

Week Six

The Rhythm of Generosity

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone else's generosity?

Perhaps someone has invited you to a meal, or bought you a gift... Maybe someone has opened their home to you, or set aside time to serve you. Or perhaps you know someone who is always a great encourager – someone who is generous when their words, who will always sing your praises.

Experiencing generosity is wonderful. And yet, at the same time, being generous comes with a cost, and often with a risk. "What if my generosity leaves me vulnerable?" "What if they don't show the same kindness back?" We'd all like to be known as generous people, but what empowers us to live like this? Where does true generosity come from?

Jesus' early followers, full of the Holy Spirit; lived in a way that was radically and counter-culturally generous. They sold their property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. They held their things lightly, making sure no one went without. Why did they do it?

The Christian author, Tim Keller, writes: *"the source of radical generosity is a gospel-transformed heart that has received the costly grace of God."*

As we look this week at the rhythm of generosity, let's allow our hearts to be transformed by the outrageous truth of the Gospel – to be so stirred by what Jesus has done for us, that it changes the way we live for good.

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

Day one

Reading: John 3:16-17

Day two

Reading: Psalm 24:1-2

Day three

Reading: Luke 19:1-9

Day four

Reading: Mark 10:17-30

Day five

Reading: John 12:1-6

1 Rhythm of Generosity | A generous God

Reading: John 3:16-17

DEVOTIONAL

We're focusing this week on what it looks like to live a life of generosity. But to live radically generous lives that are so counter-cultural that the world takes notice, we must first grasp something of the generosity of our God.

It's no wonder that John 3:16 is one of the best-known and most-often-quoted verses of the Bible. In it is the very heart and character of God. But if we're not careful, the words can become so familiar to us that we miss their outrageous truth.

"For God so loved the world that He gave his only son..." Here is the essence of what He has done for us – the Gospel in a nutshell.

In response to our rebellion against God, God acts with unmerited generosity, and extraordinary grace. We have a debt against God that we simply cannot pay, and so God pays it on our behalf, by giving himself. He is generous with his love, with his acceptance, with his forgiveness, with himself. **He holds nothing back.**

Here too, God sets out the pattern for love – the basis for all our relationships.

He demonstrates what real love looks like. When you love, you give. True love is always generous. It costs. When we're generous, we reflect the image of God.

As we spend time this week looking at what it means to live generously, we must be clear that we're not trying to earn the love of God. We're not trying to buy his favour. He loves you. He went to the cross himself to pay the debt that you simply cannot pay.

Our generosity to others is simply a response to His generosity to us. We love because he first loved us. We give, because He gave everything.

RESPONSE

Do you believe that God has paid your debt against Him? Read John 3:16, and ask God to speak to you through it in a fresh way. Allow it to bring you to thank Him.

NOTES

2 Rhythm of Generosity | Owner or manager

Reading: Psalm 24:1-2

DEVOTIONAL

Toddlers tend to have a distorted idea of ownership...

Watch a couple of two-year olds playing with toys that don't belong to either of them, and it's amazing how often you'll hear the word: "mine".

But the truth is that, as adults, we're often not much different. Our understanding of ownership can get a bit off-kilter, too. We think in terms of 'my home, my time, my money.' **"I'm not giving it up because I worked hard to earn it."** But freedom and generosity come from realising that, actually, none of it really belongs to us.

Psalm 24 begins with the words: The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. He's the source, the creator. The air we breathe, the sun that warms the earth - the plants and animals we eat - it's all from Him.

And he's the provider of everything we have - our time, our finances, our God-given gifts and abilities.

He is the owner and investor who entrusts us with worldly wealth and possessions. We are the managers responsible for taking care of them and investing them well on his behalf.

Just like a manager of a business is responsible for his or her department and employees, so, we're responsible for the things we've been given. However much, or however little, we may feel we have, we are to make decisions on how and where to invest.

Of course, the better we know the owner, the better we'll understand his priorities, and the things He wants us to invest in.

So look around you. What has He given you? What money or possessions? What gifts, what skills, what passions, what time? Knowing everything you know about the heart of God, how can you invest these things wisely and generously on his behalf?

RESPONSE

How does it affect your view of yourself and the things you have to know that God is the owner and you are a manager? What do you think wise investment looks like?

NOTES

3 Rhythm of Generosity | A life transformed

Reading: Luke 19:1-9

DEVOTIONAL

It's no overstatement to say that, in their day, tax collectors like Zacchaeus were among the least popular people around.

Tax collectors were known for cheating people out of money. They had a reputation for being corrupt. They'd collect more than they needed and keep the extra for themselves.

Worse still, they worked for the oppressive Roman Empire. So they were despised as traitors who loved money and possessions more than their own people.

But, for Zacchaeus, everything changed in a wonderful, God-ordained moment when he met with Jesus.

You get the feeling that it wasn't just Zacchaeus' finances that were affected on that day. His transformed heart would have led to different expressions of outward generosity, and a restoration of relationships with the people he had wronged.

Sure, people may have had questions, but they couldn't have doubted that the encounter, and the transformation, was authentic. **They saw it in the way he lived.**

Why was Zacchaeus suddenly able to loosen his grip on his money and his things? Because he had found something of infinitely greater worth.

This true story reminds us of what can happen when sinful, greedy man comes face-to-face with a shockingly generous God.

Our focus can shift. Priorities can be realigned. What seemed important before can be shown up for what it really is - faded, dull and temporary. Earthly things can lose their shine, and the eternal glory of knowing Jesus, spending time with Him, and becoming more like Him, can become our very reason for living.

We are undone.

He transforms us, from the inside out. Because, when we've received grace like this, how could we ever stay the same?

RESPONSE

What earthly things have lost their 'shine' since you met with Jesus? How has He changed your attitude towards money, possessions and people?

NOTES

4 Rhythm of Generosity | It's a freedom thing

Reading: Mark 10:17-30

DEVOTIONAL

Generosity isn't **just** about money. We are called to be generous with all kinds of things... our time, our words, our forgiveness, our thoughts and our possessions. But ultimately, it must affect our finances too.

Jesus talked about money a lot. In fact, He spoke more about money than He spoke about heaven or hell combined. And what He said was incredibly challenging.

Jesus suggested that how we spend our money is a decent gauge of what we think of his teaching. He suggested that our bank account is a good indicator of our faith.

Unlike Jesus, we **don't** tend to talk about money. We see it as personal, and taboo. And if a church keeps mentioning money and tithing, well then, we can start getting cynical about the motives.

In today's passage, the short line in verse 21 is key: **'Jesus looked at him and loved him'**. Jesus asked this rich young ruler to sell everything he had and to give to the poor because he knew this was a heart issue for him. He wasn't trying to back him into a corner, he wanted to set him free.

Jesus talks about money a lot because he loves us a lot. He **gets** money, and he **gets** the human heart.

He understands the power that money can have to help us accomplish God's purpose. But He also knows the power it has to distract us, and to make us think we are sufficient without Him. He knows that money and possessions can become idols in our lives, and strangle the very purpose we were created for.

God doesn't **need** our money – and that's important to say. The One who made everything from nothing doesn't require our handouts. But **we need** to give. First and foremost, our giving is a discipleship issue, a freedom thing. God asks us to give, because He wants to set us free.

RESPONSE

What is your own relationship with money?
How easy or difficult do you find it to give?
What barriers are in the way?

NOTES

5 Rhythm of Generosity | A generosity that God loves

Reading: John 12:1-6

DEVOTIONAL

There are two hearts on display in today's passage – and they are very, very different. One is a heart of extravagant generosity, the other is a heart of selfishness.

On the surface, what Judas says seems prudent – wise even. The pure nard that Mary poured on Jesus' feet was a fragrant ointment likely imported from the mountains of India. It would have been incredibly expensive, and the amount Mary used was worth about a year's wages.

To many bystanders, Mary's actions may have seemed foolish – Judas would have sounded like the generous one. But Jesus knew his heart. He always does. And Judas' underlying motives were anything but pure.

While Judas is rebuked for his selfish motives, Mary's generosity seems to impress Jesus. In fact, in the account of this story in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says that this woman's act of worship would be told everywhere the gospel was preached.

So what was it about Mary's generosity that impressed Jesus? Was it the amount she gave? Remember, this is a God of majesty and glory. Revelation 21 says that the streets of heaven are lined with gold. There's no lack in the throne room.

The truth is, it is never about the amount, it's always about the heart. It's about what's under the surface. It's about the motive.

We can give financially, and still not be generous. We could give our time to serve at church, we could give our money to charity, we could even give away all our possessions – and, if we do it from selfish motives, still totally miss the point.

Why? Because it's all about the heart. God loves a heart that is so in love with Jesus – so grateful and undone by who He is and what He has done – that it results in a transformed life of joyful generosity.

A heart that loves to give. That's the kind of generosity God loves.

RESPONSE

Take some time to examine your heart. What motives are behind the things you spend your time doing?

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