

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1. Who are the people on the margins of our invitation list?
2. The Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia*, which literally means "love of strangers." What are some ways that we can make room for those who are not typical "party invitees," who are unwelcome and excluded in our society?
3. How can you serve the church or your community by opening your home in the next month?
4. What encouraged/discouraged you from this past week?
5. Without saying something that you are "doing," describe your relationship with the Lord.
6. How have you worshipped the creation rather than the Creator?
7. What lies have you been believing?
8. Describe the situation around one relationship that you would like prayer for?
9. Which spiritual discipline has really blessed you recently? Why?
10. Which spiritual discipline has been neglected lately? Why?

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