

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



Autumn: Welcome to the Vision for Life podcast, an ongoing conversation between the pastors of Fellowship Denver and the church at large. Each week we talk about life, faith, the Bible, and how to follow Jesus as we go about our daily lives. I'm Autumn, the host of the podcast, and Hunter's with me today. Hunter, thanks for being here.

Hunter: Autumn, it's great to be here. We are at peak winter form on the Vision for Life podcast. We're in this cozy green room recording, and Jesse has a barrel of M&M's to warm us up. And we are just in here packing on the pounds and surviving this cold spell that we're living through.

Autumn: That's right. It's a good thing we have the M &M's because there's not actually heat in this room. Jesse tries to warm it up via a space heater before we come in to record, which is very thoughtful of him, but then we have to cut that because of the noise once we start recording, and the temperature starts dropping, especially on days like today. So, the M&M's help our spirits, and probably the winter layer for warmth.

Hunter: Definitely.

Autumn: We're making a hard shift from our pre-podcast conversation, which was about Nick Saban, into talking about generosity.

Hunter: Nick Saban retired on the day before we are recording this podcast, and so the college football landscape has been shaken to the core, and we've just been reviewing some of that in our conversations, but this is not what our listeners tune in for.

Autumn: No. So, we're going to get to our topic that we're going to discuss today, which is connected to our current sermon series. Last fall, we began a series of sermons under the big heading of "Heaven and Earth," and then we picked up that theme again but are talking about a different facet of it this spring. And so, this spring, we're talking about "Heaven and Earth: Family of God," or "A New Family." Could you give us a sense of what that sermon series is about? And perhaps, Hunter, even some insight into that big heading, "Heaven and Earth." What does that mean? What are we talking about in this series that we're titling, "Heaven and Earth"?

Hunter: We took the phrase "Heaven and Earth" from Jesus's claim at the beginning of the so-called Great Commission that "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me." And when we looked at that, we said, He's actually going all the way back to Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, where it says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth." That's how God's creation is described. And God rules from Heaven, and He gave us authority over the Earth, and His will is to be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. And so, these two together are to live in harmony as a place that displays God's glory. And yet, because of sin and the fall, Earth does not display the glory of God, and it's not reconciled to Heaven. And what Jesus does in reconciling us to God, He's actually reconciling Heaven and Earth. That's another way to describe what He called "the Kingdom of God." And when it comes in full, you see it in Revelation chapter 21, Heaven coming down to Earth and filling Earth. And so, we said, when we fulfill the Great Commission, when we live in obedience to Jesus to go and make disciples, when we are disciples ourselves, we are living in a place where Heaven and Earth meet, and there's power and there's life there. This year, at the beginning of this year, we're taking that one step further and saying, so how did the early Jesus movement fulfill the Great Commission? And the primary way they did that was by preaching the gospel and collecting believers into churches. And these churches started to function like new families, and Jesus anticipated that. Jesus had told His disciples that now in this time, even before the Kingdom of God comes in full, now in this age to come, you are going to have a hundred-fold brothers and sisters and children and lands,

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



meaning there was going to be a richness to this family, this new family that He was going to create. And we see that happening in Acts. In the Book of Acts, when the Holy Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, it fills the first church, and everyone's needs are met. There's just this abundance. And that's an important thing to emphasize because there's another side to following Jesus, which is probably the side many are familiar with, and that's the take-up-your-cross-and-follow-me side. There is a real sense of loss, of sacrifice, of cross-bearing that comes as followers of Jesus. We are now citizens of a Kingdom that is opposed by the Kingdom of the World, and so there's difficulty in following Jesus when He made the promise to His disciples of this great family. He also said, with persecutions the flip side is there should be a life and a vitality and a fullness within the family of God that we experience that more than makes up for what we've lost or what we've sacrificed to follow Jesus. So, this year as a church, we're saying, let's lean into that. Let's take steps of obedience. Let's live that out. That's central to how we fulfill the Great Commission in our city.

Autumn: In the sermon series this spring that talks about this new family that Jesus described in Mark 10, and both the promise of difficulty and fullness within that family, there are some unique characteristics of that family of God. What are some of those things that we are discussing in our sermon series that help us realize the type of family that Jesus was talking about and that His work on earth, His presence, His life and death, resurrection and ascension actually accomplished that we see then lived out in acts?

Hunter: Some of the things we're going to learn is this family is full of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit fills them when they center their life on God's Word and when they center their life on sharing the life that Jesus has given them. The Holy Spirit fills them, so they're full of the Spirit. We'll talk about what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to pursue the fullness of the Spirit's presence among us.

This family also is committed to learning and living out all the implications of the gospel. We'll look at a passage in Galatians where Paul confronted Peter because Peter had withdrawn from Fellowship with Gentile Christians because he had been persuaded by some Jewish people that Gentiles, you know—you couldn't have table Fellowship with them. Paul will say he's not living in step with the gospel. This is a community that lets the nature of the gospel shape their expectations of community, and they hold each other to that. We'll learn about that. We'll also look at the practice of forgiveness and how this community forgives and reconciles people back into it so that the life of the Spirit can continue to be cultivated through giving and receiving of forgiveness even among each other.

Autumn: In our podcast conversations, we're going to align, sort of bring them alongside those aspects of the sermon series, and we're talking about one thing that you mentioned a moment ago, and that is living out the implications of the gospel. And in four different discussions, we'll discuss how the nature of this new family, the distinctions that you're describing, make this new family, new Kingdom people as Jesus is inviting them in and talking about this new family and the nature of this new family, when we ask together, what are the implications of the gospel? how do they shape our shared life together? There are a few things that we see as being evident in the New Testament, the way that these churches, these communities, these new families formed and the things that they did, particularly the things that they did together. So, our conversations aren't going to discuss the same things that we're talking about in our sermon series.

Hunter: This is like bonus material. We need to keep the sermon series to seven parts. So, we're going to talk about four more ways that we live out this family of God, and kind of add this to what we're talking about on Sundays. And the

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



things we're going to talk about, I think, are great conversations because they require some practical working out in our lives. And sometimes it's best to even talk about how to work that out versus just to preach about how to work that out.

Autumn: These four conversations aren't exhaustive either. Jesus Himself mentioned many characteristics of the people who are his followers, the people who are a part of this new Kingdom that he is bringing about. And then we see that in the epistles too. But we've selected four aspects of being the family of God that are evident in the shared life, the descriptions of the Church in the New Testament that are really important and powerful for us as the family of God today. So, today we're going to start talking about one of those ways that being the family of God in a local context looks, and this aspect is generosity. So, we'll talk about how this new family is generous. And this is something that we saw distinctly in the early Church and the descriptions in Acts that has been an important aspect of shared life together as the community of God's people for the entire existence of the Church.

Hunter: This is one of my favorite subjects because God has used this in my own life in order to help me experience the fullness of being part of His people. This is not something that comes even intuitively to me. There are some aspects of following Jesus that come that lean into my natural talents. Like the learning the Bible part, that just leans into my natural tendency to read and learn things. This does not come naturally to me, and I had to be disciplined into this as a Christian and taught and personally challenged by my mentor, who I've talked about before, Bill Smith. He, in addition to teaching us to spend time in God's Word every day and to pray every day, this is another thing he disciplined us in was being generous. And it was so counterintuitive to me. And yet I've seen over the years of following Christ that He's used this so many times in my life. And it's something I just love now talking about and helping people figure out how to do.

Autumn: We've arranged our conversation today into two big ideas. And the first is more of a theological foundation for the understanding of generosity, how it is that Jesus calls us to be generous, and why it's important that this is part of our rhythm as the family of God. And then the second is, practically, how do you do that? You mentioned just a moment ago in your description that you had to learn about the importance of generosity and then actually engage it. So, we'll discuss how you do that, how you grow in generosity. So, how we understand it and then how we put it into practice. And so, our first big idea is that there is a principle of first in Scripture. And we talked about this as a church together in a whole series of sermons and Fellowship Group discussions that we called "First to the Lord." And so, we're talking about that idea of giving first to the Lord.

Hunter: Those sermons were in the fall of 2019. So, eons ago. We'll link them in our show notes. So, if folks weren't with us then-

Autumn: -Back when Nick Saban's retirement wasn't even a thought.

Hunter: -wasn't even a twinkle in anybody's eye. COVID hadn't even happened. Yeah, we didn't even know what COVID was. So, it was a really a golden era of modern history. The principle of "first" is also sometimes in the New Old Testament called the principle of first fruits. And a very concise expression of it is found in Proverbs 3:9-10. The proverb says, "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of your produce, then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine." This was obviously written in an agrarian society where their main income or their main form of wealth was crops and what the ground produced. Now, these verses actually come in the context. The whole context of Proverbs 3 is one long argument that goes, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him and He'll make your paths straight." That's what this father is trying to teach his son in Proverbs 3. It's about honoring the Lord. And after he's kind of laid that out, one of the first big

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



applications he gives him is this principle of first fruits. Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce. And then there's a promise attached to it that this is not going to be a sacrifice, but rather the Lord loves to return back to you what you have given Him. And so, we see this principle in Proverbs. And we'll talk in a minute about how that Old Testament principle gets translated into the New Covenant that followers of Jesus live under because there's not necessarily a direct correlation between just give and you'll receive more money back. And so, the promise is not quite the same under the New Covenant. And yet, the principle of first fruits we'll see still applies.

Autumn: The way that you just described that, Hunter, has two aspects. One is a responsiveness, a recognition that the good gifts in our lives, the things that we have, whether plenty or little, regardless, the things that we do have are a gift from God, and that the giving then is a response to that recognition. The second way you talked about it is that it's an expression of trust, that God will continue to provide. So, He has provided, He will continue to provide. This idea of giving first fruits to God is found in various narrative portions of Scripture too. It's a pattern that's repeated. But you mentioned specifically Deuteronomy 26. So, that passage, what's happening there? And how does that passage help us understand this idea of giving first fruits to God?

Hunter: I would encourage everyone to go read Deuteronomy 26:1-11, and you see it laid out. Deuteronomy is when Moses is repeating the law for that second generation, those kids of Israel who are going to inherit the Promised Land. Their parents have died off in the wilderness through the 40 years of wandering and their rebellion, and their children who some of them were just children when they left Egypt. These children are now going to enter the Promised Land. Moses is repeating the law, and he's telling them how to prosper in the Promised Land. The proverb we just read is just a concise articulation of what Deuteronomy 26 depicts. And Moses tells them to give first fruits to the Lord by bringing the first of their crops to the place God will designate. That was the tabernacle at one point. They would have places where they would bring their offerings. Then later, when the temple was built, it would have been to the temple, but it would have been to the place God designated. They were going to bring these first fruits offering, offer them up to the priest. And then here's what Moses tells them to do after they brought their first fruits in Deuteronomy 26:5. He says:

Then declare before the Lord your God, "My father was a wandering Aramean.

He's talking about Abraham here.

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil, and oppression." So, the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm with great terror and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place, gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me. Place the basket before the Lord your God, bow down before him, then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and to your household.

Now what they just rehearsed there was their own salvation. The Exodus was their salvation. And we do the same thing when we bring first fruits. We say, I was a sinner, and you might even want to rehearse your own story of salvation and how God led you to Himself. And now I live in this new promised land. The promised land in the New Covenant is the Kingdom of God. And it will one day be a literal land that will cover the whole earth because the Kingdom of God will be God's will done on earth. But the land promised to Israel in the Old Testament is the promise of being a citizen of the

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



Kingdom of God to New Covenant believers. And so, just as the Lord had led them out of Egypt and had brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey, the Lord has led us out of the Kingdom of the world. He has saved us from our sin, and He has led us into his Kingdom where there is life and where we flourish. And so, we bring first fruits as a way of rehearsing that story and honoring the Lord and rejoicing all that He's given us.

Autumn: You're making a direct link there to the New Covenant and you mentioned a moment ago, we'll discuss the implications.

Hunter: I guess we're doing that now.

Autumn: We're doing that now—look, you led us right into it. But you said we'll discuss the implications of these passages, this pattern that took shape throughout the narrative of the Old Testament that then here was distinctly taught to the people and then was reflected in the law that was given to them. And it's reflected also in wisdom literature. That's why we looked at Proverbs. It's distilled there, as you mentioned, for us in the form of this principle of wisdom. But how does this pattern then take shape in the New Testament and within the New Covenant?

Hunter: Well, listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 6:33. He says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." Now, all these things he has in mind is all your needs. This is the passage where He says, "Don't be anxious about your life, what you're going to wear, what you're going to eat. The Lord knows what you need. Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things you need will be added to you." Meaning, if you will prioritize the Kingdom of God and life in the Kingdom of God, God will take care of you. And there is choosing to live by faith. I can remember several seasons of my life where this was like really, really real to me in a way I just felt it. Like when I was in my mid-20s, I made a career shift to go to pursue full-time ministry, and that, going to grad school, going to seminary, I left a lucrative career, took a massive pay cut, in order to do that. Or, I didn't leave that career—I transitioned to kind of a part-time kind of role in that work and made a big move. It was a time when I didn't exactly know how all the details were going to work out. That's the point. I knew just enough details to get going. And my mentor, Bill Smith, had helped me process that transition and he told me, because I was all worried about, well, how am I going to pay for it and how am I going to get through it? And he said, hey, the Lord will take care of the details as you go. He's not going to give you all the details in advance. He's going to give you just enough to get going. And He did. He provided just enough to get going. And what I saw at the end of what ended up being a five-year journey, at the end of that five-year journey, I could look back and go, the Lord has actually taken care of me and provided for me every step of the way, even though I didn't know how exactly he was going to do that.

I can even remember at one point worrying, am I going to be able to keep my car or do I need to not have a car because I can't afford a car payment? And the Lord provided a way to make a little car payment so I could have transportation. And that was just His practical provision for me when I knew what seeking first the Kingdom meant in that season of life. Right on the heels of that, we moved here to plant Fellowship Denver and to start working on that and that lesson was so practical to me. I had all these concerns of like, well, how's this going to work, and how are we going to do this, and the Lord like, remember what you've been learning the last five years. I tell you what seeking My Kingdom looks like. You do that first, and then I take care of the details. I'll give you enough to get started. That's what we're going to do again. And so, this is just a way to live. And I don't ever want to get to the place where I'm not asking what *seeking first the Kingdom of God* means in this season of life and trusting that He'll take care of my practical needs. So, there's one way it's applied

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



in the New Testament. That's not a giving passage. That's not an instructions on giving, but that is a passage about seeking first the Kingdom.

Autumn: And I think that that idea, what you just described, Hunter, even in the way that you experienced it, is such an important connection point to what we are discussing in our sermon series. The presentation of the Kingdom of God, even when Jesus shows up at the beginning of His ministry and starts talking about it and invites people in the distinct impression we get of the Kingdom from that moment throughout all of the New Testament is that the Kingdom of God is a place of plenty. And then this calls us back to the promised land. You mentioned a moment ago that when God led the Israelites into the promised land, part of that promise was that it was fertile. It was a land flowing with milk and honey. There was plenty for them and provision for their actual physical needs. And this passage in Matthew brings to mind all of that within the Kingdom of God, there's fullness and plenty and abundance. And within the family of God, there's fullness and plenty. This is why it's so important that in the New Testament, we see these images in acts of people actually taking care of each other. This is something that is an easy way for us to replicate this fullness, to live into that as the family of God now. And we've heard stories of this happening in Fellowship groups here at our church. We set up systems as a church, but then this happens organically as well when there's an actual physical need. Often members rally around each other to provide for that. And that's a part of being this new family who's characterized by generosity and meeting this need, because we believe that God meets our needs and within his Kingdom there's abundance.

Hunter: And we have to be careful not to over individualize these promises because the promise here is not that you are going to just have everything you need by yourself and in and of yourself, but rather as part as a citizen of the Kingdom or as the family. The family is collectively going to have enough, and you are a citizen of that family. And so, your needs will be taken care of through the family. That's really what I discovered in a lot of that 10-year sojourn of going to seminary and then transitioning here to plant Fellowship Denver. I learned that God often provided for me through the generosity of others. And because I was connected to the larger body of Christ, God took care of my needs. And there was plenty within the larger body of Christ, even though me and of myself did not have plenty.

Autumn: You mentioned a moment ago that passage that we just talked about from Matthew 6 isn't one about giving, but that understanding that God provides for us in that way that we needn't worry actually then impacts us as we consider giving and how it is that we become a generous people as we follow Jesus and as we are a part of His family. So, the next passage we want to mention does talk about this.

Hunter: Yeah, the last one we'll mention is 2 Corinthians 8:9, and this is what we did our first to the Lord sermon series that we'll link on and at the beginning of that in 2 Corinthians 8. Now this is a unit, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is a unit. And what's going on here is Paul is going to tell the Corinthians a story about another church in an area he'll call Macedonia. If you need to imagine what Macedonia is like, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians are written to churches in that region of Macedonia. And the Macedonian region was not as wealthy as the Corinthian region of the world was. Paul had been taking up a collection from these churches in the Greek world to support the church in Jerusalem which was living through a time of leanness. And you can see his mindset here. He's like there's more than enough within the broader family of God to provide for these Christians in Jerusalem. Let's demonstrate the fullness of this family. So, he's invited all these various churches to give and to contribute. And the Corinthians have made a pledge to participate and now they're kind of renegeing or thinking about going back on their pledge. And Paul is trying to motivate them to follow through, but he doesn't want to command it because our giving should not just be coerced and commanded. It should be a decision that we get to make. And that's important for people in my position, pastors. We don't command people to give, we

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



invite them to give. Paul is so careful in 8 and 9 not to be too heavy-handed with these folks even though they've made a pledge. So, he's not even going to be like, you made a pledge, follow through on your pledge. Rather, he's going to be like, I think you should decide to follow through on your pledge.

And here's why. So, to motivate them, he tells him a story about these churches in Macedonia who have decided to participate, who are less resourced than the Corinthians. So, he says this, "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God" —so, he's even going to say this was a work of God's grace— "that has been given among the churches of Macedonia for in a severe test of affliction" —meaning they were going through a hard time—"their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part." Meaning they had a lot of joy in the grace of God. They had very little in terms of financial resources, and yet their joy was more powerful than their lack. And they made a pledge to be part of this of this relief effort for the churches in Jerusalem. It's a wealth of generosity on their part. Then he says, "For they gave according to their means, as I can testify" —meaning, we give according to what God has given us—and then he says, "and beyond their means of their own accord" —meaning they probably gave more than you would have expected for people who had what they had—"begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. And this is not as we expected" —and then he gives the heart—"But they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us." But their mindset was, we are going to honor God first. And when we honor God first, we're going to trust him to take care of us, even though we're living through very lean times.

And we're going to honor God first. And so, Paul says their contribution to this was not just a contribution to something I was doing or collecting. It was a giving of themselves first, this principle of first to the Lord. And so, here we see a direct application of this first principle to generosity and giving of financial material resources.

Autumn: In these various passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament that we've looked at, we see the basis for this theological understanding that God has given us life and the new life in his Son, that He's made us a part of his family. And within that family and within his Kingdom, there is no lack. Our needs will be met. It's promised to us that there's this fullness within the family of God. And our appropriate response is to give back and to prioritize that giving. That's this idea that we keep returning to of "first." In the Old Testament, it was the first, the best part of the harvest, that the first fruits were the choice fruits or the animal that was set aside to be sacrificed was one that was described as being the best without any defects. And so, this idea then of "first," especially when told through the perspective of this church who was facing persecution and difficulty themselves, but they were thrilled, they were overjoyed to be able to participate in giving to support this other church that was facing a very difficult time. It captures it, that story captures it so beautifully. So, I think we can move into the second part of our conversation, which is now, practically, how do we engage in that? How do we follow in this pattern and do that? How do we become this sort of Kingdom family that gives generously like this?

Hunter: I love that you're asking that because when I first started learning about this, someone had to walk me through what does it actually look like to do this? Even if I could see it biblically, I needed some help thinking about it. And so, I've taught people in the past some practical steps for living this out. And we'll just kind of briefly walk them here. The first one is a little bit of a recap of what we talked about, but it's simply to resolve to give first. And what we mean by that is to shift your mindset from, "I'm going to give out of my leftovers," to "I'm going to give first." And so, if you're doing a budget, if you're a person who does a budget, which most of us should be doing a budget unless we just have so much that we don't need to do a budget. But for this reason alone, I think you never outgrow, but you should live on a budget. If you're doing your budget rather than adding up, you're taking your income and then adding up all your expenses and

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



seeing what's left over and giving, budget for giving first and then let your expenses revolve around that first commitment you've made to give. This is a very practical way to apply the principles of first fruits. I learned in my own life that when I have the mindset of leftover, there's nothing left over. And yet when I shifted to first and put that in my budget first, I could make everything else work, at least on paper, right? I could make it work.

I'm going to have to have the discipline to live according to my budget. But I find that people that aren't giving first and are more giving out of leftovers, they're never able to get into this rhythm of consistently doing this. And so, they're not able to get into the rhythm of consistently honoring the Lord. And so, they don't get to experience the joy that's on the other side of this, of seeing the Lord provide for them. And many of them live in a mindset where they never, never, never have enough. And I think the way to get out of that, I never have enough mindset is to actually budget to give first. And I just testify to that as someone who's learned that in my own life.

Autumn: Hunter, when you undertake that exercise, so you assign an amount that you're going to give and you actually put into practice this idea of doing that first, who are the recipients of that giving? Are you giving to the church or to other charitable organizations, to other organizations that you support in the city or maybe our missionaries? Or where, what does that amount include?

Hunter: When I think giving to the Kingdom of God, I think first to the Church. So, I'm first giving to my church. The Church is the lion's share of my giving. And then I add to that giving to missions. So, I give to support some missionaries, giving to missions and giving to support work that is particularly aimed at the poor or the less resourceful, and developing them. And so, that's kind of how I think of it. I give first to the church, and then I give to missions and to work principally in our city that is aimed at supporting the less resourced.

Autumn: How does this type of giving relate to the Old Testament understanding of tithe?

Hunter: Well, the word "tithe" means a tenth. And they were commanded to bring a tenth, the first tenth. The tithe is not commanded in the New Testament, that we give 10%, for example. Generosity of heart is what we're called into in the New Testament. I think the tithe is a good wisdom principle. Sometimes there're principles of law in the Old Testament that aren't re-commanded in the New Testament, but they still provide good principles of wisdom. There's a reason God had that percentage. And so, I think for many people, the tithe as a tenth is a good wisdom principle to start with as a baseline for giving. When I was challenged to tithe, I had to grow into that because I was not giving a tenth. I was giving something less than that. And I had to grow into that and learn, take steps to grow into that. And it was a great stretch for me. And again, I found that as I leaned into that, I was taken care of. My needs were taken care of. The Lord met me in that, met my needs in that. I wasn't left in a place where I didn't have enough, even though that's what I feared when I was invited into that. But then I do think the New Testament principle of generosity would invite us, don't just stop at a tithe, but rather always keep growing. And so, to give beyond the tithe. And so, I would encourage people who have learned a tithe to keep growing.

Autumn: Do you have any practical suggestions or encouragements for someone who is in a line of work in which their income might not be really regular?

Hunter: Yeah, there're some of us who have predictable income, typically because we get a paycheck every two weeks or once a month. And it's based on a salary, or it's based on an hourly amount and our hours are predictable. And for those of us who have regular income like that, I'm one of those people, I have a salary, and so my income is divided up into 24

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Hunter Beaumont



equal installments paid to me throughout the year. I just can easily predict on a monthly basis what my income is going to be, and then I can tithe off of that and give beyond the tithe off of that. If you if you don't have a regular income, then you need to have a regular interval which you stop and look at what you've you know what you've earned in the year. And so, maybe that's every month, maybe that's every quarter. Maybe that's at the end of the year. If you work in sales and your income is driven by commissions and that's varies, or if you own a business and your income is driven by the profitability of your business, then you need some kind of interval where you can you can stop. And I would say make it an interval that is regular enough to keep your heart connected to the principle of "first."

Autumn: Okay, so it sounds like if I were to boil this down into some simple practical statements, you have to resolve to give. So, there is a decision and an understanding of the theological principle and a response to God's generosity to us. You still have to decide to do this. So, resolve to give, resolve to give first. So, to give first fruits. That's this idea of actually putting a placeholder in your budget. And then it sounds like you're saying, have a plan. And not just a plan to give repeatedly, but to grow in giving.

Hunter: Yeah, a plan is just that, it's something you've decided to do in advance and you figured out how you're going to do in advance. So, some people like me who my income is predictable, I automate my monthly giving. Then if I make some extra and you know with some side income or something like that, then when I make that extra, I want to give off of the extra that I've made as well. But off of my main income, which is predictable, one of the simplest ways I can plan is just by automating my giving every month. And so, every month, I give "automatically," and I review it every year to look at how I'm doing. But the automatic part is my plan, and it just helps me do what I intend to do. And so, that's kind of what I mean by having a plan. If your income is less predictable, maybe you need a plan to actually sit down and review it and then make the gift.

Autumn: I have one more question for you. As we round out our conversation on generosity, we have focused the majority of our conversation today on giving financially, but this principle actually takes shape in many ways in our lives. We can be generous with many things with our homes, in our relationships, with our time. And one other aspect of this that I think is unique to the family of God is generosity in service. And I think that this same mindset can apply to the way that we give our time in service to others. Would you agree?

Hunter: I disagree strongly.

Autumn: Oh man, I didn't expect that. It was really a leading question.

Hunter: You just did what I call a "mee-maw." My mee-maw would have a hot opinion about something, and she would expand on it, and she would go, "Don't you agree?" And you better just agree because you don't want to argue with mee-maw. Sometimes our opinions would be about politics, and you actually didn't agree, but you didn't want to say it.

Autumn: There's a real moment of decision there.

Hunter: Yeah, there's a real moment of weighing the cost.

Hunter: No, of course I agree with that, Autumn. Of course I agree with that. And the principle of giving or tithing or your time is very similar. And the principle of first applies in a very similar way like this. I have personally experienced there is a way of serving and of giving of myself, not just of my money, that would be good. And God is inviting me into and I

THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 154 | Family Of God, Part 1: Generosity

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know it would be good. And I never feel like I have just a bunch of extra time. It's just like money. I never feel like I just have a bunch of leftover money. And I never feel like I have a bunch of leftover time. And so, the only way I do these things that are good and important, but there's other things competing. The only way I do ever do them is to put them in my calendar first. And when I put them in my calendar first and let everything else revolve around it, it's amazing how it happens. Years ago, I thought I really felt drawn to mentoring a young man. And it was a program where you had to agree to meet with them once a week. So, it was a couple of hours commitment once a week. It required one kind of evening a week that was kind of set for me in the dinner time spot. And it was a busy season of ministry. The church was growing. I had far more to do than I felt like I could even keep up with. And I just remember thinking, I don't have extra time to do this. And especially in the evenings, I mean, my evenings are when I recover. Sometimes I have to work in the evenings.

I don't know how this could ever work. But I felt strongly drawn to it and convicted that I should do it. So, I just committed to do it and started blocking out the evenings. And amazingly, I didn't run out of time. The church didn't collapse. I didn't burn out. I didn't. I was able to do it. And I often talk to people who are like, I know I should serve in some way, but I really want to have the flexibility to go to the mountains on the weekends or to be able to travel or to just be able to sleep in or whatever. And they'll just never have enough time. And the only way you do what's important is to put it in first, and then amazingly, other things tend to work themselves out around it. God tends to work those things out.

Autumn: God, yes. Amazingly.

Hunter: God does it. It's faith in God. It's not faith that things "work out," it's trust in the Lord that even if I commit to this area of service that might require me saying no to some other things, at least on that night of the week or that day of the week, I'm still going to have enough fun in my life that I'm not going to become a boring old man.

Autumn: When we do that, when we respond in faith because we do trust God, when we respond in faith to this pattern, to these promises and give whether our time or our financial means within the fullness of the family of God, God multiplies those. He takes care of us, and the impact of our time and our money, our giving, within the fullness of His Kingdom and His family, gets multiplied and goes far beyond what we could imagine if we were thinking of our limited resources. So, once again within the Kingdom mindset and the understanding of the family of God, there's a fullness and an abundance. And that's what God does when we give, when we give generously.

Hunter: I think that's really well said. And I like that you're emphasizing the abundance of the Kingdom and of God Himself, because that's where our trust and our faith is. And I've just found that when I invest in the Kingdom of God, the Lord has never let me down. Even if it makes life full and even if it makes life busy at times, even if I don't have a ton of time, energy, or even money left over for a bunch of other stuff, that there's a fullness and a satisfaction to life that could only come from the Lord.

Autumn: Well Hunter, thanks for discussing this with me today. I'm excited about our current sermon series and the discussions that we get to have here about the nature of the family of God and how we as the family of God can develop unique rhythms of shared life together and experience this abundance. For those of you listening, we love hearing from you. So, if you have questions for us or suggestions about what you'd like to hear us discuss on the podcast in the future, you can send all of that anytime to podcast@fellowshipdenver.org.

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