

## Now For Then - A Life of Joyful Generosity - Week 2

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As we are approaching Christmas, we remember God's gracious gift of Jesus to us, redeeming and rescuing us with generous love, that we would be a gracious, generous people who bring glory to God.

Now for then. See this principle at work:

- I can worship You now for then I'll be ready in my heart for what today holds.
- I can face today with You now for then I am doing so with your presence before me.
- I can love others now for then I know I am walking in your purposes.
- I can be rich in good works now for then I know you have prepared them for me.
- I can be joyful with others now for then I am remembering your generosity towards me.
- I can be obedient in my giving now for then I am remembering your faithfulness to me.

**Now for then – is the principle of sowing and reaping – and this is true for all of our lives.**

### The Cheerful Giver

<sup>6</sup> The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

(2 Co 9:6–8)

It's possible that some of you "have decided in your heart" based on fear or based on culture or based on self-preservation, but I know this too – God is able to change your heart.

Culture example: Meals in China + no service charge // Meals in USA + 20% gratuity – normalcy.

Today, I want to help you by giving framework from a biblical perspective on generosity, so that you will see how faithful God is in making all grace abound to you — to the end that you would abound in every good work... including giving.

### Jesus and Zacchaeus

<sup>19</sup> He entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup> So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. <sup>7</sup> And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." <sup>8</sup> And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." <sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Lk 19:1–10)

Some things to know about this –

- Zaccheus is Jewish and wealthy, in a position of leadership and curious / eager to see Jesus.
- Jesus was not just passing through Jericho – he was on a mission to seek and save the lost.
- Jesus calls him by name – and Zaccheus is saved. And changed. And generous.

When people see Jesus – generosity is not difficult, unless money is more important to them.

### The Rich Ruler

<sup>18</sup> And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. <sup>20</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” <sup>21</sup> And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” <sup>22</sup> When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” <sup>23</sup> But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. <sup>24</sup> Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>26</sup> Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” (Lk 18:18–27)

When people see Jesus – generosity is not difficult, unless money is more important to them, but you need to know, even if that’s you today, repentance and obedience is always an option for those who follow Jesus. God is truly able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

The bible contains more than 2000 references on wealth and money – because the way we handle our resources is connected to our relationship with God. The concept of tithing, of giving 10%, did not begin with the law.

Christians that argue they don’t have to tithe because they aren’t under the law need to remember that tithing in the Bible pre-dates the law, and goes back to Abraham in Genesis 14.

Leviticus 27:30, “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.” The tithe “belongs to the Lord,” not to the people who produced the grain or fruit. The tithe applied to everything, not some things. It was “holy,” to be set apart and given to God, not used for any other purpose.

In Malachi 3:8-10, the Israelites were warned that to present to the Lord anything less than the full 10 percent was to “rob God”, since the first 10 percent belonged to Him, not them. God says, “Bring the *whole* tithe into the storehouse,” not just part of it. Whatever God provided, 10 percent belonged to Him.

### Malachi 3:6-10

“For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”

If the principle of tithing - of giving 10% - makes you uncomfortable, think about this, under the law, there were three tithes for Israel.

1. Levitical Tithe ( Numbers 18:20-24) - Levitical tithe was a 10% to support the Levites — these temple servants were supported by the rest of the Israelite tribes; the Levites would then pay a separate tithe to the priests.
2. Festival Tithe (Deuteronomy 12:17-19, 14:22-27, 26:10-16) This was another 10% tithe used to host the Feast of Tabernacles to remember God's rescue of Israelites from slavery in Egypt.
3. Charity Tithe ( Deuteronomy 14:28-29) Another 10% tithe on the 3rd and 6th year of a 7 year cycle for Egypt that was used to support foreigners, orphans, widows and additional resources to the Levites.

The charity tithe was collected every third year – but if you do the math, this means Israelites gave 23% of their income on an annual basis, and this is before they gave freely and generously in “free will offerings”.

Free will offerings look like this, [“<sup>29</sup> All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord.” \(Ex 35:29\)](#)

In Ezra, when the temple needed to be rebuilt, the Israelites were asked to give freewill offerings and we see how God moved in the hearts of people, this was more about willing hearts

“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops” (Proverbs 3:9). Three times a year the children of Israel were to bring an offering of firstfruits before the Lord.

The firstfruits offering included the first production of a vineyard (Leviticus 19:23-25) and the first annual production of grain, wine, olive oil, and sheared wool (Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Deuteronomy 18:4).

The first of grains (Numbers 15:20-21), honey, and all the produce belong to the Lord (2 Chronicles 31:5). A significant portion of the firstfruits went to the religious leaders and their ministry. (Numbers 18:12).

You can think of tithing in terms of the amount and firstfruits as the nature of giving – this principle of “God I bring my first and best to you while I trust you to provide the rest”

### **Woes to the Pharisees and Lawyers**

<sup>37</sup> While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. <sup>38</sup> The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. <sup>39</sup> And the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. <sup>40</sup> You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup> But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

<sup>42</sup> “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. <sup>43</sup> Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. <sup>44</sup> Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.” (Lk 11:37-44)

Jesus is saying to these Pharisees – you should have tithed and done so without neglecting justice and the love of God.

Jesus says the same thing in Matthew 23, he says you should have tithed and done so without neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Where in the New Testament does it indicate the principle of tithing is irrelevant? It's not there. The opposite is more clear, that following Jesus and giving goes beyond the tithe.

Jesus did fulfill the Old Testament – but in doing so Jesus does not make it irrelevant. Why would we give less back to God if by grace through faith He has given us life with Him forever?

Randy Alcorn went to visit the grave of William Borden, who died in Egypt in 1913. William Borden, graduate of Yale, and heir to the Borden milk company. Gave away his fortune, at the time, 100's of 1000's of dollars to missions. After only four months of zealous ministry in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of 25."

Borden's tombstone in abandoned graveyard in Egypt: "Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life"<sup>1</sup>

From there, it is only a short distance to King Tut's tomb. Egyptians believed that you could take worldly possessions with you into the afterlife. King Tutankhamen, who died at 17, was buried in a solid gold coffin, surrounded by chariots of solid gold, and thousands of gold artifacts. When Howard Carther discovered this tomb in 1922, it had not been touched for 3000 years, nothing was missing.

Alcorn talks about the contrast of these two graves. Both born wealthy. One died with nothing, buried in an obscure graveyard thousands of miles from his home. The other buried with more money than you or I will ever see. But where are they now?

"Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life."

Randy Alcorn who wrote on generosity in the life of Christians said this, "God did not raise your income so you could increase your standard of living, but so he could increase your standard of giving."

Here are some troubling statistics:

- Average evangelical today gives 2.5%. In the depression the average *American* gave away 3.2%.
- 42% of evangelicals give nothing
- 50% of the world's wealth is in the hands of Americans (who make up 4.5% of the population).
- 80% of all the money controlled by Christians is in the hands of American Christians.

Go back to the story of Zaccheus — part of his repentance was obedience and generosity.

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<sup>1</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Treasure Principle*, 35.

### **Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart**

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine. My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights. (Proverbs 3:1-12)

### **Encouragement to Give Generously**

**8** We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup> and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. <sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup> But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

(2 Co 8:1-7)

They gave themselves first to the Lord and then they gave themselves to each other generously.

This cannot be any clearer: see that you excel in this act of grace – following Jesus means we are to excel in giving according to our means and beyond our means. Joyful generosity is for all who follow Jesus. Joyful generosity comes from a heart touched by God – so what does your response look like?

<sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup>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. (1 Ti 6:17-19)